

# Achieving best practice through security cooperation: The Pacific way

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## Introduction

In a recent conversation with the National Security and Defence Council Secretariat in Fiji, Director of NSS Co-ordination and Monitoring Akuila Savu asked the question:

What will be the most effective forms of collective action we employ in response to COVID-19 that could be applied to the broader suite of security challenges we are facing now and into the future?

It immediately drew our attention! One thing led to another, and we are now working together to try and answer this question.

We are a consortium comprising the National Security and Defence Council Secretariat led by Brigadier General Jone Kalouniwai, the recently appointed Director-General; Director NSS Coordination and Monitoring Akuila Savu; Manager NSS Coordination and Monitoring Alipate Naulivou; and Jack Moceica, previously the Deputy Secretary of Defence and National Security. This core team is working in partnership with Associate Professor Robert Styles from the Australia Pacific Security College at the Australian National University.

Together we are working with representatives from a diverse mix of government agencies, NGOs, civil society and ethnic groups. We have embarked on a program of activities comprising an in-country, whole of government approach, with civil society dialogue and action research designed to enhance the country's capacity to implement the National Security Strategy and effectively impact human, environmental and contemporary security challenges, and to strengthen partnerships within the country and ultimately across the region. In this paper, we outline our understanding of the challenges we are aiming to impact and the 'Pacific way' in which we are pursuing our endeavours.

## Problems that beg a more adequate response

In the 21st century, the global population is facing some of the most intractable problems it has ever faced. Problems that beg for a more adequate response, today and into the future. For example, in the Pacific, as across the globe, we observe seasonal swings in the weather with drought, floods and storms causing major natural disasters that at their worst wreak death, famine, loss of livelihood, epidemics and displacement of populations, as well as vast losses of personal and state-owned property. Looking forward, the vast consensus of reputable scientific opinion (IEA 2019; IPCC 2014; NIC 2017) is that climate and related security issues will significantly worsen in the absence of a radical response. The most severe effects will likely be experienced in developing and least developed countries. In recognition of this fact, in 2018 all leaders of Pacific Island Forum

member countries outlined an extended security agenda (PIF 2018) where they articulated and agreed to the need to deal with the region's most pressing security issues.

Within Fiji, as in the rest of the region, the security environment is complex. The diverse and intractable nature of the security challenges we are facing represents a raft of significant transition challenges that we will have to tackle over coming decades. Further, the magnitude of this endeavour has been amplified as COVID-19 has exposed a lack of resilience as a result of a collective failure to assess and act on national risks and vulnerabilities. In this context, responding to our traditional and non-traditional security threats will mean addressing the lack of resilience across the country's governance, economic, environmental, public, energy and infrastructure systems. Further, this lack of resilience needs to be addressed at the personal, community, business and all levels of government. It is about being better prepared and having the ability and the will to act collaboratively whenever necessary.

We acknowledge that a shell-shocked society, with a ruined economy and depleted health system will need strong leaders at all levels, inside and outside of government, who can offer fresh and inspiring directions. *'Where to next?'* is the live question! Unless we can collectively learn how to answer this question, we will not be able to address the security risks and vulnerabilities in an integrated manner. This is the nature of our work – to help leaders, with their people, answer this question.

In Fiji, we are aiming for an integrated approach to national security inclusive of multiple actors that reinforces sovereignty and resilience at every level. This is a very complicated conversation to orchestrate! An approach that stands in stark contrast to the prevailing culture of 'telling' that has proven to have failed us collectively on many fronts. No progress will be achieved by trying to impose top-down expertise, as people are sick of experts. Rather than merely telling others what to do, our aim is to engage those we work with in a robust perspective-taking exercise; that is, *change the way they 'see' and 'listen' to their world now and into the future, and as a consequence shift the way they describe and act in relation to it – change the discourse and consequent action.* This is about having them re-authoring themselves in their world over time; having them strategically qualifying an array of choices, values, trade-offs and decisions that will impact over generations. At this juncture, there will be a very different array of options to those faced by previous generations, and that have affected our resilience today and into the future unless we change.

Our social economy will be critical in this endeavour. We are keen to ensure that Fiji's National Security Strategy adequately considers the human dimension. We must *manage for change through people*, rather than try to drive people to change. We see this as an essential role for both

government and community leaders. To help them take a more sophisticated approach than merely stating their case and expecting others to believe them. This goes for us as well. The experience of the last few years proves that facts do not stand on their own, e.g. the impact of climate change and the evidence does not necessarily persuade by itself. Indeed, the presentation of strong arguments often backfires and encourages people to disagree and resist even more strongly than they did before.

Suppose Fiji's National Security Strategy is going to orchestrate the behaviour of the system effectively. In that case, it needs to go beyond imported frameworks or off-the-shelf futures work and systems thinking to *systems doing*. This is a living process that requires a range of collaborative and experience platforms to sustain the activities of different communities of practice as they leverage the best of what has historically and culturally worked and apply it in new and innovative ways. This is naturally pulling for new governance arrangements. These are emerging and will continue to do so over time.

Further, the emerging strategies are being derived not to build 'bridges to nowhere' and generate short-term pay-offs that soon become debt-ridden stranded assets. Beginning with maritime and climate security, we are focusing on those sectors and qualified opportunities with a future. The custodians of these particular spaces are being engaged in authoring their future, based on what is intrinsically and environmentally important. Critically, younger people are being involved in this process as much as possible as they will ultimately inherit and evolve adaptation and prevention measures. In this way, our program of activities is providing mechanisms for these groups of groups to ask and answer: *What good ideas should be invested in? How can those ideas be worked to the benefit of all?*

## What is the Pacific way?

Our approach is about giving legitimacy and support to those responsible for a security challenge. It's about affording power and authority that builds in purpose to act with sovereignty and self-determination. This raises an important question: *how do we understand 'power-to' get things done?*

For our purposes, we recognise power to be, 'the capacity to mobilise resources to attend to needs' (Kashtan 2014:130). This definition of power suggests that we don't use power or authority for the sake of it, we use it to satisfy needs, either our own or those of others. This distinction is central to our endeavours in Fiji.

Power is, first of all, a capacity or ability or the potential to achieve specific outcomes by mobilising physical and cultural resources at our disposal. Second, power is the capacity to meet needs. *So, what are needs?* Within the context of our endeavours, needs refer to the most essential categories of what motivates us and what is necessary for life, not to the almost endless strategies of attending to those needs.

There are four basic categories of need – physical needs (e.g. food and shelter), freedom, connection and meaning.

These same four basic needs apply equally to the collective – environmental health (i.e. sustainable resources), sovereignty, partnership and shared purpose. Furthermore, needs are understood to be universal aspects of experience that apply to everyone irrespective of culture or circumstance (Deci and Ryan 2008; Rosenberg 2003). It is this latter characteristic that makes them so useful for our purposes. Focusing on needs automatically brings us towards a sense of shared identity and purpose. In this way, needs, along with purpose and values, define an essential aspect of what matters to us. Understanding what we need in this way can liberate us.

With these distinctions in mind, we have adopted an approach to decision making that is based on collecting all needs relevant to a decision and engaging stakeholders in converting them to practical strategies that can work for all, now and in the future. This approach is resulting in robust decisions that are less likely to be sabotaged by those carrying them out.

We believe that unless we consciously build our cultures and economies on direct caring for needs with an awareness of being always part of a larger whole, we are likely to continue to increase the suffering of people and the environment. A direct and insistent focus on needs can provide a blueprint for creating economies and lifestyles that nurture life.

In this way, by exercising power-with others (versus power-over), including the protective use of force – force that is used to protect life, not to punish, shame, or hurt anyone – as part of our effort, it is shifting the focus from 'what's in it for me' to 'what matters to us (including me)'. This shift in focus from the individual to relationship and community is catalysing a reweaving of community and relationship back into our lives, undoing the ravages of capitalism. This is the Pacific way!

## Our first steps on this journey

During these times of rapid disruption, particularly with COVID-19, we are experiencing novel opportunities for change. To capitalise on this moment, we have actively foregrounded the need to be creative, to imagine new futures and seek ways to enable the Fijian Government and people to innovate together, not only to tackle the challenges of today but also to sow the seeds of a better world for future generations. Most importantly, doing it the Pacific way means we have put our people and their needs centre stage. Together, we are taking this as an opportunity to revolutionise how we listen, think and act.

The first thing we did was to design an entry plan. A carefully sequenced set of 20 interviews and inquiry activities with key stakeholders from across the Fiji maritime sector followed by a two-day structured deliberation involving over 70 representatives from 22 different institutions. This approach has demonstrated that gaining trust and credibility, and ultimately leading an organisation or system to improved performance, follows from a formal, planned, hit-the-ground-learning approach. This is contrasted with informal, ad hoc, hit-the-ground-running approaches typically taken.

This process catalysed a two-way, collaborative interaction aimed at examining and understanding the nature of current practice and formulating priorities for the future, those most effective forms of collective action. Our enquiry sought to understand the sector and people; what they care about and how they think and feel about their work and role within the system; whether they think the system is headed in the right direction and pursuing that direction in the right way; whether or not the system is working so together they can engage in fixing it; and, their expectations for leadership. The question that gave the secretariat *raison d'être* or *Yavu*<sup>1</sup> for this program was:

*Vaka cokotaki ni vei Tabana Vaka Matanitu* – What characteristics or current institutional practices (both government and non-government) would provide a degree of credibility to the implementation of a whole of government approach?

By following this discipline of systematically sharing carefully collected data and interpretations publicly instead of keeping them private, we were able to invite those we engaged with to experience the same confrontation with complex reality. The resulting collective reflection on current practice set the stage for new thinking that is now leading to new behaviour.

The system we engaged with is being referred to in the Fijian vernacular as *Yavusa*.<sup>2</sup> Within the *Yavusa* resides a number of sub-systems or *Mataqali*,<sup>3</sup> each having its own strategic centre of gravity,<sup>4</sup> i.e. a source of power that provides moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or will to act. It became apparent that should each *Mataqali*'s centre of gravity be correctly positioned within the broader security domain, or *Yavusa*, each *Mataqali*, comprising a suite of agencies, or *Tokatokas*,<sup>5</sup> would likely choose to cooperate. Within each *Mataqali*, should there be an understanding of each agency or *Tokatoka*'s respective statutory roles, collaborative effort would be enhanced as they undertook national security preventative initiatives.

Based on our enquiries we inferred the systems' centre of gravity, a traditional characteristic, *Vanua*,<sup>6</sup> was significantly impacting the decision-making processes within and between the various *Tokatokas* or agencies, and their capacity for multi-agency cooperation. The challenge was to align the systems *Vanua* so it would reinforce a whole of government approach to security. In the Fijian vernacular:

- *Vaka rokoroko* – Respect, encouraging organisational bureaucracy. This manifests as rigid policies, hierarchical structures, centralised processes, no flexibility to out-source, delegation, top down approaches and a lack of new ideas. Our response was to create an epiphany (by discussing the benefits of new ideas and tools available) – *Vei Vaka Dodonu Taki*.
- *Ririko* – Hesitation, a reluctance to share information. This manifests as sophisticated information systems, security clearances, restrictions, and a lack of awareness outside one's own jurisdiction and broader spheres of responsibility. Our response was to create a wider sense of awareness outside each specific agency foci of interest linked to their specific challenges, link them to the outside world – *Vei Vakaramatki*.

- *Ka Makawa* – Old/expired/past, linked to archaic policies. This manifests as old school leadership, a lack of confidence and reluctance to change. Our response was to create a deep desire for change, to advocate change management – *Veisau ni Vakarau*.
- *Duidui Vakasama* and *Veiliutaki Mataboko* – Different understanding and blind leadership contributing to lacking a sense of purpose and a diverse range of interests. This manifests as a lack of purpose, lack of necessary investment, lack of coordination, and not purpose driven. Our response was to create a sense of purpose – *Veiliutaka Matata*.
- *Sega na veivakabautiI* – A lack of trust, lacking appreciation to invest in the multi-agency response mechanisms. This manifests as a lack of political will and communication breakdowns. Our response was to maintain an open and credible channel of communication, encourage information sharing, dialogue and networking – *Veiwasei*.

Interestingly, not only did this structured enquiry illicit insights and catalyse strategically motivated multi-stakeholder activity, these *Vanua* characteristics framed a general program logic for the secretariat's engagements. The quality of dialogue and level of connection positioned the secretariat to become the preferred partner of choice. It is recognised as being able to provide sound intelligence and policy advice; build the capacity of the system by facilitating multi-agency engagements, workshops, joint working group meetings, consultations and networking activities; reliably assist and support agencies as they comprehensively responded to security issues; and drive the Government of Fiji's National Security Agenda through coordinated whole of government approaches to national security.

The two-day marine awareness multi-stakeholder deliberations took the form of a structured tabletop exercise on disaster preparedness. An activity that took participants through the process of dealing with four simulated disaster scenarios: oil spill, illegal fishing, civil unrest, and search and rescue. Each scenario was intentionally linked to the Fijian maritime domain and had a cascading impact on all aspects of the sea, air and land operating environments. How did it go? Reportedly, 'The results were just amazing. Everyone – meaning all the 22 agencies after having been introduced to the roles, functions and challenges of every participating agency in the initial two days – was empowered with a greater sense of awareness of how they can respond with each other in an emerging opportunity.'

Over the two days, a huge amount of information was exchanged. The deliberations not only included the key maritime agencies of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ports Authorities Fiji, Fiji Navy and border security agencies, but also extended to include *iTaukei* Affairs, Rural Development, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Fishing and others. Those involved learned the importance of looking beyond their individual agency boundaries, to flexibly coordinate their effort, appreciate the availability of other agency's capabilities and deploy technologies to fill capability gaps and deficiencies. The tabletop exercise increased their awareness of the complexity of various challenges at all levels of the security system. The planning

process and decisions employed during the exercise created an epiphany among these agencies.

Significantly, there was an appreciation of the value of information sharing; the identification of various policies, protocols and existing platforms available to the system; and the identification of critical gaps and deficiencies lacking in individual organisations during the various stages of a security response. Participating agencies successfully evaluated the applicability of their standard operating procedures and respective capabilities such that they were able to identify opportunities for interoperability. The system's capacity, once coordinated, was recognised to be a credible multi-agency response mechanism. This approach to multi-stakeholder deliberation is now becoming the forerunner of a government and non-government decision-making and planning process.

## Conclusion

This experience has taught us that learning together to understand the emerging dynamics and complexities of the ecosystem is fundamental to any multi-stakeholder planning and risk mitigation measure. We aimed to design and make available tailor-made learning and collaboration platforms for those actors we worked with, the first responders to emerging issues. By empowering those involved to act in a more coordinated manner, we observed them gain control of, and successfully manage their responses to the emerging strategic complexities and subsequently reduce exposure to risks.

Critically, we learned that when we embed ourselves within a group with a sense of shared purpose, we become part of an emergent field of exploration rather than a solitary cog in the system. This is about the Pacific way and is especially so when, within whatever community we find ourselves, we rise to the immensely challenging task of finding the willingness and capacity to share more emotional and material risks, liberating ourselves bit by bit from being islands of independence struggling to satisfy our basic needs. By sharing our valuable resources in the service of meeting our collective needs as human beings, we can navigate our differences, deepen our freedom, create and attend to our systems of agreements, and much more.

This endeavour has affirmed how effectively the Fiji National Security Strategy can respond to prevailing and expected traditional and non-traditional security threats, and in lieu of the Government of Fiji's agenda, how the National Security Defence Council Secretariat can approach whole of government governance and capability requirements for strategy implementation. We have begun learning what a home-grown prototype design and potential response mechanism for our secretariat will look like.

In this way, our lives and work have become a living experiment in truth, rather than a codified set of practices

that we are trying to pass on as 'the way to do things', which usually happens in traditional approaches to capacity building. As we move forward with our endeavours in Fiji, we have more trust that this approach will continue to pull us out of our social conditioning and into laying micro-foundations for a social infrastructure for the future.

## Notes

- 1 *Yavu*: Purpose, foundational belief for existence.
- 2 *Yavusa*: Fijian traditional clan system comprising multiple clans with varying responsibilities, dependent on each other for their coordinated survival against other rival Yavusas.
- 3 *Mataqali*: A single clan system (agency) consisting of various families (agency departments).
- 4 Centre of gravity: The characteristics, capabilities, or locations from which a system or organisation derives its freedom, physical strength, and will to take action. At the strategic level, centres of gravity might include traditional security systems, an alliance or multi-agency organisation, a set of critical capabilities or function, or a national strategy itself.
- 5 *Tokatoka*: A nuclear family system that extends throughout the patriarchal lineage of a family.
- 6 *Vanua*: A reference to a strong sense of traditional ethics that characterise loyalty, humility, obedience, meekness and respect.

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