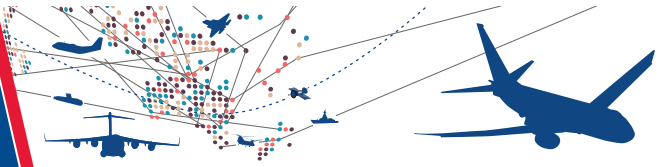




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Air Power and Policy Development for Enhanced Pacific Cooperation – The Sum is Greater than the Parts

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Introduction

The Defence Department has a long history of engagement within the Pacific and Timor Leste. In recent times the nature of that engagement has changed, with greater focus on creating security partnerships to address mutual security outcomes. As a security partner we are looking to create real value in our relationship. We create that value by focusing on their security priorities and being willing to explore areas of cooperation we have not previously considered.

One area that hasn't traditionally been a focus of the Defence Cooperation Program is the elements of air power. That doesn't mean that ADF air power has been absent in the region, but it has been primarily focused on delivering specific operational effects during times of great need, rather than being an area of focus for our security partnerships.

Today I want to discuss a potential road map for greater ADF air power presence within the Defence Cooperation Program. I have purposely not used Air Force because multiple elements of the ADF operate air power and they could be key contributors to this proposal.

PIC Security Priorities

To be effective security partners with Pacific nations we need to be adding value to the relationships by making a meaningful contributions to their capacity to respond to their identified security needs.

While we should never fall into the trap of presuming we understand individual security needs, which you can only really get that through meaningful personal dialogue. We are lucky that regional architectures such as the Pacific Islands Forum, do give us a strong understanding of regional security priorities.

In 2018 the Pacific region spoke with one voice on security priorities when the Pacific Islands' Forum issued the Boe Declaration on regional security. Which identified an expanded concept of security priorities for the region that included human security, environment and resource security, trans-national crime and cybersecurity.

This statement is important not only because of the priorities it identifies, but because it also highlights the desire of the the Pacific's leaders to view security as a wider regional challenge that they need to address through a coordinated strategy and in partnership with one another.

While the leaders within our region would also recognise the importance of traditional elements of security, the Boe Declaration does make it clear that some aspects of security within the Pacific, can only be treated effectively if the region tackles them as a coherent whole.

This agreement that some aspects of security in the Pacific are best treated through a coordinated regional approach, is important and something I will return to later.

PIC Security Environment

While the Boe Declaration provides us with a good understanding of regional security priorities, that is only really half of the equation, in seeking to support the region in achieving security outcomes it's also important to understand those factors that limit and shape any potential response.

In the most practical of terms the majority of Pacific nations don't have the resources available to Government to effectively treat the scale and wide scope of security challenges.

75% of Pacific nations have a GDP of a billion dollars or less, and like all nations, the Governments within the Pacific region have to balance how much of their available resources they spend on mitigating security issues, when they also have a vast array of development needs.

A lack of available financing isn't the only resource shortfall they are experiencing, with limited people resources also reducing their ability to address the full scope of security challenges. 80% of Pacific nations have a population less than a million and 50% have a population less than two hundred thousand.

This lack of scale in the both the economy and available workforce restricts many nations ability to apply resources within the security sector, but when it comes to their geography the problem of scale is actually in reverse.

Perhaps the best way to demonstrate the challenge geography provides is to provide an example. The Federated States of Micronesia, have a population of 103 thousand, which is significantly less than 1% of Australia's population, they have GDP of approximately \$340 million, which is once again significantly less than 1% of Australia's, yet they have an EEZ which is the 14th largest in the world at almost 3 million square kilometres, which is 35% of Australia's EEZ size. This disproportionality between resources available and areas of geographic responsibility are the norm within the Pacific, with seven Pacific nations featuring in the world's largest top 25 EEZs.

It's also important to remember that most of the Pacific nations are archipelagic in nature, with many of them having populated islands dispersed over a great distances and serviced primarily by maritime assets. For example the Solomon Islands consists of 6 major islands and over 900 smaller islands.

The ability for national governments to achieve security outcomes over these vast distances, and dispersed features, tends to also be hampered by a lack of transport infrastructure and effective communication links for both voice and data.

Why Air Effects can make a difference

While Australia may not share the same challenges in resource availability, we are very familiar with the limitations created by geography. We share many of the same dispersion and distance challenges that our Pacific partners face. It is by no means simple for our country to generate security effects over such a large area of responsibility and that's why, as a nation, we have become reliant on air power as a method of mitigating those challenges in scale.

In the security sector we have relied on air power to provide us with the flexibility necessary to cover a wide geographical area. Of course coverage isn't the only advantage it provides us, it also gives Australia a level of responsiveness that can only be achieved by an aviation platform.

Though it is important to understand that we can't achieve the required coverage and responsiveness by amassing great numbers of aviation platforms. It can only be achieved by creating an informed system that places the right assets in the right place, at the right time. But even we know that there are limitations on what we can achieve based on the resources available to us and the scale of our geographic area of responsibility.

So if aviation has given Australia the capability it needs to manage the scale of its geographic security responsibilities, why aren't we seeing the same advantages being exploited by our Pacific partners.

Barriers to a traditional Air Force

To be blunt, air power for security purposes is simply too expensive for the majority of our Pacific partners, who's limited resources need to be prioritised on essential areas of national development.

Even a basic scaled down version of our traditional Air Force model would be beyond the reach of our Pacific partners. While they may be able to afford a number of aviation platforms, the cost of building a security capability that includes training, operating, maintenance, safety and logistics very quickly becomes prohibitively expensive, and as our shared international experience shows, you can't maintain an aviation capability efficiently and safely without ensuring you have the basic building blocks to support it.

Alternate Models

So if the traditional Air Force model doesn't match the resources available to our Pacific partners, then what other options could they consider to achieve the security effect required?

There is obviously the option to lease aviation capability from a commercial supplier, but as our own experience within the ADF demonstrates that can be a cost effective way of hiring a platform, but it isn't quite so cost effective when you're trying to create a security outcome. The majority of platforms don't come equipped with specialist security equipment, so adding those increases costs significantly.

As our current 5th generation experience demonstrates, the security outcome now tends to be less about the platform you're operating and more about the informed system you create to support it. Even the simplest of security tasks need some form of cueing, tracking and fusion to make use of the airborne element. Once these costs are factored in, the commercial lease option can quickly become as prohibitively expensive as a traditional Air Force model.

Some of our Pacific partners have explored using excess commercial capacity to provide a level of airborne observation, but this tends to be very ad hoc, unreliable and because the platforms aren't modified to conduct surveillance, the information gathered tends to be very limited in nature.

Regionalism

So ultimately we arrive at a conundrum where our Pacific partners need aviation capabilities to create security outcomes over large distances and dispersed populations, but for the majority of them this very real need remains out of reach because, as most of you would be aware, air power can be an expensive proposition that sets a high-bar for entry, especially if you're trying to create a capability and not just operate a platform.

So the question remains how our region, the Pacific region, benefit from the advantages of air power, when national solutions place too much of a burden on most of the nation's available resources.

One potential solution can find its regional imperative from the last meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum in 2019. As part of the meeting communique the forum members stressed the on-going importance of Pacific regionalism and stated that as part of securing our Blue Pacific we should continue to emphasise the importance of genuine partnerships that reflect the collective priorities of the region.

In a security sense, regionalism is the ability to identify and agree security priorities and then use the combined weight of national contributions to create a security effect where the sum is greater than that of its individual parts.

The Forum Fisheries Agency as an example

Perhaps the best way to describe the practical realisation of this vision, in an air power sense, is to provide you a very real example of how a security effect can be created by regionalism.

40 years ago, in a regional response to a shared security concern over the sustainability of fishery resources, our region established the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency or FFA.

FFA is an advisory body providing expertise, technical assistance and other support to its members who make sovereign decisions about their fishery resources and participate in regional decision making on fisheries management.

In 1994 the FFA established the Regional Fisheries Surveillance Centre whose mission is to support and assist FFA members to counter illegal fishing in the region.

One of the surveillance centre's primary tasks is the provision of a reliable analysed and risk assessed Regional Surveillance Picture (RSP) which alerts members of potential illegal fishing in their EEZ.

In recent years the capabilities of the FFA have been enhanced through the provision of an aerial surveillance element. As part of the wider Pacific Maritime Security Program, the Australian Government has contracted two surveillance equipped King Air aircraft to the FFA to enhance the Regional Surveillance Picture being provided to Pacific nations.

The FFA as an independent and trusted regional body maintains MoUs with each individual nation to provide specific maritime security surveillance, which in turn adds to the overall regional security effect. In recognition of the unique service the FFA provides, in 2018 the Forum Foreign Ministers agreed to give the surveillance aircraft "state like aircraft" status.

While the aircraft were important to increase the security outcomes being delivered, it's essential to point out that to get full value out of their operations the platforms need to be enhanced by an in-country tasking mechanism, a fusion capability within the surveillance centre, and when possible the aircraft are teamed with a response vessel which is normally the nations Pacific or Guardian Class Patrol Boat.

With the regional approach that the FFA adopts it also allows it to take advantage of organisations like the Pacific Quadrilateral Defence Coordination Group. Which is a group that includes Australia, New Zealand, the US and France, who coordinate military maritime surveillance cooperation within the region, and who apply additional surveillance resources, both maritime and aviation, to FFA run coordinated regional fisheries operations.

This regional approach to maritime surveillance is providing real results for individual nations, last year FFA coordinated activities resulted in 397 vessels being boarded, which was a 43% increase from 2018.

Perhaps the most important lesson we can take from the FFA example is that individually, the Pacific nations would probably not have the resources and capabilities necessary to deliver this security outcome, but together the region working as a coordinated whole was able to deliver a security outcome that benefited both nations and the region.

Regionalism by design, by operation and by outcome.

Principles for regional security Frameworks

While the FFA model works it's important to understand why and to look at some of the principles we can use to replicate it in other areas of regional security cooperation.

First and foremost it respects the sovereignty of participating nations. It doesn't seek to create a uniform security outcome, it simply enables national Governments to use the provided support to achieve national aims, and in most cases that also achieves a regional security outcome.

The FFA is a trusted independent regional body that isn't closely aligned with particular nations or political affiliations. It is purely focused on delivering a regional security outcome and can do that because those services are not coloured by international politics.

Member nations are able to contribute based on the resources and capabilities they have. Nations with limited resources aren't expected to contribute equally but their participation alone, does bring a whole of region benefit. Gaps in security frameworks caused by a prohibitive cost of entry make the whole system weaker.

Whether a nation is a capability operator, a contributor or a participant, the system needs to recognise the value of all levels of involvement.

In the same way we don't need to be too precious about nations with more resources and capabilities contributing to a greater degree, security partners are aware of these relativities and expect more capable nations to step-up where they are capable of doing so. Recognising that we also get the benefit of creating a regional security effect.

A satisfying regional security outcome can only be achieved if it is seen as responsive to changes in security priorities and regional crisis. Any framework created has to have the flexibility to surge when urgent security responses present themselves.

Applying those principles to HADR Response

In the last section of our talk today I'd like to take you through a hypothetical example of how regionalism could be applied to other areas of security within the Pacific and how air power could enhance the security effects being delivered.

Unfortunately, in recent years many of us in the Pacific region, Australia included, have experienced the adverse effects of severe tropical cyclone. Many of our partners recently suffered again at the hands of Tropical Cyclone Harold and our thoughts and prayers got out to all of those effected.

Though Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Response is a whole-of-government effort led by DFAT, much of the immediate response and in particular the provision of essential supplies through airlift becomes the responsibility of regional military forces.

While responses to natural disasters definitely have a regional flavour to them, with multiple nations contributing to the response. The actual mechanism by which this response is normally created still relies heavily on multiple

bi-lateral relationships, normally through a wider whole-of-government network that brings together responses from defence forces, NGOs and other Government departments.

While you could conceive of a regional framework that could be built to respond to natural disasters, it might not be the easiest or most natural place to start.

In the first instance it might actually be more productive to focus on preparation rather than response. How nation's need to respond to a natural disaster tends to be extremely complex and changeable. So as a first step, perhaps regionalism could better focus on preparation.

And because there are obviously multiple aspects of preparation to consider, and because after all this is an air power forum, I thought I might further narrow the discussion to how a regional approach to the provision of airlift may deliver better security outcomes for individual nations.

As successive generation of airlift specialists have constantly reminded me, there is nothing easy about airlift, it is a complex system that needs to be managed carefully to achieve what appears to be a relatively easy effect.

As with the maritime security effect created by the FFA, the regional efficiency of airlift support to natural disasters could be improved if individual nations looked at opportunities to contribute to a wider regional security outcome.

While not professing to be an airlift expert there are many aspects of the task that could be enhanced to create greater efficiency within the regional system. This list of what could be done to create a more efficient regional system is actually very long, but to give you a flavour of what it could include:

- In-country staff trained on determining HADR supply priorities and aircraft tasking.
- The provision of airfield surveys to determine the full extent of potential operating aerodromes and the ability to increase availability by doing minor works to austere airstrips.
- In-country staff trained to prepare loads and to assist in loading aircraft.
- The provision of specialised loading equipment.
- An increase in the number of non-perishable HADR supply caches distributed throughout the region.

The effect we are trying to achieve is to build a more efficient regional response to disaster relief by increasing the region's capacity to task, stage, load, and distribute relief delivered by airlift. Increasing options and capacity within the system could create greater responsiveness and more targeted effects.

As with the FFA model individual nations within the region would contribute to the increased effectiveness of the security outcome based on the resources available and their capacity to do so. This should be considered a sliding scale where on one extreme we have the countries capable of operating specialised airlift platforms and on the other end of the scale we could have nations that contribute to the system by simply increasing their ability to accept aid delivered by air. Each of the Pacific nations could then choose where they lie on that scale and could be an important part of system through operation, contribution or participation.

Importantly this approach respects the sovereignty of individual Pacific nations, the framework allows each of them to decide the when, who and how humanitarian assistance is delivered, there is no requirement for them to use the system, it simply enables greater capacity for support if they choose to use it.

Ultimately the creation and management of this system could be managed by an independent body, much like the FFA, that coordinates national contributions and builds efficiency within the system. This independent organisation could at some stage also become a regional response capability as well.

Conclusion

So to try and wrap today in some form of coherent conclusion.

As a dependable security partner in the region Australia needs to focus on those aspects of security the region has identified as their priorities.

As identified by the Pacific Islands Forum their security priorities have a regional focus on non-traditional areas of security.

These are complex and challenging problems, made all the more difficult by the scale of their geography and their limited resource base.

To react to these security challenges we should be considering embracing regionalism to enhance our response.

In terms of air power contributing to this regional approach, we need to recognise that the traditional Air Force model won't enable the majority of Pacific nations and we should be looking to a solution that allows them to take full advantage of air power's responsiveness and reach.

This solution needs to enable our partners to make use of regional resources by participation in, or contribution to, a wider security model that allows them to benefit from air power but doesn't require them to invest in every aspect of the capability.

Regionalism by design, by operation and by outcome.

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