

South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting

Joint Communiqué

1. We, the Prime Minister of Tonga, the Defence Ministers from Australia, New Zealand, and Papua New Guinea, the Vice Minister for Defence from Chile, and the French Ambassador to Tonga, representative of the French Defence Minister, met in Nuku'alofa in the Kingdom of Tonga on 2 May for the inaugural South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting (SPDMM).
2. Ministers and other representatives from Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, France, and Chile expressed their deep gratitude to the Government and the people of the Kingdom of Tonga for hosting the SPDMM, and for the kind hospitality extended during their visit to Tonga.

PACIFIC SECURITY

3. We confirmed the enduring importance of security in the Pacific, which underwrites the region's continued stability and prosperity.
4. We noted the range of challenges to continued security and prosperity in the Pacific, including the continued potential for conflict within fragile states, transnational crime (including illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing), climate change and the impacts of environmental degradation, as well as frequent natural disasters.
5. We noted the wide range of agencies and organisations—both within our states and regionally—that play important roles in responding to these challenges, including military and police forces, aid agencies, customs, fisheries, and border protection organisations, justice departments, as well as non-government bodies and community groups.
6. We further noted that the broad array of challenges, exacerbated by the enormous scale of the Pacific, makes cooperation between states crucial to achieve regional security.
7. We further noted the many successes already achieved through regional cooperation to address pertinent security challenges, including growing collaboration on maritime security, and the extensive cooperation in regional security operations, such as RAMSI.
 - a. We further noted the important contribution of Pacific states to global security, including to multinational operations in the Middle East and Africa, which demonstrated the willingness of Pacific states to contribute to international peace and security.
8. Notwithstanding these achievements, we agreed on the need to deepen and expand cooperation between our respective military forces to help respond to these regional challenges.
 - a. We further agreed to focus this enhanced regional cooperation between our respective militaries on two key thematic areas, namely:

- i. coordination of approaches and perspectives through information sharing and dialogue, consistently with national and international confidentiality requirements; and
- ii. advancing interoperability through combined exercises.

COORDINATION OF APPROACHES AND PERSPECTIVES

Future South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meetings

9. We welcomed the inaugural SPDMM as an important step to improve regional security cooperation and coordination.
 - a. We agreed that the SPDMM provides a useful forum to share perspectives on key regional security issues and helps common understanding and coordination between the participants' respective policies and approaches.
10. We agreed to hold Meetings on an annual basis, to maintain frequent communication between Ministers and enable them to review the implementation of outcomes from previous Meetings.
 - a. Australia's Minister for Defence agreed for Australia to develop a proposed governance framework for consideration by other participants for the management of future iterations of the SPDMM.
11. Papua New Guinea's Minister of Defence offered to host the next meeting of the SPDMM in 2014.
 - a. We further agreed that Vanuatu should be invited to observe this next Meeting, and at the suggestion of Chile, for Peru to be considered as a potential future participant in due course.

Information Sharing

12. We noted the range of successful mechanisms for sharing information on key security issues that are already operating in the region.
13. We noted that in addition to these mechanisms, a significant level of bilateral coordination already exists between our respective militaries.
14. Building on these achievements, we agreed to open a dialogue on our respective military capacities in order to undertake regional humanitarian assistance and disaster relief or maritime security operations.
 - a. Such a dialogue would include exchange of information on the specific assets and expertise from our respective militaries that could contribute to such operations or activities.
 - b. Such information sharing would contribute to improve a common understanding of our capabilities, and allow us to better coordinate our respective operations and activities to regional needs.
15. We noted this dialogue would build on work already undertaken through existing mechanisms for information sharing, such as the FRANZ Arrangement.

Encouraging common approaches

16. Recognising the array of challenges facing continued stability and prosperity in the region, and the stretched resources our nations all faced, we welcomed the wide range of states with an interest in Pacific security—including those resident in the region, as well as both traditional and new partners.
 - a. We noted that our various partner states provide valued resources, assets, and expertise that help support regional stability.
17. We agreed it was important to build the awareness of our partners as to the unique security challenges facing the region to ensure their continued support was appropriately tailored and targeted.
 - a. This would include extending, where appropriate, invitations for certain new states to observe existing regional military activities and exercises.
 - b. This observation would be especially important in areas of common interest, such as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief and maritime surveillance.
18. We further agreed on the importance of encouraging partners to work closely with both regional states and other partners to de-conflict and coordinate the security assistance programs in the Pacific.

ADVANCING INTEROPERABILITY

Cooperative Exercise Framework

19. To help further enhance cooperation and develop greater interoperability between our militaries, following a stocktake of existing exercises, we agreed to establish a new framework for our cooperative military exercises, to be known as POVAI ENDEAVOUR.
20. We further agreed the POVAI ENDEAVOUR framework will be an overarching mechanism that will help coordinate the large number of exercises and activities that are already occurring in the region.
 - a. This framework will aim to ensure these activities build the capability of regional militaries to respond to the full range of security, stabilisation, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief challenges in the region.
21. Australia's Minister for Defence agreed that Australia would develop a governance framework for POVAI ENDEAVOUR for consideration by other participants.
22. We also agreed to consider broadening, where possible, the participation in existing activities and exercises to include forces from our respective militaries and other partners (noting many exercises already involve broad regional representation).
 - a. Where appropriate, this could also include representatives from Pacific Island Countries that lack military forces.

- b. Inclusion of these states would help build their awareness of regional security operations and capabilities, and facilitate greater cooperation between their domestic security institutions and our military forces.

Maritime Security Cooperation

- 23. We acknowledged the successful collaboration on maritime security already evident between many states, as well as with key regional institutions such as the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA).
- 24. We agreed on the importance of further enhancing our maritime security cooperation as a response to transnational criminal threats—especially illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing.
 - a. We welcomed the opening for signature in late 2012 of the Niue Treaty Subsidiary Agreement by the States party to the Niue Treaty as a key means to facilitate greater coordination.
- 25. We further agreed that pursuing greater information sharing amongst our militaries would be essential to foster enhanced coordination of regional maritime security operations.
- 26. We welcomed Australia's continued intent to implement the Pacific Maritime Security Program (PMSP) as a follow-on to the Pacific Patrol Boat Program.
 - a. The PMSP—originally announced at the 2009 Pacific Island Forum Leaders Meeting—will strengthen and broaden the region's capacity to secure maritime resources, and will enable greater cooperation between regional states in achieving this goal.
- 27. Australia's Minister for Defence noted that Australia would shortly begin a series of consultations with regional states, key regional institutions, and partner nations, which would help inform and refine options for the PMSP.
- 28. Australia's Minister for Defence also noted three key activities that Australia would shortly implement to help support regional maritime security;
 - a. A regional aerial surveillance trial with Pacific Island Countries, utilising existing aviation infrastructure and assets in Pacific Island Countries, that would improve maritime domain awareness and allow regional militaries and police forces to more effectively patrol their respective exclusive economic zones;
 - b. The provision of equipment and software to the FFA to strengthen the capacity of the Regional Fisheries Surveillance Centre; and
 - c. Subject to agreement with the FFA, to support the attachment of regional personnel (from police, defence, or other relevant agencies) to the FFA Regional Fisheries Surveillance Centre.