



IISS SHANGRI-LA DIALOGUE

20th Asia Security Summit. 02 – 04 June 2023, Singapore

Fourth Plenary Session

ASIA'S EVOLVING MARITIME SECURITY ORDER

Ni Sa Bula Vinaka,

Distinguished leaders, Government Ministers, Senior Officials, Business Leaders and Security Experts.

I thank Director-General Dr. John Chipman for the excellent task in moderating this plenary, also to the previous speakers an absolute pleasure to share this forum with you both.

First and foremost, I offer my appreciation to the organisers, the host of this dialogue for the invitation to speak on this plenary and to offer my thoughts regarding the topic.

I was asked to speak about the evolving Maritime security order in the Asia-Pacific. I ask maritime security for who?

Naturally as a Fijian, I care most about our home, the **Blue Pacific**.

So how do changes in the maritime security of the Blue Pacific risk the safety and security of all our people?

The desire to prosper, to enjoy family life, and of course, live with security are values we all share. To this end, the protection and safety and security of our people is paramount.

In November 2022 the world population reached 8 billion people. 60% of the population are in the Blue Pacific region. This population growth impacts resources, and on socio-economic development and security.

We in the Pacific are an ocean people: our food and economic security is irreducibly tied to our maritime security.

As small players in the global system but Large Ocean States in our right, we envision our Blue Pacific to be a zone of peace.

Our oceans are the maritime highway through which nearly two thirds of the world's trade transits. The well-being of all countries is dependent on goods and commodities flowing freely, safely and unhindered across our Blue Pacific – connecting countries; connecting people to markets and realizing hope for communities.

However, our fish stocks are rapidly disappearing, our coral reefs are dying, and natural ecosystems are sustaining long-term damage, driven by illegal fishing, environment biodiversity degradation, related to climate change.

Prime Minister Albanese commended this forum as an opportunity for constructive but frank discussion. He said that the prosperity and security of our region is a collective responsibility. I could not agree more.

Indeed when the Blue Pacific is secure and sustainable, we make an outsized contribution to the collective security of the planet. Securitising and maintaining peace for our ocean wealth guarantees our commonwealth. As the Prime Minister said, this task must be a collective responsibility: our current obligation to return to our people their future prosperity. The marine resources are what we share. The sea is not only a major contributor to the global economy, it sustains the daily livelihoods of the world's people.

As mentioned by Prime Minister Albanese in his keynote address, Fiji is also thankful that our Pacific Islands Forum is unified. This unity is a precondition for dialogue and such dialogue is precondition for collective security.

For many years Fiji and other Pacific nations have advocated at global platforms about the challenges we are facing. And yet each year, the trends of climate change, and its related impacts on food, water, and health security continue to accelerate.

Fiji and the Pacific are thankful for those nations who partner with us to ensure the Blue Pacific's commonwealth. With the multiple global crises we face, we need the community of nations to listen and act. This is our collective responsibility to our future generations.

In our Blue Pacific Continent, the ocean is our livelihood. Our forefathers traverse the sea without fear, to them the ocean connects the islands.

Now, our maritime space has become part of strategic power competition. Not for the marine resources but over leadership of the Blue Pacific, the Asia-Pacific or an Indo-pacific, depending on who you ask.

This vast ocean area, spanning from the northern to the southern hemisphere, has drawn the attention of powerful nations.

Geopolitical tensions and rivalries across the globe are spilling into the Blue Pacific region.

While some nations are in disputes over their maritime boundaries, we in the Pacific risk being left with nothing to even have a dispute over!

International engagement in our region is more intense than ever. Never before has the rate of engagement been so high. These engagements must be meaningful.

On the geopolitics of maritime security, I and my other Pacific colleagues are told not to pick sides. However, we need to consider our own security and development first.

While the intense competition in my region and the race for global leadership may well threaten our collective maritime security and stability, more pressing for the Pacific are the ramifications of maritime threats such

as climate change, Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing (IUU), transnational crime and nuclear threats.

We are in an endurance race for survival. However, we are resilient in our collective vision of identifying pathways to address climate change and disasters; peace and security; the ocean and environment which are all enshrined under the **2050 Strategy for a Blue Pacific Continent**.

This strategy calls for regional responses to be developed “the Pacific Way”: consensus, respect for sovereignty, and collective action.

Whilst our concerns may vary from country to country, what we can agree on for most of us here sitting in this room is that maritime and climate threats, if left neglected, will be a loss for all.

When you come to Fiji and the Blue Pacific region first think about the maritime security of the region you are in. Should you come for dialogue, do not just talk, we need action now to ensure the collective prosperity. This is an essential approach to address global challenges and ensure the sustainable development of all our people.

END