



Security Dynamics in Oceania



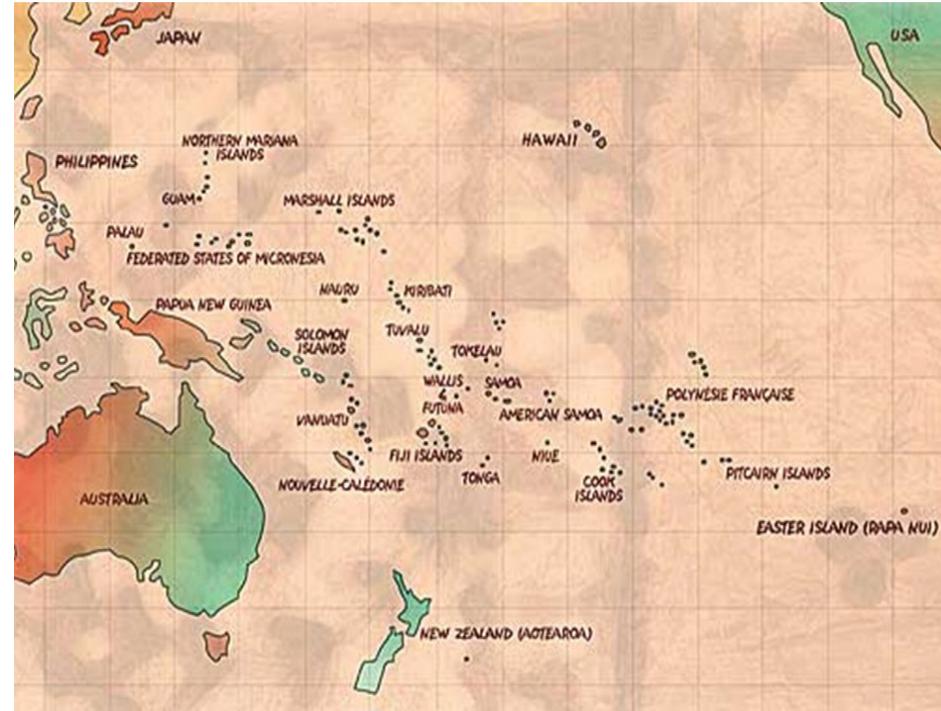
NGA & Friends

**21 May 2020
Dr. Alfred Oehlers**



The Plan

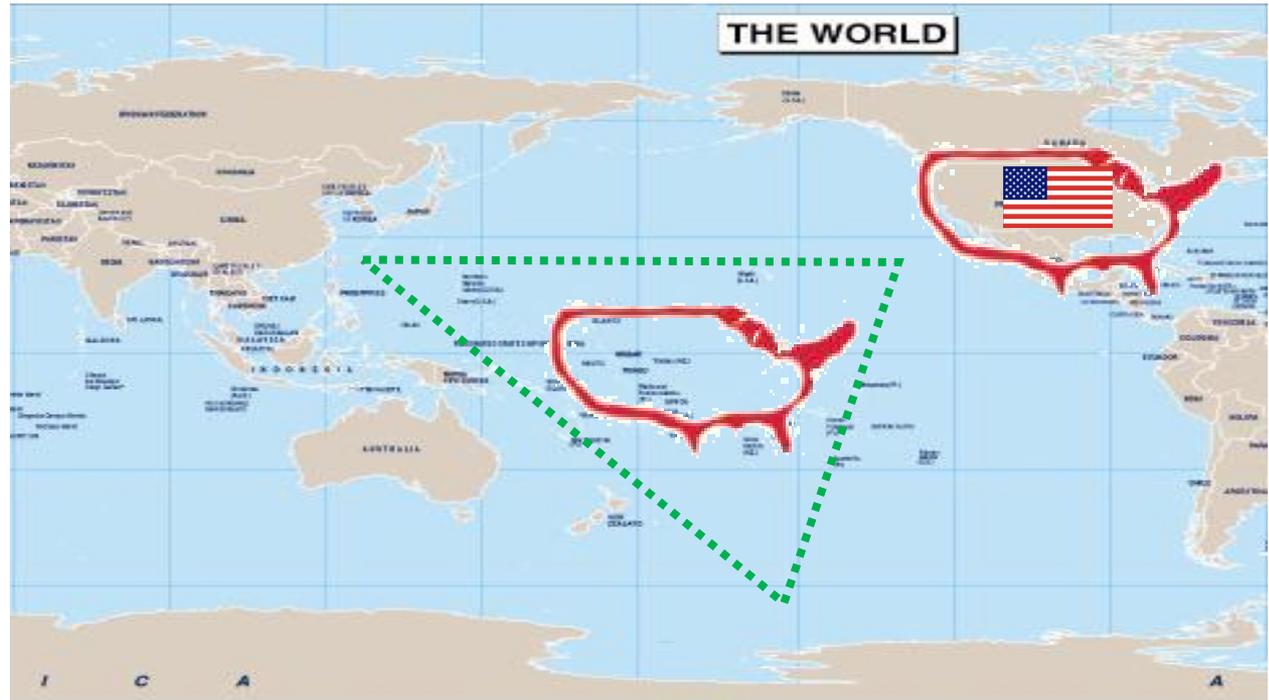
1. A brief orientation.
2. Comment on 3 themes:
 - Increasing strategic prominence.
 - Current context.
 - The challenge is Ours.





A large maritime region...

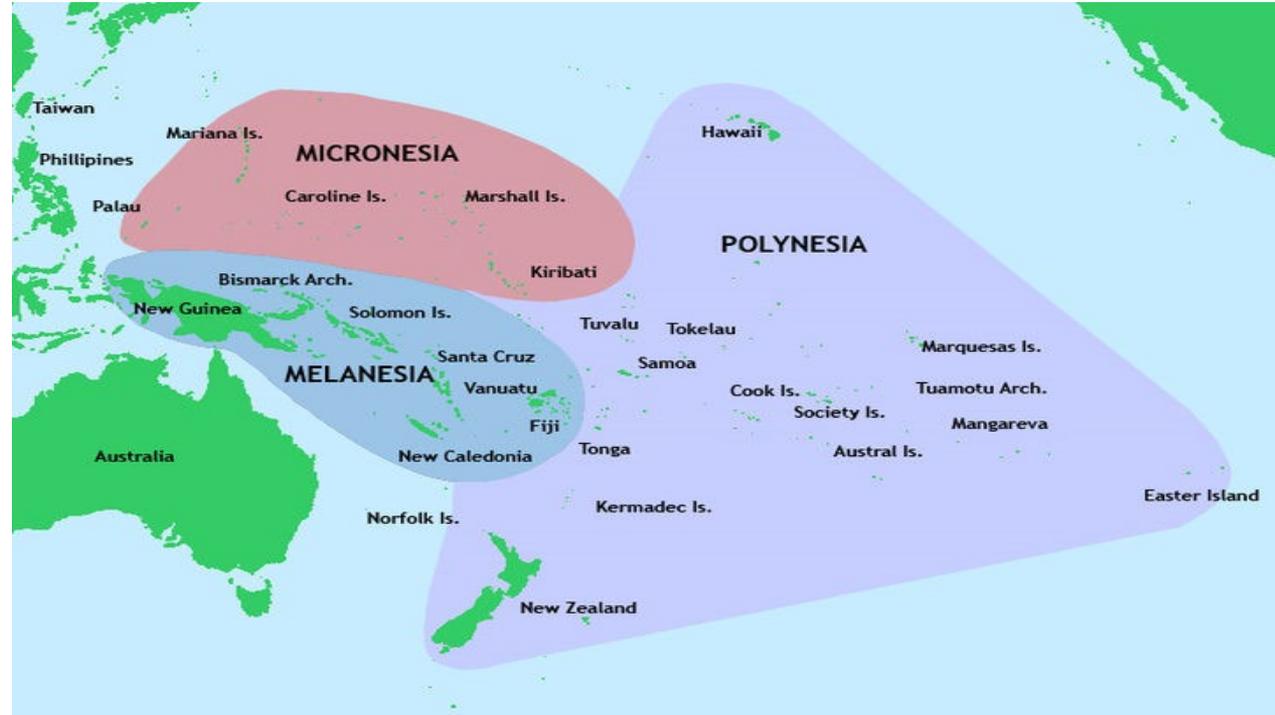
- **11.5 million sq. miles; 98% ocean.**





Ethnic diversity

- 3 sub-regions:
Micronesia;
Melanesia;
Polynesia





Political organization

- 25 political entities
 - 11 independent nations
 - 9 territories
 - 5 States in Free Association





Independent nations



• Australia



• Fiji



• Kiribati



• Nauru



• New Zealand



• Papua New Guinea



• Samoa



• Solomon Islands



• Tonga



• Tuvalu



• Vanuatu



Territories

-  • American Samoa (USA)
-  • Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas (USA)
-  • Guam (USA)
-  • New Caledonia (Kanaky) (France)
-  • French Polynesia (France)
-  • Wallis and Futuna (France)
-  • Tokelau (NZ)
-  • Pitcairn Island (UK)
-  • Rapa Nui (Easter Island) (Chile)



States in Free Association



- Cook Islands (NZ)



- Niue (NZ)



- Federated States of Micronesia (USA)



- Palau (USA)



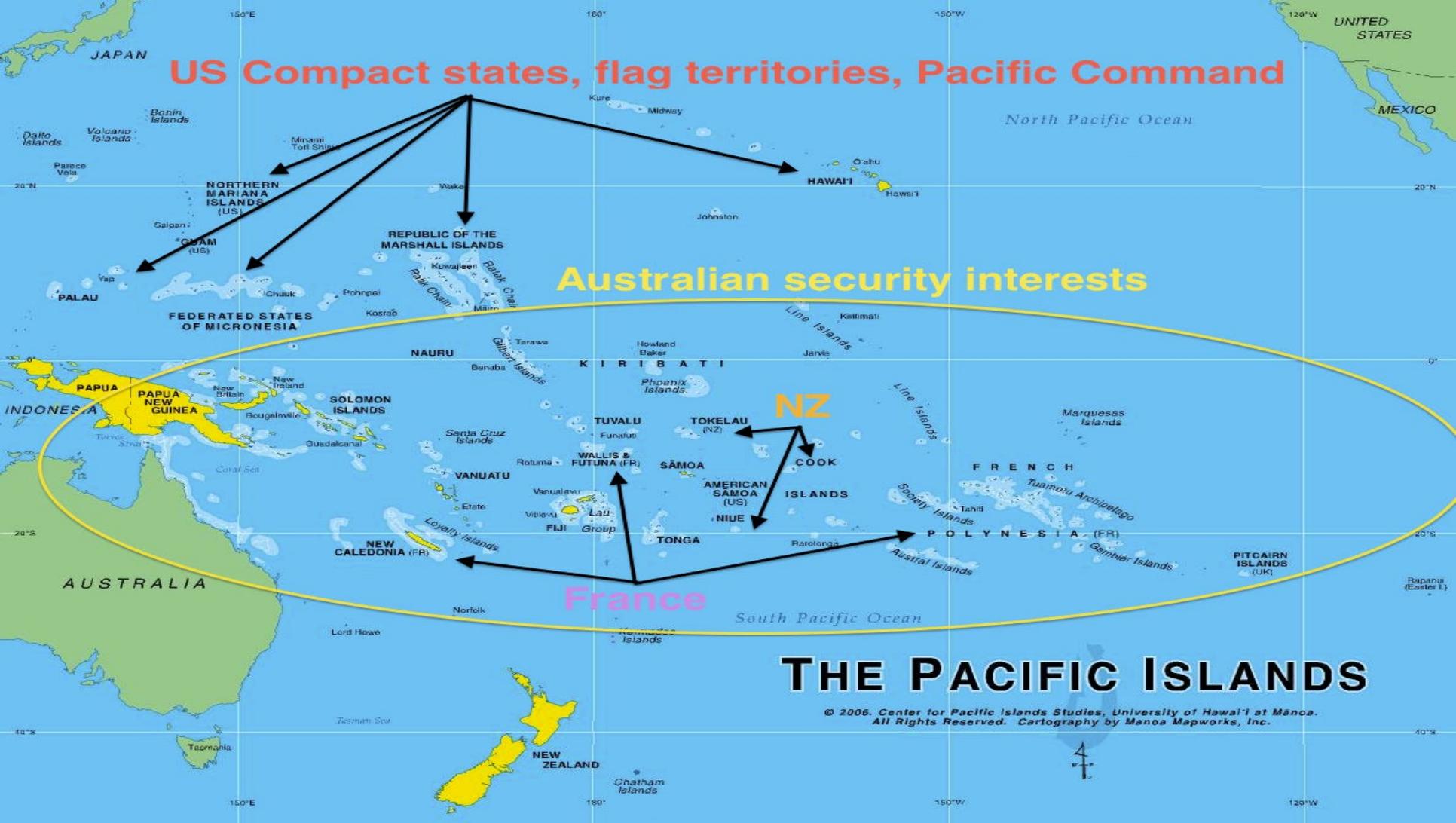
- Republic of the Marshall Islands (USA)



Principal external powers

- **Largest players historically: Australia, New Zealand**
 - Extensive support bilaterally and through Pacific Islands Forum
- **Additional players: United States, France**
 - France: New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Wallis and Futuna 
 - United States: Compact States 
 - Both are founding members of Secretariat of the Pacific Community
- **Some coordination: e.g. FRANZ (trilateral HADR coord),
Quadrilateral Defence Coordinating Group (Australia, France, New Zealand, U.S.)**

US Compact states, flag territories, Pacific Command



Australian security interests

NZ

France

THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

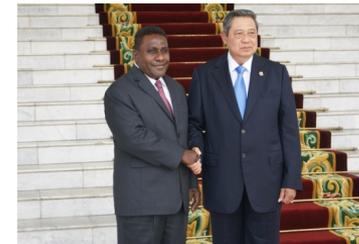
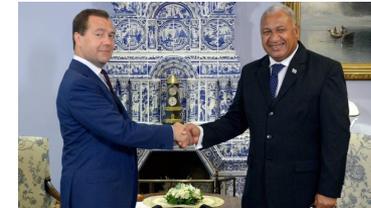
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Additional external powers

- **China** 
 - Pervasive diplomatic and economic presence
 - Limited military assistance to date
 - Connections to Melanesian Spearhead Group
 - Reluctance to coordinate donor assistance

- **Others involved, e.g.:**
 - Japan 
 - Republic of Korea 
 - Taiwan 
 - Russia 
 - Indonesia 
 - European Union 
 - Commonwealth of Nations 
 - The United Nations (UNDP and UNOCHA) 





Regionalism...

- 6 regional forums:
 - Pacific Islands Forum (Suva, Fiji) (1971)
 - Secretariat of the Pacific Community (Noumea, New Caledonia) (1947)
 - Melanesian Spearhead Group (Port Vila, Vanuatu) (1988)
 - Polynesian Leaders Group (Apia, Samoa) (2011)
 - Micronesian Islands Forum (2003)
 - Pacific Islands Development Forum (Suva, Fiji) (2013)





Other regional mechanisms of note...

- **Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (aka Forum Fisheries Agency – FFA), Honiara, Solomon Islands.**
- **Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police (PICP), Wellington, New Zealand**
- **Pacific Transnational Crime Network (PTCN), Apia, Samoa**
- **Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO), Suva, Fiji**
- **South Pacific Defence Ministers Meeting (Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, France, Chile)**





Non-governmental actors

- A very dense network of NGOs in the region working a broad range of social, economic and political issues
- A tight network of traditional familial and tribal links underpin many key relationships
- There is a prominent regional elite, well-educated, articulate, internationally-mobile, often moving between governmental, non-governmental and regional/international organizations





Contrasting sizes and wealth

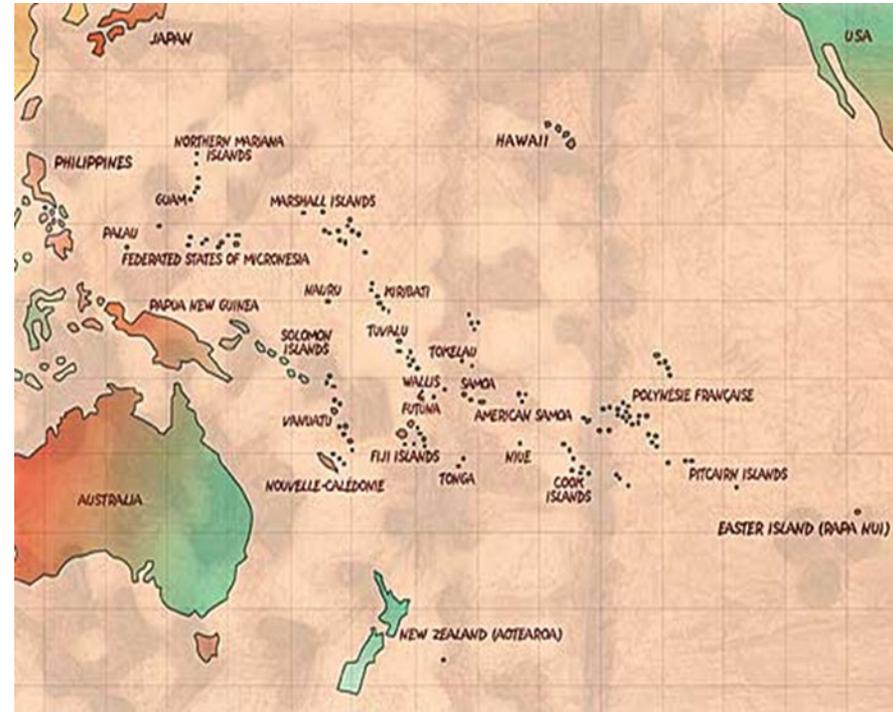
- Outliers: Australia, New Zealand
- Largest: PNG (178,000 sq. miles; 9 million)
- Smallest: Nauru (8 sq. miles; 12,000)
- EEZs: 1.3 m sq. miles (Kiribati) to 46,000 sq. miles (Samoa)

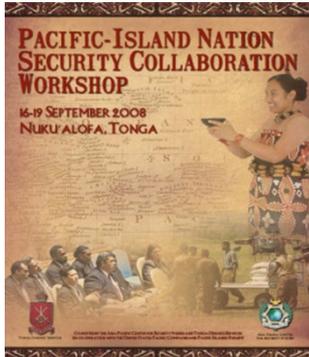




Defining features

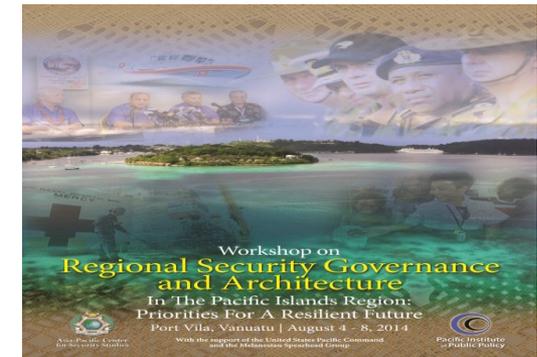
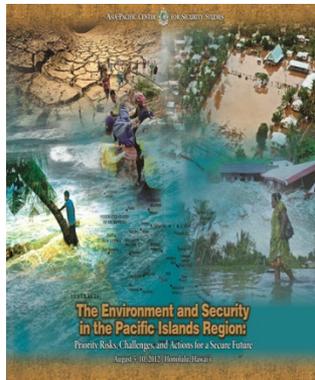
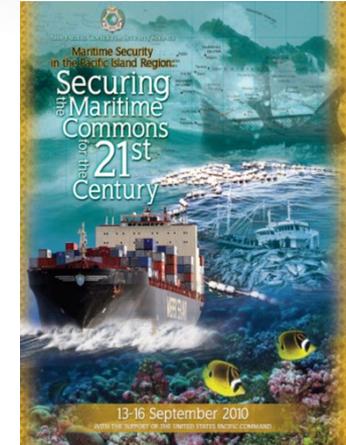
- A region of predominantly small states facing the challenges of modernization
- A strong sense of community, culture and tradition, and deep religious faith
- A “dualism” – comprising a more recent “modernism” superimposed on a bedrock of tradition in existence for centuries





Key security challenges...

- 4 clusters:
 - Existential and physical insecurities
 - Political issues
 - Economic challenges
 - Social issues





Existential and physical insecurities

- **Climate change**

- Rising sea-levels
- Increasing ocean acidity
- Changing sea temperatures
- Increasing soil salinity
- Shifting rainfall patterns



- **Natural disasters**

- Increasing frequency & severity of severe weather events
- Challenges in preparedness, response, risk management





Political issues

- **Internal challenges**
 - Corruption
 - Law and order
 - Fiscal instability
 - Political instability
 - Weak governance capacities
- **External relations**
 - Asymmetric relations
 - Differing security outlooks & priorities
 - Aid, assistance and external dependence
 - Navigating emerging large-power tensions
- **Regional architecture**
 - Duplicative structures
 - Competition
 - Weak cooperation & coordination between states





Economic challenges

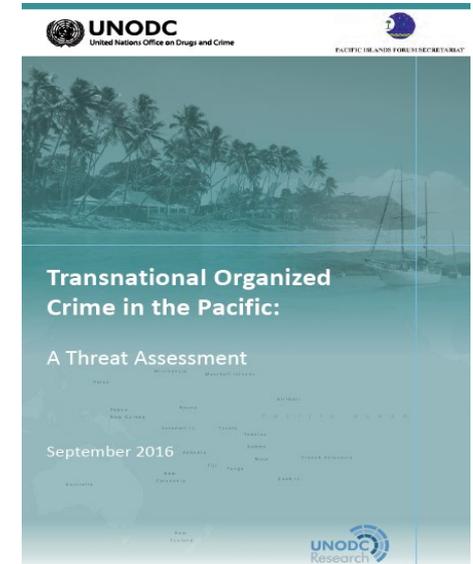
- **Economic vulnerability**
- **Poverty & unemployment**
- **Demographics and human resources**
- **Environmental and resource management challenges**





Social issues

- **Ethnic tensions**
- **Gender issues**
 - Rape and domestic violence
 - Social and political exclusion of women
- **Health**
 - Communicable and non-communicable disease
- **Organized crime**
 - Trafficking (arms, drugs, people, resources)
 - Cyber-crime
 - Money laundering





3 Themes

- Increasing strategic prominence
- Current context
- The challenge is Ours



Increasing strategic significance

- Location – maritime and homeland security
- Communications – sea lanes, telecoms, satellites
- Resources – food (fishing), mining, energy
- Climate change
- Historical commitments and relationships
- Antarctica
- Norm-shaping & re-imagining the international rules based order





Current context

- **Crowded**
 - State/non-state; regional & international organizations; private sector players, etc.
- **Complex**
 - Navigating diverse agendas/interests
 - Cross-cutting problem sets
 - Challenges in building consensus and coordinating
- **Competitive (but not yet escalating into contestation)**
 - Across a full spectrum: diplomatic/political, economic, informational, security
 - Essentially contest of two “models”: PRC vs. Liberal-democratic?
- **Which is gaining the upper hand?**

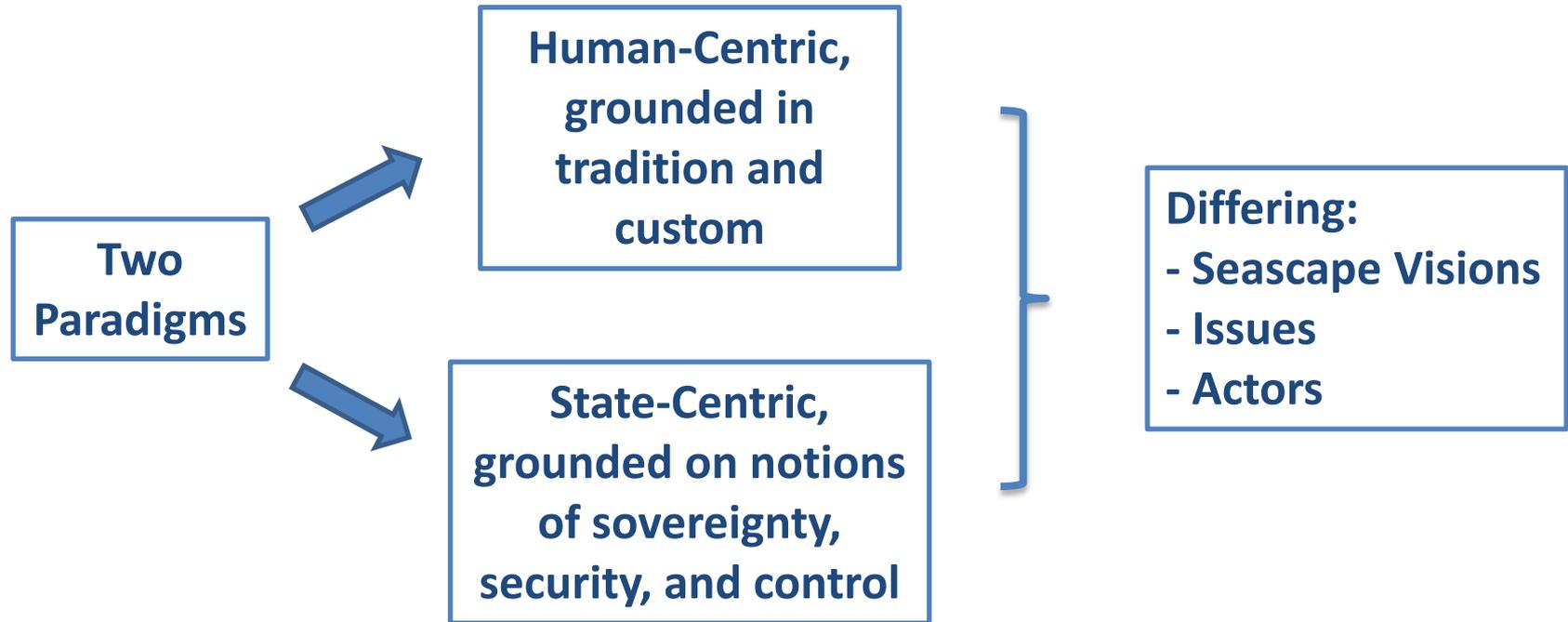


The challenge is Ours

- **“Ours” = U.S. and allies/partners (Australia, France, New Zealand)**
- **Comfortable alongside each other engaging with Pacific nations**
 - Shared “language”, interoperability, vision, etc.
- **But is this resonating with Pacific nations?**
- **Or are we talking across each other (and missing opportunities)?**



Eg.: Maritime Security in Oceania



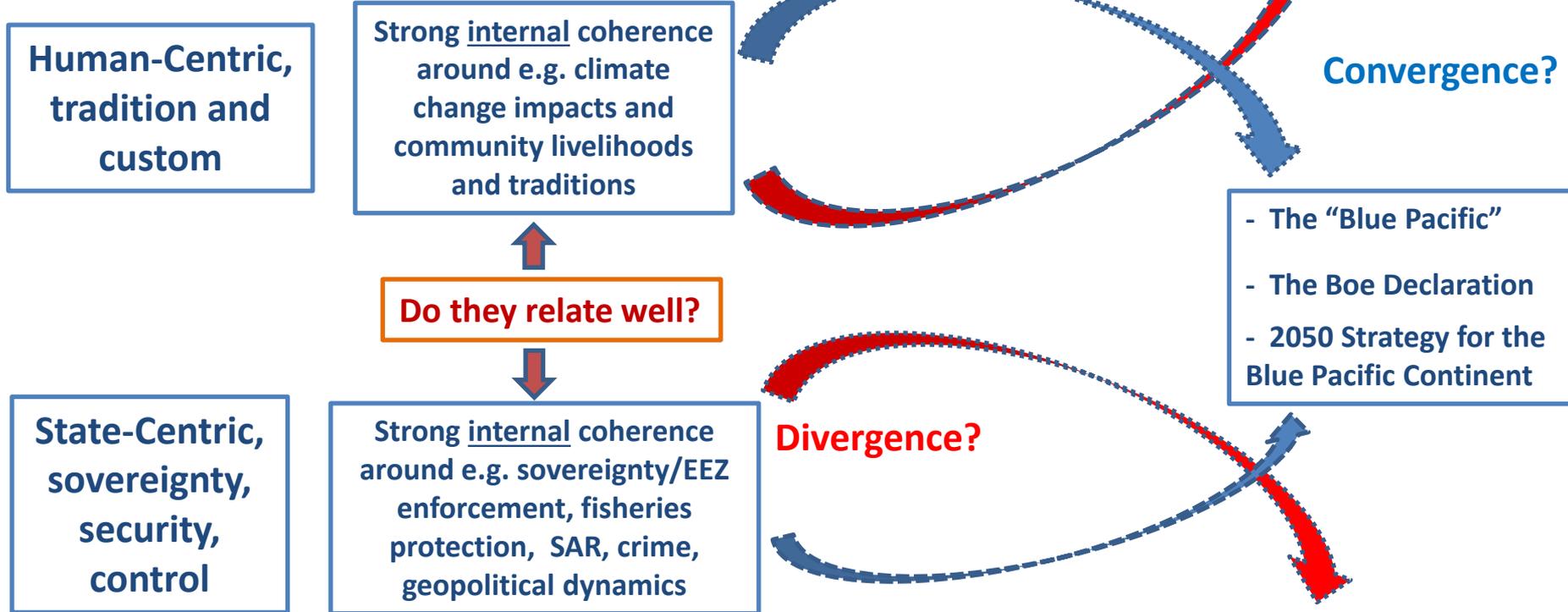


Oceania's Two Paradigms





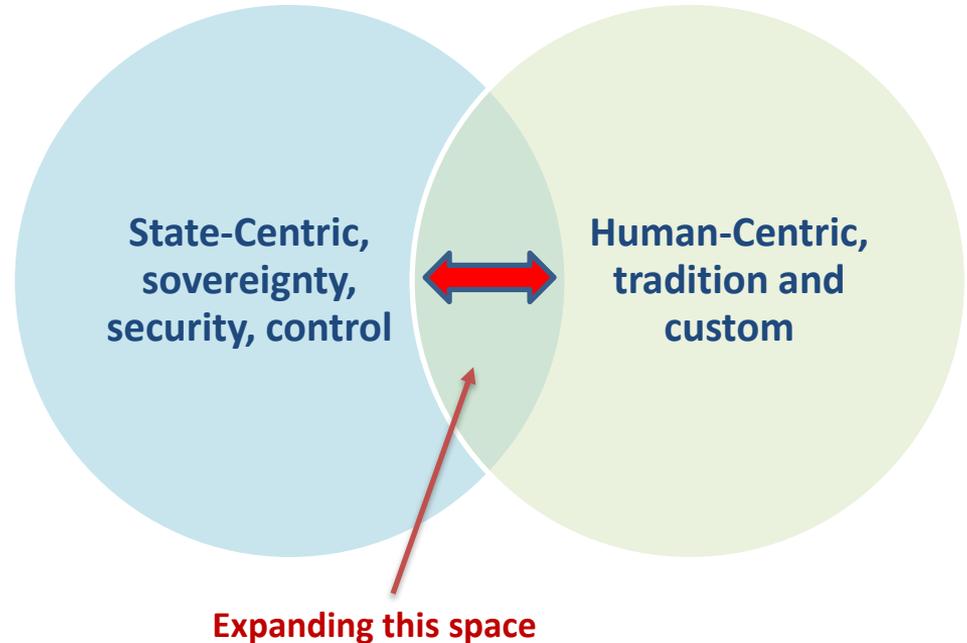
Paradigm Dynamics and Trajectories?





The Challenge in Managing Maritime Security Dynamics in Oceania?

- Sustaining coherence and positive momentum within each paradigm
- Strengthening the interface between the paradigms for a more holistic approach advancing collective regional maritime well-being





Mahalo!