**Regional interoperability front of mind as ANZAC Army chiefs strengthen special ties with Fijian Forces**

Australia’s Chief of Army Lieutenant General Simon Stuart and his New Zealand Army counterpart Major General Rose King have met with senior Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) leaders in Suva this week to kick-start a week-long tour of the Pacific.

On Tuesday and Wednesday the joint Australia-New Zealand delegation held a series of engagements, including with Commander Land Forces Brigadier General Onisivoro Covinisaqa and Commander RFMF Major General Jone Kalouniwai Logavatu.

The talks reinforced the shared commitment to the region’s security and stability, acknowledged a deepening of strategic dialogue between the three nations and cast an eye to future engagements and opportunities.

“We had great, insightful and honest discussions about our current landscape and what direction we’re all heading in. We were also able to discuss some of our common challenges and shared some lessons learned, which has been really valuable,” Lieutenant General Stuart said.

“We only have the ability to have such conversations because of the incredibly strong relationship we’ve built over an extended period of time between our three nations. You cannot build trust and relationships overnight when you need them – our commitments to each other, our comradeship and friendships are stronger than they have ever been, and that’s a benefit to us all, as well as the collective security of our region.”

Both the Australian and New Zealand chiefs reaffirmed contributions to RFMF programmes, staff and instructor exchanges, and future joint exercises.

The NZ Army’s Major General King said these collective approaches, as well as broader regional interoperability was a “win-win” for all parties.

“Nothing we do with our partners in the Pacific goes one-way; our collaboration alongside Fiji and Australia only serves to strengthen each other, and I firmly believe we’re all richer, better and more effective organisations as a result,” Major General King said.

The chiefs also discussed how best to capitalise the momentum and opportunities provided through channels such as the Pacific Small Armies Forum (PSAF) and the Pacific Response Group (PRG).

“We see so many fantastic opportunities to not only continue, but deepen our partnership with Fiji and other countries in the Pacific – in fact, we’re seeing that materialise with the upcoming Talisman Sabre Exercise in Australia, where both New Zealand and the RFMF are sending a combat team and infantry company, respectively,” Major General King said.

“We know - particularly from the New Zealand perspective being a member of PSAF – that we can’t operate in the same way as larger armies, so for us it’s about ensuring we most effectively leverage what we do incredibly well, which in our case with the RFMF is to share, collaborate and partner wherever we can. We see our interoperability with partners in the region as key to promoting security and stability in the Pacific.” Major General King said.

The delegation was also briefed on the RFMF’s vision for its force transformation, and visited a number of key installations at Land Forces Command, which outlined the significant developments made by the RFMF, including to individual and collective training.

“The advancements that the RFMF has made over the last three to four years has been incredibly impressive, and we’re really excited to see the journey they are on to develop and evolve their capabilities – there is immense potential and talent there, and we can’t wait to see it flourish,” Lieutenant General Stuart said.

The contingent will continue its Pacific trip in Timor-Leste later this week.

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