

## Strengthening Collective Security Approaches in the Pacific

*Anna Powles & Jose Sousa-Santos*

In 2022 strategic competition between the United States (U.S.) and the People's Republic of China (China) intensified in the Pacific islands region. Two agreements, a security cooperation agreement between Solomon Islands and China, and a subsequent economic and security region-wide arrangement proposed by China, raised alarm in Canberra, Washington and Wellington, eliciting swift visits by U.S. Indo Pacific Coordinator, Dr Kurt Campbell, to Solomon Islands in April, a discreet visit by a New Zealand foreign affairs official also to Solomons Islands, and Australian Foreign Minister Senator Penny Wong, four days after the Australian election, to Fiji in May.

For the U.S., its allies and partners, the agreements served as further evidence of China's strategic intentions towards the region, specifically China's security ambitions. The security agreement signed between Solomon Islands and China signalled Beijing's interest in enabling ship visits by the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) which immediately provoked fears of a military base.<sup>1</sup> Campbell noted 'potential regional security implications' of the Solomon Islands-China security cooperation agreement and warned that the U.S. would have 'significant concerns and respond accordingly' if China sought to establish 'a de facto permanent military presence, power-projection capabilities, or a military installation' in Solomon

1 David Crowe and Eryk Bagshaw (2022). China could have Solomon Islands military base within four weeks. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 20 April 2022. <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/china-could-have-solomon-islands-military-base-within-four-weeks-20220420-p5aevc.html>.

Islands.<sup>2</sup> Wong urged Pacific countries to weigh up the ‘consequences’ of accepting security offers from China and that the region should determine its own security.<sup>3</sup>

For many Pacific leaders, these events reflect the tension – and dilemma – between three intersecting concerns: first, that ‘[t]he big powers are doggedly pursuing strategies to widen and extend their reach and inculcating a far-reaching sense of insecurity’ in the region;<sup>4</sup> secondly, a deep frustration that the region was being pressured to choose between ‘a China alternative’ and ‘our traditional partners’<sup>5</sup> at the expense of development imperatives and Pacific calls for climate action; and thirdly, that Pacific approaches to ‘managing’ strategic competition, at both the national and regional levels, are increasingly being tested. In essence, that Pacific states – and the region – are increasingly being faced with a strategic choice not of their making.

As strategic competition between the U.S., its regional allies and partners, and China intensifies in the Pacific, how the region is responding is under heightened scrutiny. There has been an inclination to view Pacific Island leaders and policymakers as having “no strategy”; assuming that Pacific leaders and officials did not understand geopolitics or were disinterested. Increasingly, though, how Pacific states are responding to China as a rising power in the region is the subject of scholarly inquiry.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter considers how the Pacific is responding to strategic competition in the face of competing security narratives and interests, and what mechanisms the region has developed to ensure regional

2 The White House (2022). Readout of Senior Administration Travel to Hawaii, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and Solomon Islands. April 22, 2022. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/04/22/readout-of-senior-administration-travel-to-hawaii-fiji-papua-new-guinea-and-solomon-islands/>.

3 Daniel Hurst (2022). Penny Wong urges Pacific nations to weigh up ‘consequences’ of China security offers. *The Guardian*. May 27, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/may/27/penny-wong-urges-pacific-nations-to-weigh-up-consequences-of-china-security-offers>.

4 Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, Speech on Pacific perspectives on the new geostrategic landscape, August 30, 2018, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/speech-hon-prime-minister-tuilaepa-sailele-malielegaoi-pacific-perspectives-new>

5 Meg Taylor, ‘Keynote address, “The China Alternative: Changing Regional Order in the Pacific Islands”’, February 12, 2019, <https://www.forumsec.org/2019/02/12/keynote-address-by-dame-meg-taylor-secretary-general-the-china-alternative-changing-regional-order-in-the-pacific-islands/>.

6 Graeme Smith and Terence Wesley-Smith (eds.) (2021). *The China Alternative. Changing Regional Order in the Pacific Islands*. ANU Press. March 2021.

security priorities are not undermined or overlooked, including how the Pacific Islands Forum, as the pre-eminent regional political organization, has sought to shape the regional order in response to strategic competition. It is widely acknowledged that a consensus exists in the Pacific that strategic competition is disruptive and threatens to undermine regionalism and that cooperation between partners is preferred as it enables Pacific states to balance their relationships. This stance has led to many Pacific states adopting a practice of hedging which, despite differences in approach at the national level, has come to dominate the overall regional response to strategic competition. Accordingly, this chapter finds that a nascent strategic community of practice has emerged in the Pacific as a consequence of enacting regional crisis management mechanisms and negotiating strategic competition. However, as others have noted, growing pressure on the region to ‘choose sides’ and make a strategic choice will prove increasingly challenging. This chapter concludes that the Pacific would benefit from strengthening existing approaches to collective security by building on extant declarations and strategic mechanisms, and enshrining collective security principles and praxis, which in turn would strengthen regionalism as the buffer against threats and challenges to the regional order.

### **The China-Solomon Islands Security Pact**

The security cooperation agreement between Solomon Islands and China,<sup>7</sup> formally signed in May 2022, was met with concern and condemnation. For many it confirmed that China was seeking to disrupt the regional order in the Pacific through establishing a security presence in the region; these fears were further validated when China stated, for the first time, that it was not seeking a ‘sphere of influence’ in the Pacific but that it is a ‘direct stakeholder in the security of the South Pacific’.<sup>8</sup>

The security agreement, albeit simultaneously vague and ambitious in both scope and intent, contained two provisions that would, if realized, challenge the regional balance. First, *Article 1* of the draft security agreement stated that China, with the consent of Solomon Islands, could ‘make ship visits to, carry out logistical replenishment in, and have

7 Framework Agreement Between the Government of the People’s Republic of China And the Government of Solomon Islands on Security Cooperation (Draft), <https://twitter.com/AnnaPowles/status/1506845794728837120?s=20&t=WB9tGDcrHzDVAdaFVcFIUw>.

8 Xu Keyue and Xu Yelu (2022). China-bashing tactics ahead of elections ‘hurt Aussie parties’. *Global Times*. May 9, 2022, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202205/1265203.shtml>.

stopover and transition in Solomon Islands'. Then Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison called the establishment of a Chinese military base in Solomon Islands a 'red line.'<sup>9</sup> This provision was interpreted as evidence that China was actively seeking to establish a military base in the Pacific.<sup>10</sup> Sogavare denied in national parliament that the security agreement would allow China to establish a military base in the country;<sup>11</sup> a prospect which Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison described as a "red line".<sup>12</sup> The prospect of any kind of persistent Chinese presence in Solomon Islands provoked a series of high-level diplomatic visits to Solomon Islands. Australia's highest ranking intelligence chiefs flew to its capital, Honiara, to meet with Sogavare<sup>13</sup> followed by Australian Minister for International Development and the Pacific, Zed Seselja, to request Solomon Islands not sign the security agreement and 'to consult the Pacific family in the spirit of regional openness and transparency, consistent with our region's security frameworks.'<sup>14</sup> The United States (U.S.) sent a delegation, led by National Security Council Indo Pacific Coordinator, Kurt Campbell, to Solomon Islands stating that "if steps are taken to establish a de facto permanent military presence, power-projection capabilities, or a military installation...the United States would then have significant concerns and respond accordingly."<sup>15</sup> On the eve of Campbell's visit to Honiara, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin confirmed the

9 Daniel Hurst and Katharine Murphy (2022). Morrison silent on 'red line' for China as Labor continues attack over handling of the Pacific. *The Guardian*. April 26, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/26/morrison-silent-on-red-line-for-china-as-labor-continues-attack-over-handling-of-the-pacific>.

10 Earlier examples include Santo in Vanuatu, Tulagi in Solomon Islands, and Kanton in Kiribati.

11 Robert Iroga (2022). Sogavare strongly denies "PRC Military Base" in SI as claimed. Solomon Islands Business Online. March 29, 2022, <https://sbm.sb/2022/03/29/sogavare-strongly-denies-prc-military-base-in-si-as-claimed/>.

12 Georgia Hitch (2022). Scott Morrison says Chinese military base in Solomon Islands would be 'red line' for Australia, US. ABC News. April 24, 2022, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-04-24/scott-morrison-china-naval-base-solomon-islands-red-line/101011710>.

13 Stephen Dziedzic (2022). Australian spy chiefs meet with Solomon Islands PM Sogavare over draft security deal with China. ABC News. April 7, 2022, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-04-07/australian-intelligence-officials-meet-with-solomon-islands-pm/100972282>.

14 Zed Seselja (2022). Statement on Solomon Islands. Media release. April 13, 2022, <https://ministers.dfat.gov.au/minister/zed-seselja/media-release/statement-solomon-islands-0>.

15 White House (2022). Readout of Senior Administration Travel to Hawaii, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and Solomon Islands. April 22, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/04/22/readout-of-senior-administration-travel-to-hawaii-fiji-papua-new-guinea-and-solomon-islands/>.

agreement had been signed<sup>16</sup>, although Solomon Islands Government has yet to provide official confirmation.

Second, the security agreement authorizes Solomon Islands to request ‘police, armed police’ and ‘military personnel’ to assist in ‘maintaining social order, protecting people’s lives and property, providing humanitarian assistance, carrying out disaster response, or providing assistance with other tasks as agreed upon by the Parties.’ The agreement also states that ‘the relevant forces of China can be used to protect the safety of Chinese personnel and major projects in Solomon Islands.’ This is fundamentally different from the existing security arrangements between China and other Pacific states, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Tonga.

Australia and New Zealand responded to the leaked draft agreement – the only version which is publicly available<sup>17</sup> - with claims that the security agreement could ‘undermine stability’<sup>18</sup> and would risk ‘destabilizing the current institutions and arrangements that have long ensured the Pacific region’s security’.<sup>19</sup> New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern referred to the agreement as ‘gravely concerning’.<sup>20</sup> Both Australia and New Zealand sought to quickly by affirm their roles as security providers of choice in the Pacific with Ardern stating that ‘existing security arrangements with New Zealand and Australia meant there was simply... no need for this agreement.’<sup>21</sup> Ardern even suggested that the security agreement violated the existing regional framework for crisis management: specifi-

16 Wang Wenbin (2022). Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin’s Regular Press Conference on April 19, 2022, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2511\\_665403/202204/t20220419\\_10669768.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/202204/t20220419_10669768.html).

17 Danny Philip, former Solomon Islands prime minister, confirmed the final text of the agreement was “very close” to the leaked draft. Webinar. ‘China Solomon Islands Security Agreement and Blue Pacific InSecurities.’ April 21, 2022. Hosted by Georgetown University and University of Hawai’i, <https://youtu.be/IBJlc5hb2k>.

18 Marise Payne (2022). Interview with Neil Breen, 4BC. 1 April 2022.

19 Nanaia Mahuta and Peeni Henare (2022). New Zealand committed to partnership with Solomon Islands. March 29, 2022, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/new-zealand-committed-partnership-solomon-islands>.

20 Lucy Craymer (2022). Analysis: Alarmed by Solomon Islands-China pact, NZ finds its voice on security. *Reuters*. May 17, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/alarmed-by-solomon-islands-china-pact-nz-finds-its-voice-security-2022-05-16/>.

21 James Baker (2022). China-Solomons deal crosses a ‘very clear line’ – Ardern. 1News, <https://www.1news.co.nz/2022/04/20/china-solomons-deal-crosses-a-very-clear-line-ardern/>.

cally the Pacific Islands Forum Biketawa Declaration (2000)<sup>22</sup> which acts as the coordinating mechanism. Building on this theme, at bilateral talks held between Australian and Chinese officials in May, Australian officials reinforced Australia's 'abiding commitment' to the Pacific's security architecture, citing three key collective security arrangements: the Boe Declaration on Regional Security (2018), the Biketawa Declaration, and the Treaty of Rarotonga (1985).<sup>23</sup>

Reactions from Pacific leaders were more muted but no less concerned. Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), President David Panuelo, publicly wrote to Solomon Islands Prime Minister Mannasseh Sogavare requesting he not sign the agreement and stating that FSM has 'grave security concerns' that it 'poses a risk of increasing geopolitical tensions across the Blue Pacific Continent'.<sup>24</sup> Referring to the security agreement as 'controversial and unprecedented', Panuelo voiced his fears that the Pacific islands risked becoming 'collateral damage' and 'would be at the epicenter of a future confrontation between these major powers.'

Tongan Prime Minister Siaosi Sovaleni announced he would raise concerns about the security agreement at the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders meeting in mid-2022,<sup>25</sup> an approach endorsed by New Zealand Foreign

22 James Baker (2022). China-Solomons deal crosses a 'very clear line' – Ardern. 1News, <https://www.1news.co.nz/2022/04/20/china-solomons-deal-crosses-a-very-clear-line-ardern/>. The Biketawa Declaration is available online at: <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/BIKETAWA-Declaration.pdf>

23 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2022). Australian and Chinese officials discuss the Pacific. May 6, 2022, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/news/media-release/australian-and-chinese-officials-discuss-pacific#:~:text=Officials%20reinforced%20Australia's%20abiding%20commitment,o%20Pacific%20island%20countries%20comprehensively.>

24 David Panuelo (2022). President Panuelo Appeals to Prime Minister Sogavare to Respectfully Reject & Give Deepest Consideration to Longer-range Consequences from Solomon Islands' Proposed Security Agreement with the People's Republic of China, March 31, 2022, [https://gov.fm/index.php/component/content/article/35-pio-articles/news-and-updates/595-president-panuelo-appeals-to-prime-minister-sogavare-to-respectfully-reject-give-deepest-consideration-to-longer-range-consequences-from-solomon-islands-proposed-security-agreement-with-the-people-s-republic-of-china?Itemid=177.](https://gov.fm/index.php/component/content/article/35-pio-articles/news-and-updates/595-president-panuelo-appeals-to-prime-minister-sogavare-to-respectfully-reject-give-deepest-consideration-to-longer-range-consequences-from-solomon-islands-proposed-security-agreement-with-the-people-s-republic-of-china?Itemid=177)

25 Prianka Srinivasan (2022). Tonga PM says security pact between China and Solomons will be raised at June Forum meeting. ABC Radio Australia Pacific Beat. April 20, 2022, <https://www.abc.net.au/radio-australia/programs/pacificbeat/pm-sovaleni-to-raise-china-solomon-islands-security-pact-at-pif/13847382>

Minister Nanaia Mahuta who argued that ‘we need to discuss these issues as a part of the Pacific Islands Forum.’<sup>26</sup>

In response to these concerns, Solomon Islands foreign minister Jeremiah Manele was dispatched to Suva to meet with Fijian Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama and Pacific Islands Forum Secretary General Henry Puna to discuss the security agreement and quell concerns about its regional implications.<sup>27</sup> This does not appear to have had the desired effect. Both New Zealand and Tonga have upheld their call that the security agreement to be on the agenda of the PIF annual leaders meeting in mid-2022. This will be an opportunity to test the fortitude and resilience of the regional security architecture. The challenge posed by the security agreement further strains the PIF, already under duress as a consequence of the withdrawal (which was put on later hold until the end of June 2022) of the five Micronesian member states in 2021.

## **The China-Pacific Island Countries Common Development Vision**

The China-Pacific Island Countries Common Development Vision was met with similar strategic anxiety. The draft communiqué was written prior to the second China-Pacific Islands Countries Foreign Ministers Meeting on 30 May 2022 and circulated amongst China’s regional partners with the intention it be adopted at the meeting. The communiqué revealed the ambitious scope and trajectory of Beijing’s strategic intent in the Pacific including a desire to shape the regional order through economic, trade and security arrangements and provided a list of priorities and strategies for doing so. A number of the initiatives outlined reflect existing bilateral cooperation arrangements and built building on announcements made at the first China-Pacific foreign ministers meeting in October 2021. However, this was the first time China had provided a comprehensive roadmap

26 Radio New Zealand (2022). Solomon Islands-China security deal needs scrutiny – Mahuta. April 21, 2022, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/465630/solomon-islands-china-security-deal-needs-scrutiny-mahuta>.

27 Eddie Osifelo (2022). Manele to explain security treaty to regional leaders. *The Island Sun*. May 5, 2022, <https://theislandsun.com.sb/manele-to-explain-security-treaty-to-regional-leaders/>.

for how it intended to deepen its engagement with the Pacific. It also revealed Beijing's diplomatic limitations in the Pacific.

The Communique and accompanying Action Plan are revealing for a number of reasons. First, it comprehensively aligns economic cooperation with security cooperation. This creates a dilemma for Pacific countries seeking economic deals with China – or for those already in-debted to China – as they seek to recover from the economic fall-out of the pandemic. It proposes substantial trade and investment initiatives, including a China-Pacific Islands Free Trade Area. On security, it lends weight to China's claim that it is a “security stakeholder” in the Pacific. It outlines the provision of intermediate and high-level police training for Pacific police forces through both bilateral and, importantly, multilateral, arrangements. The Communique also seeks to elevate law enforcement cooperation to ministerial levels through holding the inaugural China-Pacific Islands Ministerial Dialogue on Law Enforcement Capacity and Police Cooperation this year. Of significant national security concern for Pacific countries are the proposed agreements on cooperation on data network governance, cyber security, and smart customs systems. Given China's expertise at mass surveillance, this raises fears about the collection of biodata and surveillance of those living and travelling in the Pacific. It also includes an invitation to Pacific countries to participate in the Fengyun meteorological satellite system. Fengyun satellites collect and provide strategic weather reconnaissance data for civilian and military purposes – including maritime surveillance.

Second, it revealed that China is seeking to create competing security architecture and mechanisms in the Pacific through the proposed policing, security and data communication cooperation provisions which could potentially cut across and undermine the existing regional security architecture – from existing crisis management mechanisms such as the Pacific Islands Forum Biketawa Declaration (2000) to maritime surveillance mechanisms including the newly announced Quad initiated Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness initiative.

Third, it shows an evolution in how China engages with the Pacific shifting from Beijing's preferred bilateral mode of engagement in the Pacific – to multilateralism – in order to advance the development of the comprehensive strategic partnership between China and Pacific countries (those that recognise China). This reflects increased confidence on Beijing's part in its relationships with Pacific countries. The communique's action plan states China will appoint a Special Envoy for Pacific Island

Countries Affairs to advance the comprehensive strategic partnership between China and the Pacific (China has comprehensive strategic partnerships with a number of Pacific countries); and the aligning of the Belt and Road Initiative with the Pacific Islands Forum's 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. Moreover, it commits China to establishing tripartite cooperation arrangements in Pacific countries with third countries and international organisations in order to facilitate development cooperation. This would also allow China to shape development conversations, access, and funding. Notably, it also includes training for Pacific junior diplomats.

Fourth, following China's response to the Tongan eruption and tsunami earlier this year, it cements China's ambitions to become a humanitarian responder and a key stakeholder in disaster responses in the Pacific. The Communique refers to 2021 China-Pacific foreign ministers meeting announcements to establish China-Pacific Islands Disaster Management Cooperation Mechanism and disaster prevention and relief cooperation centre and the Pacific Reserve of Emergency Supplies (in Guangdong) and significantly it refers to establishing a sub-reserve in Pacific countries. This raises questions about what form and scope the repositioning of supplies would look like.

Fifth, the communique seeks to give greater form to China's strategic interests in and access to the Pacific's maritime domain. This includes hosting the China-Pacific Islands Countries Maritime Cooperation High-Level Forum (which was flagged last year), deepening maritime cooperation with Pacific countries through the Island Research Centre of the Ministry of Natural Resources in Fujian, and increasing China's access to fisheries in the context of economic investment and infrastructure development. For example, China has majority fishing rights in Kiribati and when Minister Wang visits Kiribati this week it is widely expected that a series of fisheries deals will be signed. It was rumoured in 2021 that China influenced the lifting of the Phoenix Islands Protected Area opening it up for commercial fishing. The benefits are also strategic reflecting how Chinese fisheries investments are part of a broader strategy to build strategic presence in the Pacific. The Phoenix Islands Group include Kanton Island, the northernmost island in the Phoenix Group. Kanton Island, lying roughly 3000 kilometres southwest of Hawai'i, is strategically valuable and China has offered to rebuild the WWII vintage runway and causeway. The Blue Pacific is increasingly the site of strategic competition and the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness initiative aims

to counter illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in the Pacific which is dominated by Chinese fishing fleets.

In response to the communique, on May 20 the President of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), David Panuelo, wrote to Pacific leaders (including the New Zealand and Australian prime ministers) calling for the “pre-determined joint communique” to be rejected because he feared it could spark a new “Cold War” between China and the West and draw the Pacific into Beijing’s orbit. However, despite the fissures within the Pacific Islands Forum, concerns about the scope and intent of the communique, particularly with respect to maritime resources and data security, may galvanise regional solidarity and reveal the limits of strategic competition in the Pacific.

As the security agreement between Solomon Islands and China and China’s proposed Common Development Vision illustrate, strategic competition between the U.S., its regional allies and partners, and China has intensified in the Pacific. This is likely to continue to intensify and Pacific states will increasingly need to balance, manage and negotiate the competing interests of their partners.

## **The Pacific’s Strategic Importance**

The Pacific has significant strategic and economic value. The 22 states and territories of the Pacific<sup>28</sup> span the world’s largest ocean - the islands equate to approximately 2 percent – or 560,000 km - of the region’s total area of 26 million km and are more accurately described as ‘large ocean states.’ The Pacific has considerable maritime real estate; collectively, Pacific states and territories, along with New Zealand and Australia, are custodians of 30% of global EEZs (20% if New Zealand and Australia are excluded). For Australia and New Zealand, it lies across some of their most important sea and airlines of communication. In the north, the US territory of Guam is considered the ‘tip of the spear’ of US military projection into Asia. In the south, the Pacific Ocean is the maritime gateway into the Southern Ocean and Antarctica. Moreover, the region is traversed by critical sea and airlines of communication, such as the Trans-Pacific

28 These are the independent states of Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu; the New Zealand realm territories of Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau; the US freely associated states of Palau, the Republic of Marshall Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia, and the territories of Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands; and the French territories of New Caledonia, French Polynesia and Wallis and Futuna.

maritime trade route between North America and Asia, and submarine telecommunications cables, including the Southern Cross Cable Network, the Japan-US Cable Network, and the Trans-Pacific Submarine Cable Systems.

As then Samoan Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi stated in 2018, 'by the sheer fact of our geography, such as trends associated with shifts in the centers of global power, this places the Pacific at the center of contemporary global geopolitics.'<sup>29</sup> This, however, has frequently led to a dominant strategic narrative that is binary, zero-sum, and which places greater focus on major powers' geostrategic interests without adequate recognition for the Pacific's security complexities, priorities and agendas.<sup>30</sup> This has, in turn, resulted in 'competing strategic imaginaries'<sup>31</sup> in which the security priorities and perspectives of partners have been privileged over that of Pacific states. This has challenged Pacific states to seek to balance the region's development, security and economic priorities with the competing geopolitical pressures. As Dame Meg Taylor, then Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), noted in 2017:

"the geopolitical and development context of the Pacific has shifted and the region faces a range of external and internal factors that are acting to reshape it, including increasing plurality of regional actors, shifts in global power, and unmet development challenges."<sup>32</sup>

As a result of strategic competition in the Pacific, a broad consensus has emerged amongst Pacific states. It is driven by two demands: first, that partners cooperate rather than compete; and secondly, that Pacific interests and priorities shape and drive the regional security agenda. For example, the importance of cooperation was reinforced when the Pacific

29 'Forum Leaders arrive', *Samoa Observer*, September 2, 2017, <https://www.samoaoobserver.ws/category/samoa/26476>.

30 Anna Powles, Joanne Wallis & Tess Newton Cain (2018). 'Chinese whispers and Pacific agency,' *The Interpreter*, Sydney: The Lowy Institute, October 22, <https://www.loyyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/chinese-whispers-and-pacific-agency>.

31 The term 'competing strategic imaginaries' is borrowed from Evelyn Goh's lecture 'Competing strategic imaginaries in Asia' given at the Australian National University, Canberra, July 21, 2021.

32 Dame Meg Taylor (2017). Secretary General Dame Meg Taylor's Opening Remarks to the 2017 Pacific Update. University of the South Pacific, June 20, <https://www.forumsec.org/secretary-general-dame-meg-taylors-opening-remarks-to-the-2017-pacific-update/>.

Islands Forum and its partners established the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19 (PHP-C) in response to the pandemic in early 2020. Taylor stated:

“If ever there was a time where the region and its partners needed to work together in strong solidarity to overcome a direct and immediate threat to the lives of our people across our Blue Pacific region — it is now”.<sup>33</sup>

Similarly, Panuelo, in response to the Solomon Islands-China security agreement, lamented the regional schism created by the ‘China choice’ asking ‘wouldn’t it be terrific if they [U.S. and China] could see that the troubles of our times, such as climate change, require all of them working in concert instead of against each other?’<sup>34</sup>

The consensus on strategic competition does not reflect a homogenous regional security viewpoint but there is agreement that competing security agendas could potentially weaken Pacific regionalism and undermine the pursuit of Pacific identified priorities and concerns. Following the leaking of the Solomon Islands-China security agreement, the Pacific Elders Voice Group, comprising of prominent regional leaders retired from public office, released a statement affirming that ‘the security and future of the Pacific must be determined primarily by Pacific Island countries and not by external powers competing over strategic interests in our region’ and raising concerns that strategic competition was undermining action on climate change as ‘the primary security threat to the Pacific.’<sup>35</sup>

At the national level, the consensus is not surprisingly less consistent. Voting patterns at the United Nations (UN) for example, reflect distinct

33 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (2020). ‘Pacific Islands Forum Foreign Ministers to Consider Regional Response to COVID-19 Pandemic,’ Suva: April 4, 2020. Accessed <https://www.forumsec.org/pacific-islands-forum-foreign-ministers-to-consider-regional-response-to-covid-19-pandemic/>.

34 David Panuelo (2022). President Panuelo Appeals to Prime Minister Sogavare to Respectfully Reject & Give Deepest Consideration to Longer-range Consequences from Solomon Islands’ Proposed Security Agreement with the People’s Republic of China. March 31, 2022, <https://gov.fm/index.php/component/content/article/35-pio-articles/news-and-updates/595-president-panuelo-appeals-to-prime-minister-sogavare-to-respectfully-reject-give-deepest-consideration-to-longer-range-consequences-from-solomon-islands-proposed-security-agreement-with-the-people-s-republic-of-china?Itemid=177>.

35 Statement by the Pacific Elders Voice Group, April 29, 2022. The Group was established in 2021 and comprises of prominent regional leaders: Hilda Heine (former president of the Marshall Islands), Thomas Remengesau (former president of Palau), Anote Tong (former

foreign policy behaviors and choices. In 2019 Kiribati, which switched recognition from Taiwan to China that year, was the only Pacific country that signed the Cuban statement delivered at the UN Human Rights Council in defense of China's Xinjiang policy. Not surprisingly, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, and Palau (all of whom recognize Taiwan) joined with the German statement condemning China's Xinjiang policies in 2020. In 2020 Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands joined 52 countries at the 44<sup>th</sup> UN Human Rights Council in support of China's national security laws in Hong Kong. In response, the Solomon Times wrote, "it is concerning that Solomon Islands allows itself to be used by China to leverage the Council to promote its views on Human Rights"<sup>36</sup> and noted that other Pacific democracies Fiji and Samoa had not signed on. Palau and the Marshall Islands joined 21 countries opposing the legislation.<sup>37</sup> At the 47th UN Human Rights Council in 2021, the Marshall Islands, Nauru and Palau signed onto the Canada-led joint statement expressing concern over human rights abuses in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong. Papua New Guinea, Tonga, and Solomon Islands joined 65 countries supporting China's policies. International condemnation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in early 2022 revealed consensus across the Pacific. On February 26, the PIF Secretary-General, Henry Puna, released a statement condemning the invasion.<sup>38</sup>

Outside of the UN, the foreign policy behavior of Pacific states on key issues are similarly revealing. Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea were the only two Pacific states to endorse China's position on the South China Sea in 2016. Vanuatu's then Prime Minister Charlot Salwai publicly stated that his government had not received any financial incentives from China

president of Kiribati), Enele Sopoaga (former prime minister of Tuvalu), Dame Meg Taylor (former secretary-general of the Pacific Islands Forum), Robert Underwood (former member of US Congress and president of the University of Guam, Kaliopate Tavola (ambassador and former foreign minister of Fiji), and Konai Helu Thaman (former professor, University of the South Pacific).

36 Samson Sade (2021). Solomon Islands Voted Against its Own Values. Solomon Times. May 14, 2021, <https://www.solomontimes.com/news/solomon-islands-voted-against-its-own-values/10833>.

37 Julian Braithwaite (2020). UN Human Rights Council 44: Cross-regional statement on Hong Kong and Xinjiang, cross-regional joint statement on behalf of 27 countries, June 30, 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/un-human-rights-council-44-cross-regional-statement-on-hong-kong-and-xinjiang>.

38 Henry Puna (2022). REMARKS: Pacific Islands Forum Secretary General Puna-Statement on Ukraine. Pacific Islands Forum. February 26, 2022, <https://www.forumsec.org/2022/02/28/remarks-pacific-islands-forum-secretary-general-puna-statement-on-ukraine/>.

in exchange for Vanuatu's diplomatic support. Papua New Guinea's then Prime Minister Peter O'Neill expressed his country's respect for China's position during a state visit to China and committed to Papua New Guinea being part of what was then termed the 'Maritime Silk Road' trade route system.<sup>39</sup> Fiji moved quickly to deny it supported China's position on the South China Sea after China's foreign ministry released a statement to the contrary following a meeting in Beijing between Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Fijian Foreign Minister Ratu Inoke Kubuabola.<sup>40</sup>

The variation in voting patterns and foreign policy behaviors of Pacific states reflect their individual pursuit of strategic autonomy in accordance with their interests and values. The variation of responses and strategies at the national level reflects the Pacific agency and the primacy of domestic politics.

Where consensus in the Pacific lies is with respect to the imperative that Pacific interests and priorities shape and drive the regional security agenda and the long-standing frustration that Pacific voices have been ignored and overlooked. As Taylor stated:

“Despite the fact that we are stewards of one of the greatest strategic regions in the world, a region that is currently of great interest, it is surprising that we are often left out of conversations about geostrategic matters concerning the Pacific.”<sup>41</sup>

The current debate about strategic competition in the Pacific has frequently failed to consider alternative visions of security, specifically Pacific visions of security. Instead, the debate has focussed on narrow understandings of security as material power and seeking to shape the regional security narrative to reflect growing anxiety about Chinese influence in

39 RNZ Pacific (2016). PNG respects China position on South China Sea. July 10, 2016, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/308349/png-respects-china-position-on-south-china-sea>.

40 RNZ Pacific (2016). Fiji quick to deny supposed South China Sea support. April 15, 2016, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/301556/fiji-quick-to-deny-supposed-south-china-sea-support>.

41 Dame Meg Taylor, Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum. Comments made at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Shangri-La Dialogue, 18th Asia Security Summit: Special Session 2: Strategic Interests and Competition in the South Pacific, Singapore: June 1, 2019.

the Pacific.<sup>42</sup> As a result, the region's power and diplomatic agency<sup>43</sup> has frequently been misunderstood, overlooked or side-lined. This has been compounded by the reframing of the Pacific within the broader Indo-Pacific strategic framing. As Christelle Pratt, then deputy secretary-general of the Pacific Islands Forum argued:

“For our region, these similar yet different frames appear both complementary and competing, but what matters to this region is our own collective ambition to define our place. The Blue Pacific cannot and will not become an aside in this new Indo-Pacific frame.”<sup>44</sup>

The concern that the principles and priorities of the Blue Pacific will be marginalized was echoed by Malielegaoi, who argued that ‘for the Pacific there is a real risk of privileging Indo over the Pacific.’<sup>45</sup> Taylor, in turn, argued that the Pacific Islands has rarely featured in the discussions except from a perspective of vulnerability to China's influence and therefore part of the Indo-Pacific that needs to be ‘secured’ by and for external partners.<sup>46</sup> She reflected deeper concerns that there had been little effort to engage the Pacific in dialogue about where the region ‘fits’ within the wider Indo-Pacific. Taylor challenged Forum members to consider how the Pacific maintains its solidarity and strengthens its own strategic autonomy in the context of the Indo-Pacific and how it ensures regional

42 Anna Powles, Joanne Wallis and Tess Newton-Cain. ‘Chinese whispers and Pacific agency,’ *The Lowy Interpreter*, October 22, 2018, <https://www.loyyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/chinese-whispers-and-pacific-agency>.

43 Greg Fry (2019). *Framing the Islands. Power and Diplomatic Agency in Pacific Regionalism*. Canberra: ANU Press, October 2019. <http://doi.org/10.22459/FI.2019>.

44 Christelle Pratt, “Strengthening the U.S.–Pacific Islands Partnership” (opening remarks to the CSIS U.S.–Pacific Dialogue, Nadi, March 4, 2019), <https://www.forumsec.org/opening-remarks-to-the-center-for-strategic-international-studies-us-pacific-dialogue-strengthening-the-us-pacific-islands-partnership-by-deputy-secretary-general-cristelle-pratt>.

45 Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, prime minister of Samoa, ‘Pacific Perspectives on the new geostrategic landscape,’ address at the Lowy Institute, Sydney, August 30, 2018.

46 Dame Meg Taylor (2018). Address to the State of the Pacific conference. Canberra: ANU. Accessed <https://www.forumsec.org/keynote-address-by-secretary-general-meg-taylor-to-the-2018-state-of-the-pacific-conference/>.

priorities are neither undermined nor appropriated by the narratives of ‘others not of our region?’<sup>47</sup>

Malielegaoi also voiced frustration with the region’s partners that ‘there has been a reluctance to engage in open discussions on the issue and to share information to assist us in decision making.’<sup>48</sup> Pratt further outlined the implications of this, stating:

“Pacific Island countries and the U.S. have different approaches to this new phase of great power competition. The US National Security Strategy portrays Pacific Island Countries as “fragile states”....[I]t states that the U.S. will work with Australia and New Zealand to “shore up” these fragile Pacific Island Countries. This narrative continues to paint the picture of a region that is willing to stand by and allow its future to be shaped and directed by others. I would like to encourage you to move away from this narrative.”<sup>49</sup>

Pacific leaders have long contested – and rejected - the view held that they do not fully comprehend the geopolitical costs and consequences. According to Malielegaoi:

“There is a ‘patronising’ nuance in believing that Pacific nations did not know what they were doing or were incapable of reaping the benefits of close relations with countries that are and will be in the region for some time to come. In cases where emerging partners have engaged with Pacific countries without conditionality, the relationships are perceived to be associated with corruption or unprecedented environmental degradation. One has the tendency to be bemused by the fact

47 Dame Meg Taylor (2018). Address to the State of the Pacific conference. Canberra: ANU. Accessed <https://www.forumsec.org/keynote-address-by-secretary-general-meg-taylor-to-the-2018-state-of-the-pacific-conference/>.

48 Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, prime minister of Samoa, ‘Pacific Perspectives on the new geostrategic landscape,’ address at the Lowy Institute, Sydney, August 30, 2018.

49 Christelle Pratt, “Strengthening the U.S.–Pacific Islands Partnership” (opening remarks to the CSIS U.S.-Pacific Dialogue, Nadi, March 4, 2019), <https://www.forumsec.org/opening-remarks-to-the-center-for-strategic-international-studies-us-pacific-dialogue-strengthening-the-us-pacific-islands-partnership-by-deputy-secretary-general-cristelle-pratt>.

that the reaction is an attempt to hide what we see as strategic neglect.”<sup>50</sup>

Samoa’s then deputy prime minister and current prime minister, Fiame Naomi Mata’afa, expanded further stating that ‘we are being cautioned, we are being warned, we are being told perhaps we are not fully nuanced on the intentions of the relationship with China.’<sup>51</sup> Efforts by the Pacific’s partners to counter Chinese influence in the region have failed to recognize that Pacific perspectives on China are far more nuanced and diverse than is acknowledged and attempts to influence the Pacific have been challenged. Malielegaoi stated that ‘island nations wouldn’t line up with Australia and the United States against China, declaring ‘their enemies are not our enemies’<sup>52</sup> and Taylor has stated unequivocally

“I reject the terms of the dilemma which presents the Pacific with a choice between a China alternative and our traditional partners. Unfortunately, this framing remains the dominant narrative in the public debate about our region in the context of today’s geostrategic competition.”<sup>53</sup>

China represents opportunity as well as a challenge to the region. Then Papua New Guinean Prime Minister Peter O’Neill argued ‘it is healthy that there are competing sources of finance for infrastructure projects and the ‘competition between China, Australia and the United States leading to funds being made available to the Pacific is in the best interest of our countries.’<sup>54</sup> Taylor suggested that ‘if there is one word that might resonate amongst all Forum members when it comes to China, that word is access.

50 Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, prime minister of Samoa, ‘Pacific Perspectives on the new geostrategic landscape,’ address at the Lowy Institute, Sydney, August 30, 2018.

51 *Samoa Observer* (2019) “Australia’s attitude to China “patronising and unfair” – Fiame,” July 16, 2019. Accessed <https://www.samoobserver.ws/category/article/43598>.

52 *The Australian*, August 15, 2019.

53 Dame Meg Taylor (2019). “The China Alternative: Changing Regional Order in the Pacific Islands” . Keynote address. University of the South Pacific, Port Vila, Vanuatu, February 8, 2018, <https://www.forumsec.org/keynote-address-by-dame-meg-taylor-secretary-general-the-china-alternative-changing-regional-order-in-the-pacific-islands/>.

54 Peter O’Neill (2018). “Prime Minister gives upbeat take on Papua New Guinea’s economy,” *Business Advantage PNG*, August 7, 2018, <https://www.businessadvantagepng.com/prime-minister-gives-upbeat-take-on-papua-new-guineas-economy/>.

Access to markets, technology, financing, and infrastructure. Access to a viable future.<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, as Taylor stated:

“Forum members view China’s increased actions in the region as a positive development, one that offers greater options for financing and development opportunities – both directly in partnership with China, and indirectly through the increased competition in our region.”<sup>56</sup>

In response to competing strategic narratives, some Pacific states have adopted a practice of strategic ambivalence, viewing geopolitical tensions as ‘outside’ issues. As Teburoro Tito, the permanent representative of Kiribati to the United Nations (UN), asserted, “Security to me is an outside concept, created by people from outside our shores. Security for me is drought within the island; the problem is people from outside [who] come to our islands and turn our oceans and islands into battlegrounds.”<sup>57</sup> Other states have engaged in hedging practices enabling them to not overtly choose sides albeit not necessarily reflecting a well-calculated or cogently designed ‘strategy.’<sup>58</sup> Even in those cases where sides appear to have been chosen, such as when Kiribati switched diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China in 2019,<sup>59</sup> a decision based on the ‘economics of survival’<sup>60</sup> Pacific states continue to broadly hedge their relationships. Consequently,

55 Dame Meg Taylor (2019). “The China Alternative: Changing Regional Order in the Pacific Islands”. Keynote address. University of the South Pacific, Port Vila, Vanuatu, February 8, 2018, <https://www.forumsec.org/keynote-address-by-dame-meg-taylor-secretary-general-the-china-alternative-changing-regional-order-in-the-pacific-islands/>

56 *ibid.*

57 Teburoro Tito (2021). “Island Security and the Blue Economy,” at the ‘Ocean Nations: An Indo-Pacific Islands Dialogue’ hosted by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the Sasakawa Peace Foundation. 20 September 2021. Available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uozTXIXuVmw>.

58 Cheng-Chwee Kuik (2021). ‘Getting hedging right: a small state perspective.’ *China International Strategy Review*, (3), pp.300-315.

59 Kiribati first recognised China from 1980 to 2003 then switched recognition to Taiwan from 2003 to 2019.

60 Tito (2021).

Pacific states have become accustomed to exercising a high level of strategic – and geopolitical – agency.

## A Pacific Security Agenda

The Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) has led work in defining the regional security agenda and redefining how the region articulates and responds to security challenges. It has sought to achieve this by adopting three security frameworks: the Framework of Pacific Regionalism (2014); the Blue Pacific (2017) narrative; and the Boe Declaration on Regional Security (2018). The Framework of Pacific Regionalism identified security as a principle objective for regionalism and endorsed a *Pacific Vision* calling for a region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion, and prosperity and underpinned by four objectives: sustainable development, economic growth, strengthened systems, and security for all.<sup>61</sup>

In 2017 Forum Leaders endorsed the Blue Pacific identity as a new narrative for Pacific regionalism, demonstrating strategic autonomy, and serving as the core driver of collective action to advance the Framework's Pacific Vision. The Blue Pacific echoed Tongan philosopher Epeli Hau'ofa's call to reject notions of smallness, disconnect and fragility arguing that Pacific Islanders were “connected rather than separated by the sea” and formed an “oceanic community.”<sup>62</sup> As Samoan Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sa'ilele Malielegaoi explained:

“the Blue Pacific identity...represents our recognition that as a region, we are large, connected and strategically important. The Blue Pacific speaks to the collective potential of our shared stewardship of the Pacific Ocean.”<sup>63</sup>

The Blue Pacific seeks to re-capture the collective potential of the region's shared stewardship of the Pacific Ocean based on an explicit recognition of its shared “ocean identity,” “ocean geography”, and “ocean re-

61 'Framework for Pacific Regionalism' (2014). Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat: Suva.

62 E. Hau'ofa, V. Naidu & E. Waddell (1993) (eds.), *A New Oceania: Rediscovering our Sea of Islands*, Suva: University of the South Pacific.

63 Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, Prime Minister of Samoa, 'Pacific Perspectives on the new geostrategic landscape,' address at the Lowy Institute, Sydney, August 30, 2018.

sources”. The Blue Pacific merges both issues and identity-based agendas, specifically the preservation of the ocean and its resources, the promotion of oceans governance and the implementation of Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Policy with the statement that Pacific peoples are responsible for the collective stewardship for the Pacific Ocean, an explicit recognition of a shared ocean identity. The Blue Pacific’s relevance lies in the fact that it is perhaps one of the strongest articulations of Pacific regionalism at a critical point when regionalism is increasingly under threat. As then secretary general of the PIF, Dame Meg Taylor stated, “while we are the subject of the geopolitical maneuvering and strategies of others, the Blue Pacific collective remains focused on charting our own destiny.”<sup>64</sup>

The third framework, the Boe Declaration on Regional Security (2018), represents a cohesive voice on security, seeking to reclaim the terms in which security is framed in the Pacific (and by whom) by acknowledging both traditional and non-traditional security imperatives. The Declaration cites climate change as the ‘single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific’ and identifies four cross-cutting non-traditional security issues - human security (including humanitarian assistance and disaster relief), environmental and resource security, transnational crime, and cyber security - as critical to Pacific countries and communities.<sup>65</sup>

The Boe Declaration acknowledged the tension between a ‘dynamic geopolitical environment’ and an ‘increasingly complex regional security environment driven by multifaceted security challenges’ by advancing an ‘expanded concept of security’ to address both traditional and non-traditional security issues.<sup>66</sup> The Boe Declaration references US-China competition by acknowledging the Pacific is ‘an increasingly complex regional security environment driven by multifaceted security challenges, and a dynamic geopolitical environment leading to an increasingly crowded and complex region.’<sup>67</sup> To that end, the Declaration reaffirms both the ‘Blue Pacific’ identity ‘to strengthen and enhance our capacity to pursue our

64 ‘Bid to avoid Pacific climate stoush’, *The Australian*, July 26, 2019, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/politics/bid-to-avoid-pacific-climate-stoush/news-story/fbcbe5870c-0a665de31ba3fc2b1ba>

65 Pacific Islands Forum (2018). Boe Declaration on Regional Security.

66 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (2018) ‘Boe Declaration on Regional Security’, [www.forumsec.org/2018/09/05/boedeclaration-on-regional-security/](http://www.forumsec.org/2018/09/05/boedeclaration-on-regional-security/)

67 Boe Declaration on Regional Security (2018).

collective security interests'; and the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of Forum members and the 'sovereign right of every Member to conduct its national affairs free of external interference and coercion.'

The Boe Declaration's expanded concept of security demonstrates that 'meaning and practices of security'<sup>68</sup> in the Pacific lie at the nexus of development and security. The Boe Declaration Action Plan (2019) further advances the Pacific consensus imperative to drive a Pacific security agenda underpinned by Pacific perspectives on security as well as the centrality of the Pacific Islands Forum. The Action Plan cites "the need for strengthened collective and cohesive action to effectively manage the regional security environment in a proactive manner."<sup>69</sup> The Action Plan identifies a number of outputs to achieve this including: managing the regional security environment through the strengthening of the existing regional security architecture, specifically the creation of a regional security coordination mechanism; strengthening dialogue and information sharing between Forum Members to 'enable the development of regional positions to respond to the current geopolitical context and regional security challenges'; and strengthening engagement with international partners in the region, to 'promote our regional security interests and ensure alignment of security cooperation with the Boe Declaration.

These frameworks, as well as other key PIF declarations, such as the 1997 Aitutaki Declaration on Regional Security Cooperation which provides principles governing security cooperation in the region; the 2000 Biketawa Declaration which sets the framework for regional crisis management and conflict resolution initiatives; and 2002 Nasonini Declaration on Regional Security which recognises the need for immediate and sustained regional action in response to the current regional security environment, reflect a nascent strategic community of practice. This is demonstrated by the invoking of the Biketawa Declaration to provide a coordinated regional crisis management response, for example, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (2003-2017), the Pacific Regional Assistance to Nauru (2004-2009), the New Zealand-led intervention in response to

68 Evelyn Goh (2021). 'Competing strategic imaginaries in Asia'. Australian National University, Canberra, July 21, 2021.

69 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (2019). Updated Brief on Boe Declaration Action Plan (2019), Accessed <http://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Updated-Brief-on-Boe-Declaration-Action-Plan-1.pdf>.

the Nuku'alofa riots in Tonga (2006), the parliamentary election observation mission to Nauru (2019), and the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19 (2020-).

The ability of the Pacific's strategic community of practice to navigate and manage strategic competition is less clear. Arguably, strengthening existing approaches to collective security by building on existing declarations and extant strategic mechanisms, and enshrining collective security principles and praxis, would benefit the Pacific and strengthen regionalism. This chapter has outlined the existing collective security arrangements in the Pacific from the Biketawa to the Boe declarations. However, the security agreement between Solomon Islands and China suggests that the current collective security arrangements may not adequately deter challenges to the regional order.

The principles and praxis of a strengthened collective security approach could include the following measures: stipulating that PIF member states with security concerns invoke 'good offices' under the Biketawa Declaration to discuss collective solutions prior to seeking the assistance of external security partners; ensuring transparency of security agreements between PIF member states and external partners by depositing agreements at the PIF; and establishing a monitoring and oversight mechanism within the PIF Secretariat to review all security agreements which PIF member states are signatory to as well as reviewing security assistance arrangements. In conclusion, Pacific states have demonstrated extraordinary success at collective action in the areas of climate change and oceans governance. Strengthening current approaches to collective security by enshrining principles and praxis in response to challenges to the existing regional architecture would draw on these successes and build on the existing strategic community of practice in the Pacific.