

# Strategic Competition —&— Security Cooperation in the Blue Pacific



Edited by Deon Canyon  
Foreword by Alfred Oehlers



# Strategic Competition & Security Cooperation in the Blue Pacific

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Deon Canyon

*with a Foreword by Alfred Oehlers*



Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies

## **Strategic Competition & Security Cooperation in the Blue Pacific**

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*The views expressed in these chapters are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, the U.S. Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.*

# Strategic Competition & Security Cooperation in the Blue Pacific

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## **Foreword by Dr. Alfred Oehlers**

Good ideas, it is often said, possess an uncanny timelessness. Those found in this book are no exception. Conceived at possibly one of the most tumultuous times in the history of the Pacific, the themes addressed nonetheless carry an enduring resonance, addressing matters that both trouble, but also, inspire. Though the incessant drumbeat of headline-grabbing developments may distract, there remains much to reward the reader with an eye to deeper fundamentals and trajectories shaping the future of the region.

This catalog of troubles is well known, and as the contributors to this volume ably remind us, comprise a daunting spectrum. Pressing challenges associated with Covid-related health and economic crises demand immediate attention, alongside risks to sovereignty and security from transnational criminal syndicates and other malign actors. Meanwhile, persistent threats such as those posed by climate change and the insecurities in food and water occasioned, hover menacingly over the very future viability of states. The unity of the region - once widely celebrated and apparently assured - in more recent times has frayed. And finally, the broader geopolitical backdrop has shifted dramatically, with still uncertain implications for interrelationships among the region, its identity, and very soul.

But yet, as disturbing as this catalog might appear, there is hope. Seemingly inspired and catalyzed by the magnitude of the challenge posed, the region has rallied at several pivotal junctures. In the depths of the pandemic, a Pacific Humanitarian Pathway was created. Economic adversity was courageously weathered, and as transitions now occur out of Covid lockdowns, vital discussions are occurring not only about recovery, but the future shape of economic configurations nationally and regionally. The region's global leadership and voice on climate change have been burnished further. Deeply divisive issues centered on the organizational symbol of unity in the region - the Pacific Islands Forum - were reconciled the Pacific Way, wholly by Pacific leaders themselves. The entreaties of greater powers in the complex geopolitical milieu now encountered were handled confidently, deftly and politely by Pacific leaders, with a sharp reminder the region shall be engaged only on its terms, in its ways, and with its interests foremost. And almost encapsulating this admirable journey

towards a future defined by the Pacific itself, came the release of the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent* this year.

Far from telling a tale of woe, our present juncture speaks to a future of opportunity and potential. For what appears to be emerging are the contours of a fresh departure point for development in the region at an elevation and trajectory qualitatively higher than in the past. A departure point that holds promise of a more resilient and bolder economic integration. One that reflects and captures a more profound unity that can only come from a healing of that so nearly lost. And one that is born of a greater clarity and certainty of identity and purpose, that can illuminate a path forward for the region, but also, undergird principled conversations with the wider world.

The realization of such a tantalizing potential, of course, is not the job of the authors in this present volume. They have done their job commendably, offering penetrating analysis, insight and suggestions. Instead, that job will fall to us, as beneficiaries of these labors, who now must harness these ideas to developments fast unfolding giving shape to that future to come.

Our task is urgent. We are poised at a unique and critical moment. Pacific leaders have thrown down the challenge by cogently and emphatically articulating a unified vision for a resilient region enjoying peace, harmony, security, social inclusion and prosperity, for all Pacific peoples to lead free, healthy and productive lives. There can be none other more powerful affirmation of our shared commitment to such universal values than success in the accomplishment of that vision. Our time to act in support of these aspirations, is now.

Honolulu,

August 2022.

## Author Biographies

**Ethan Allen**, PhD, joined DKI APCSS in August, 2019. His work focuses on topics such as: (1) reciprocity among science, technology, and the myriad aspects of human security; (2) Oceania; (3) water, climate, and environmental security; and (4) learning and cognitive sciences. Previously, he led science education programs at Pacific Resources for Education and Learning, including a five-year project that engaged residents of U.S.-affiliated Pacific islands in building their drinking water security. Dr. Allen earned his doctorate (systems and integrative biology) from the University of Oregon, and did postdoctoral neuroscience research there and at the University of Texas at Austin. Outside of his formal work, for the past seven years, Dr. Allen hosted a weekly live-streamed Internet TV show, *Likable Science*.



**Mr. Joelson Maodina Anere**, BA, is the eldest son of the late Dr David L. Anere, PhD, and the late Elizabeth nee-Kila Anere, and nephew of the late Fulbright Dr Ray Anere, PhD. His parents served Milne Bay Province, Central Province and represented the nation overseas in sports and as diplomats. Mr. Joelson Anere holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree with a major in International Relations and Diplomacy. He was the 2005 winner of the Mineral Resource Development Corporation academic excellence award in International Relations and Diplomacy at Divine Word University and has written papers for several academic journals abroad.



**Rouben Azizian**, PhD, joined Massey University's Centre for Defence and Security Studies in December 2015 and served as its Director until December 2021. His major areas of expertise are Asia-Pacific security environment and architecture, diplomacy and conflict resolution, security sector governance and Russia's foreign relations. He is also an Honorary Professor of the New Zealand Defence Force Command and Staff College and Editor-in-Chief of National Security Journal. Previously he taught at DKI APCSS (2002-2015) and at the University of Auckland

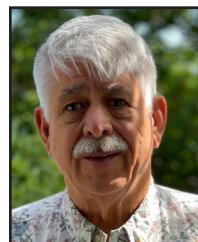


(1994-2001). Prior to becoming a full-time academic, Dr. Azizian had an extensive career in the Soviet and later Russian Foreign Service, which included assignments in Nepal (1972-1978) as Attaché and Third Secretary; Sri Lanka (1980-1985) as Second and First Secretary; and New Zealand (1991-1994) as Counsellor and Deputy Chief of Mission.

**Deon Canyon**, PhD DBA MPH FACTM, joined DKI APCSS in 2016 after working at the University of Hawaii, Curtin University and James Cook University on leadership, management, environmental health, and disaster management. He currently focuses on crisis management, security in Oceania, and gray-zone wargaming and has over 200 publications on a broader array of security topics. As a tertiary educator since 1996, Dr. Canyon enjoys thought-provoking discussions and critical, cross-disciplinary analysis of complex issues that improve understanding, management, control and prevention of crisis-laden situations. His trans-national security wargames involve 10-110 people and require abductive reasoning and fast-paced decision-making in geopolitically-charged, crisis-laden environments. A Hawai'i resident since 2011, Dr. Canyon speaks Melanesian languages and was raised and educated in Papua New Guinea, South Africa, UK, US, Israel and Australia.



**J. Scott Hauger**, PhD, is founder of Climate and Environmental Security, LLC, which he established in June 2021 to provide a vehicle for collaborative research and consulting upon his retirement from DKI APCSS. Current projects include consulting as senior advisor to the USINDOPACOM Climate Change Impacts Program and research into the security impacts of Mongolian dust storms in collaboration with the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Northwest Institute for Eco-Environment Resources. Dr. Hauger has a 45-year career as a researcher, teacher, program manager, and entrepreneur in areas related to science, technology and policy. For the last 15 years, his work has centered on issues of climate change and environmental security.



**Richard Herr**, PhD, is the academic director for the Faculty of Law's Parliamentary Law, Practice and Procedure course at the University of Tasmania since his appointment in January 1973 including Head of Department. He co-founded the Australasian Study of Parliament Group (ASPG) 1979, drafted the treaty that established the South Pacific Applied Geo-Science Commission as an autonomous agency in 1985, and drafted the first national candidates' manual for Fiji's return to democracy in the 2014 general election. Dr. Herr was adjunct professor of Governance and Ethics, Fiji National University (2009-2016), Hon. Director and adjunct professorial fellow at the Centre for International and Regional Affairs, University of Fiji (2010-2015); visiting scholar, French University of the Pacific, Noumea, New Caledonia (1997); and professional associate, Pacific Islands Development Program, East-West Center (1984).



**Henry Ivarature**, PhD, is from Papua New Guinea and is the Pacific Fellow at the Australia Pacific Security College in Australia. His 1994 PhD from Victoria University of Wellington focused on health and human security issues in Tonga. As a senior research fellow with the PNG National Research Institute, He taught at the University of the South Pacific Centre in Tonga. Later, he served in the PNG Department of Prime Minister and was PNG's Senior Official to APEC. After 2006, Henry was the Regional Governance Adviser for six years at the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat in Fiji. Following this, Dr. Ivarature worked with the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance and on institutional strengthening at the Pacific Institute of Leadership and Governance.



**Meg Keen**, PhD, is the Pacific Islands Program Director at the Lowy Institute. She has also held the positions of inaugural Director of the Australia Pacific Security College at the Australian National University (ANU) and senior fellow with the Department of Pacific Affairs, ANU. Her research focuses on regional security policy, human and environmental security, and resilience in the Pacific islands. She has worked across the Pacific islands' region with governments, NGOs, and regional agen-



cies. Prior to returning to the ANU in 2015, Meg was a senior analyst on Pacific island geopolitics at the Office of National Assessments (now Office of National Intelligence) and a senior policy adviser, including with the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI).

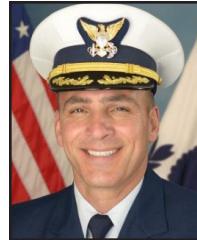
**Sebastian Kevany**, PhD, joined DKI APCSS in January 2021. Dr. Kevany's areas of expertise include epidemics, pandemics, health security, health diplomacy, health as foreign policy, international relations, and military global public health interventions. Within these realms, he has gained extensive experience in monitoring and evaluation; cost-effectiveness analysis; diplomacy; national and international security; and the use of public health and epidemic control programs as a means of preventing or resolving international conflict. Dr. Kevany has also gained extensive fieldwork experience via 100+ missions to the Middle East and Northern Africa, the South Pacific, and sub-Saharan Africa. His in-country experience has taken place in partnership with the United Nations, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and the World Health Organization.



**Amb. Christian Lechervy**, PhD, is currently France Ambassador to Myanmar and previously Advisor for Strategic Affairs and Asia to the French President, and former Deputy Director of the Policy Planning Staff for the French Foreign Office. He was also France Ambassador to Turkmenistan (2006-2009), Deputy Director of the South-East Asia section for the Foreign Office (2002-2006), Diplomatic advisor on International Affairs for the Minister of Defense, Sir Alain Richard (1997-2002) and Chief Clerk of the Asia-Pacific section at the Delegation for Strategic Affairs for the Department of Defense (1992-1996).



**Captain Michael Long**, US Coast Guard, joined DKI APCSS as a Military Professor in July 2021. He was commander of Sector Honolulu where he led Coast Guard missions throughout the Hawaiian Islands and American Samoa. Captain Long's other operational assignments include deputy commander of Sector Miami, Senior Defense Official / defense attache at the US Embassy to Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, Response Department Head and Search and Rescue Mission Coordinator at Sector Puget Sound, Port Operations at Marine Safety Office New Orleans, and Assistant Operations Officer at the Gulf Strike Team.



**Captain Kim McCann**, US Navy, joined DKI APCSS in March 2019 as a Military Professor. A native of Lubbock, Texas, Captain McCann graduated in 1998 with a Juris Doctor and Master of Business Administration from Texas Tech University and School of Law and is a member of the Texas Bar. She was commissioned in 1999 and shortly thereafter completed the Basic Lawyer Class at Naval Justice School. In 2017, she earned a Master of Laws in National Security Law (with distinction) from Georgetown University Law Center.



**Alfred Oehlers**, PhD, is a specialist in the political economy of economic growth and development, with reference to the countries of the Indo-Pacific region. His teaching has ranged widely during his career, spanning courses as diverse as international business, economics, politics, public policy, international relations, Asian studies, history, and other social sciences. He has taught at Massey University in New Zealand, Macquarie University, the University of Sydney in Australia, and the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Helsinki, Finland.



**Anna Powles**, PhD, is a Senior Lecturer at the Centre for Defence and Security Studies at Massey University, New Zealand. Her research and publications focus on geopolitics, security and conflict in the Pacific Islands region; specifically, how state and non-state actors are shaping regional security, strategic competition and the intersection of geopolitics and local security dynamics. She is a non-resident Fellow at the National Bureau for Asian Research (2022-2026) and an associate scholar, MacMillan Brown Center for Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury. She was previously a visiting scholar at the East-West Center in 2019; and is a DKI APCSS alumni.



**Eric Shibuya**, PhD, is professor of Strategic Studies, Command and Staff College, Quantico, Virginia. He joined Marine Corps University in February 2007, serving as Security Studies Department Head from 2016-2019. He was previously at DKI APCSS from 2000-2006, where among other duties he served as Program Director for the Junior Executive Course (now known as the Indo-Pacific Orientation Course) and cofounded the Comprehensive Security Responses to Terrorism Course. Dr. Shibuya has traveled extensively through Asia and the Pacific, and also has been part of Transnational Security Education teams in Kenya and Kosovo. Dr. Shibuya holds degrees from the University of Hawaii, University of Oklahoma, and Colorado State University, and is a 1999 Fulbright Fellow at the Australian National University, Canberra.

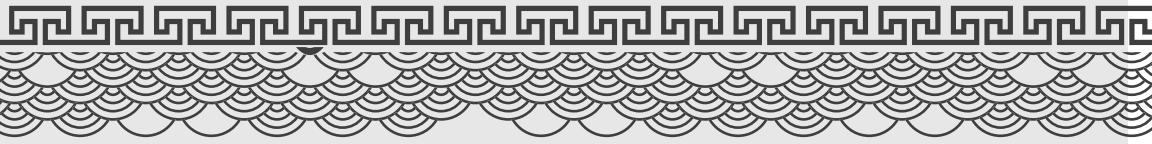


**Jose Sousa-Santos** is the Pacific Policy Fellow at the Australia Pacific Security College. His area of expertise and research is transnational crime, regional security, grey zone activities and non-state actors in the Pacific Islands and Southeast Asia. He has held roles as a subject matter expert with the US Indo Pacific Command and Special Operations Command Pacific executive education programs and as an analyst with the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste. He sits on the Global Initiative against Transnational Crime panel of experts. His PhD examines the nexus between transnational crime and climate security in the Pacific Islands.



**Wade Turvold**, US Navy, Captain (Ret.), joined the DKI APCSS for Security Studies in June 2019 after a 30-year career in the US Navy. He served as a Naval Flight Officer during his career and has extensive experience flying P-3C and P-8A aircraft. He commanded Patrol Squadron FOUR in Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, and Air Test and Evaluation Squadron ONE in Patuxent River, Maryland and has deployed throughout the world. He was privileged to serve in two educational assignments, as the U.S. Navy Senior Service Representative and Director National Security Studies at the U.S. Army War College, and the U.S. Navy Exchange Directing Staff at the Joint Services Command and Staff College, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom in Shrivenham, England.





Part 1:

## GEOPOLITICAL DYNAMICS IN OCEANIA



# Current Pressures on the Pacific Island Regional Security Architecture

*Richard Herr*

## Introduction

A great deal has changed since my chapter on security and the Pacific Island regional architecture in the 2015 volume *Regionalism, Security & Cooperation in Oceania*.<sup>1</sup> The main driver for the regional security transformation has been a new appreciation of China's increasing influence regionally and globally.<sup>2</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic, the increasing international consensus on the effects of climate change and Donald Trump's "America first" foreign policy have also impacted to some degree on regional security orientations and options over the past seven years. In addition to these broader influences, the region<sup>3</sup> itself has changed to take greater control of its security interests. As a result, the recently installed Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), Henry Puna, expressed concern

1 R.A. Herr, "Regional Security Architecture in the Pacific Islands Region: Rummaging through the Blueprints", Rouben Azizian and Carleton Cramer (ed) *Regionalism, Security & Cooperation in Oceania* (Honolulu: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2015), pp 17-31.

2 Zanny Minton Beddoes, "Rivalry between America and China will shape post-covid world", *The Economist*, November 8, 2021, <https://www.economist.com/the-world-ahead/2021/11/08/rivalry-between-america-and-china-will-shape-the-post-covid-world>

3 The Pacific Island region is defined by the ambit of the Pacific Community. The terms "Pacific Islands" and the abbreviated forms "Island" or "Islands" are capitalized to denote both the region and those polities within it as distinct from other Pacific islands such as Hawai'i or Okinawa, which are islands outside this region.

whether the region could manage the dangers arising from the new and “complex geo-political environment.”<sup>4</sup>

Responding to these challenges, the leadership and members of PIF have made three important claims on behalf of the region’s interests in these changing strategic circumstances. One is an objection to having Pacific Island concerns rolled into the broader security arrangements of the Indo-Pacific where they will inevitably be minimized.<sup>5</sup> A second is a plea for unity. Former PIF Secretary General, Dame Meg Taylor, expressed a fear that the regional architecture might buckle under the new international pressures. As she observed, “if we divide into our sub-regions and then get played off by geo-strategic interests, our own interests as a collective will be undermined.”<sup>6</sup> The third claim is for a collective stewardship of the “Blue Pacific,”<sup>7</sup> essentially leveraging their vast EEZs and related ocean entitlements to assert grounds for a larger global diplomatic presence.

This chapter assesses the prospects of the Pacific Island regional security architecture converting the Forum Island Countries (FIC) aspirations for coping with their new complex geo-political environment into security deliverables. This discussion is qualified by two important limitations. Even as this chapter is being drafted, the cohesion of the PIF remains very much in doubt. While the effects of the collapse of the PIF would be dramatic and quite possibly lead to substantial renovation of the region’s institutional architecture, the detritus from the current dispute is likely to take some time to clear away with no insignificant consequences.

Secondly, COVID-19 has had many consequences across the Pacific Island region. Most have been negative but some have been positive such

4 Pacific Islands Forum Secretary-General Henry Puna, ‘We will fight back, together, and win back, together’, Opening remarks to the Forum Economic Officials Meeting, July 6, 2021, <https://www.forumsec.org/2021/07/06/we-will-fight-back-together-and-win-back-together-sg-puna-to-forum-economic-officials-2021/>

5 Henry Ivarature, “Creating an inclusive Indo-Pacific”, Asia and the Pacific Policy Society Policy Forum, June 29, 2021, <https://www.policyforum.net/creating-an-inclusive-indo-pacific/>

6 Johnny Blades, ‘Outgoing Pacific Forum head warns about external influences’, Newshub, May 31, 2021, <https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/politics/2021/05/outgoing-pacific-forum-head-warns-about-external-influences.html>.

7 Grant Wyeth, “Paying Attention to the Blue Pacific”, *The Diplomat*, October 30, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/10/paying-attention-to-the-blue-pacific/>

as the development of the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway.<sup>8</sup> Arguably, one of the more politically destructive regional influences of the pandemic has been the year-long internecine struggle over the future of the PIF. Extra-regionally, meeting the manifold challenges of COVID have heightened suspicions of Chinese malign intentions to undermine the region's traditional Western friendships and the shared security interests based on these ties.<sup>9</sup> The economic and political consequences of COVID and the transitioning out of COVID emergency measures remain far from clear. COVID's impacts on the fragile economies of the region's microstates may serve to deepen some bilateral linkages. However, regional cooperation equally needs to be strengthened to hasten political stability and a return to pre-COVID economic levels.

## Regional Security Community and China

Increased suspicion of Chinese actions and motives has been the major change regarding regional security and the role of China in the Islands since Xi Jinping's accession to the PRC Presidency in 2013. Earlier cautious optimism amongst the region's traditional friends that the PRC might pursue an acceptably cooperative approach in its engagement with the Pacific Islands has largely evaporated. The Chinese tactics *inter alia* in the South China Sea, economic coercion against Australia, and the wolf warrior approach to diplomacy have heightened Western cynicism regarding Chinese ambitions more broadly. Within the Island region, these concerns have been echoed in criticisms of "roads to nowhere," overpriced buildings ill-suited to tropical conditions and "debt diplomacy."<sup>10</sup>

There is an agreed perception regionally that China's growing international assertiveness is having a destabilizing influence. However, the focus for, and cause of, the disruption is not agreed. The Island states have been hesitant to re-evaluate their relations with China in line with Western threat perceptions. Having come to accept China as a legitimate actor in the

<sup>8</sup> Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, "Pacific Islands Forum Foreign Ministers Agree to Establish a Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID -19", April, 8 2020, <https://www.forumsec.org/2020/04/08/pacific-islands-forum-foreign-ministers-agree-to-establish-a-pacific-humanitarian-pathway-on-covid-19/>

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Pryke and Richard McGregor, 'China's coronavirus aid to Pacific islands is part of geopolitical game', The Lowy Institute, April 23, 2020, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/china-coronavirus-aid-pacific-islands-part-geopolitical-game>.

<sup>10</sup> ABC Radio, "Federal Minister Concetta Fierravanti-Wells accuses China of funding 'roads that go nowhere' in Pacific", January 10, 2018, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-01-10/australia-hits-out-at-chinese-aid-to-pacific/9316752>

region, the Island countries have been unwilling to completely reverse their view of the PRC as quickly as their Western partners. This is not to say that the Island states accept Chinese interests as entirely benign. The debt diplomacy meme has effectively dented Chinese soft power, particularly at the village level, where traditional land tenure systems and subsistence agriculture loom large.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the meme has had less success amongst Island political and bureaucratic elites who are more inclined to focus on Chinese aid and the PRC's economic success. Significantly for the sentiment of belonging to a shared "security community,"<sup>12</sup> extra-regional perceptions of some level of military threat from China have not loomed large either in the village or amongst regional elites.

The prospect of being caught up as collateral damage in the strengthening strategic competition is recognized but not regarded uniformly as a negative. Former PIF Secretary General, Dame Meg Taylor, was inclined to argue that there could be a silver lining to the strategic jockeying. In her view, the attention the rivalry brought offered "greater options for financing and development . . . through the increased competition in our region."<sup>13</sup> Her comments echoed the old Cold War sentiments that being able to bargain for strategic access could be lucrative for meeting Island development aspirations. Her views have had some academic support on the grounds that the Island leadership have demonstrated a more sophisticated agency in leveraging the rivalry with China to the benefit of the regional states than is commonly recognized.<sup>14</sup>

There are several key differences between the regional risks in the current period of strategic rivalry and the Cold War of more than a generation ago. The Soviet Union had none of the advantages that the PRC

11 Richard Herr, *Chinese influence in the Pacific Islands: the yin and yang of Soft Power*, ASPI Special Report, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Canberra, Australia, 2019, pp. 1-44, <http://ecite.utas.edu.au/132796>

12 Karl Deutsch's 1957 security community concept has seemed particularly relevant to the PIF states given they have long had a sense of common belonging, where physical conflict amongst members is virtually unthinkable and where they are unlikely to allow their territory to become a threat to their neighbors.

13 Pacific Islands Forum Secretary-General Dame Meg Taylor, "The China alternative: changing regional order in the Pacific Islands", keynote address to University of the South Pacific, February 8, 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/>

14 Steven Ratuvu, "Pacific Island Agency in the Global Game of Competitive Geo-political Bidding", Australian Institute of International Affairs, June 6, 2019, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/pacific-island-agency-in-the-global-game-of-competitive-geo-political-bidding/>

currently enjoys for exploiting any miscalculation a regional state might make in “playing the China card.” The USSR had minimal trade, no real aid program, no significant cultural ties and no diplomatic presence. Playing the Soviet card during the Cold War was a one-sided, transparent bluff. The PRC is deeply ensconced in the region across a range of elites – administrative, economic, political and social. Beijing has a direct capacity to answer and countercriticism of its activities at the highest levels throughout the Pacific Island region.

To be fair, Dame Meg was not unmindful that playing China could be very damaging to the PIF states and their region. She warned that there would always be a price to be paid by the small states participating in an aid auction for access. “Are we going to owe them places for military bases? Are we going to owe them places for their influence and control of the Pacific Ocean?”<sup>15</sup> The problem with her analysis is that it implies an initial state of equality. The region’s traditional friends have a generally privileged strategic role in the region due to historical relations, territories in the region, proximity to the region, logistical assets and some military bases within or adjacent to the region. The consequences for Western security would be vastly different if China did secure a military base in the South Pacific compared with any upgrading of, for example, American or French facilities in the region.

### **Security without defense; bricks without straw**

With apologies to Exodus 5:11, a key challenge for the traditional friends of the Pacific Island states to build an acceptable and effective security architecture linking the region’s aspirations to external defense structures is tantamount to making bricks without straw. The basic ingredients for effective formal defense cooperation are largely absent in the Pacific Island region. Regional security as a concept has existed largely apart from defense policy within the region since decolonization. For a variety of reasons, the distinction was scarcely noticed until recently. Re-joining defense and security in the current complex geo-political environment could prove counterproductive. The PIF leadership is concerned that new defense

15 Johnny Blades, ‘Outgoing Pacific Forum head warns about external influences’, Newshub, May 31, 2021, <https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/politics/2021/05/outgoing-pacific-forum-head-warns-about-external-influences.html>

structures are likely to exacerbate strategic rivalry. To understand the PIF quandary, it is useful to look to the Caribbean for contrasts.

The main issue for defense cooperation with the Pacific Island states is the absence of a national defense infrastructure. Only three of the 14 members of the Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS) caucus at the UN have defense establishments.<sup>16</sup> Size is undoubtedly a factor. The two largest states, PNG (9 million) and Fiji (900,000), have noteworthy militaries. Of the rest, only Tonga (100,000) has a defense force which is explained, in part, by being the region's only monarchy with the king's authority over royal guards and the militia being included in the Constitution of 1875.<sup>17</sup>

That all but one of the PSIDS are microstates (populations under 3 million) has not been the only circumstance for the limited defense scaffolding to support a regional security architecture. Western colonial dominance across the Pacific Island region and the remoteness of the area from theatres of strategic rivalry contributed to the issue of defense ranking relatively low on the decolonization agenda. Moreover, based on experience elsewhere, Pacific colonial administrations tended to believe that creating defense forces in the absence of a specific need could prove to be a threat to democracy. Significantly, because decolonization was essentially benign, there were no wars of national liberation to create local militias that could morph later into national defense forces.

Not only did the colonial powers leave without creating self-defense infrastructure for most of the smaller Pacific states but also did not establish formal post-colonial defense obligations to protect their former territories. Rarely explicit, in practice, the defense of most of the newly independent states was underpinned by the UN's collective security mechanisms. While there are no mutual security treaties between any of the regional states, there are some other arrangements that have security implications. The US has compacts of free association with three former territories – the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) and Palau. New Zealand maintains a similar

<sup>16</sup> The use of PSIDS for these comparisons is mainly for the convenience of not complicating matters with the two French territories – French Polynesia and New Caledonia. Neither is in the UN but are currently in the PIF although their status under the 2005 PIF Treaty may be reviewed.

<sup>17</sup> Tonga's Constitution of 1875 with Amendments through 1988, Art 22, [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Tonga\\_1988.pdf](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Tonga_1988.pdf)

relationship with two – the Cook Islands and Niue. These arrangements create some non-reciprocal defense obligations, although it is not clear whether these are obligatory or whether the Island state could initiate defense protection. As revealed dramatically by the Australian intervention in the Solomon Islands during the November 2021 civil strife, Australia does have a bilateral security agreement with the Solomon Islands.<sup>18</sup> However, this agreement does not create mutual security obligations having been concluded primarily to provide insurance against post-RAMSI (Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands) instability.

The post-colonial defense infrastructure of the island microstates of the Caribbean region contrasts noticeably from that of the Pacific Island region. It helps to illustrate limitations on constructing a security relationship with the Pacific Island region that includes a strong defense component. The two regions comprise the largest concentrations of insular microstates in the world. The Caribbean region has 10 small island states ranging in size from just over 52 thousand (Saint Kitts and Nevis) to under 3 million (Jamaica). The Pacific Island region has 13 states with populations under 3 million ranging from just over 10,000 (Tuvalu) to about 900,000 (Fiji). For all the similarities, there are significant contextual differences between the two regions. The Pacific states are remote from major global population centers while the Caribbean states are virtually surrounded by nearby markets with hundreds of millions of potential customers. Moreover, the Pacific states are relatively remote from each other in contrast with the compactness of the members of the Caribbean region.

As given in Table 1.1 (page 24), six of the ten Caribbean states currently have military establishments. Two of these – Antigua and Barbuda and Saint Kitts and Nevis – have populations less than Tonga. Dominica, the second smallest of the regional states, had its own defense force until 1981. However, this was disbanded pending the creation of the Regional Security System (RSS), a 1982 mutual security pact for the defense of the eastern Caribbean. Three of the five founding members – Dominica, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines – did not have military forces when they signed an agreement to give mutual assistance on

<sup>18</sup> Agreement Between the Government of Australia and The Government of Solomon Islands Concerning the Basis for Deployment of Police, Armed Forces and Other Personnel to Solomon Islands, [http://www.austlii.edu.au/other/dfat/treaties/ATS/2018/14.html](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/dfat/treaties/ATS/2018/14.html)

request. The other two founding members – Antigua and Barbuda and Barbados – did have military forces. Saint Kitts and Nevis joined on independence the next year and Grenada, the only remaining state without a defense establishment, joined the mutual protection alliance in 1985.

**Table 1.1: National military establishments**

Country	Military	Population	Area (sq km)
Antigua and Barbuda	Royal Antigua and Barbuda Defense Force	96,286	442
The Bahamas	Royal Bahamas Defense Force	385,637	13,943
Barbados	Barbados Defense Force	286,641	430
Dominica	N/A	71,625	751
Jamaica	Jamaica Defense Force	2,934,847	10,991
Grenada	N/A	111,454	344
Saint Kitts and Nevis	Saint Kitts and Nevis Defense Force	52,441	261
Saint Lucia	N/A	181,889	539
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	N/A	110,211	389
Trinidad and Tobago	Trinidad and Tobago Defense Force	1,389,843	5,130

Thus, the small island states of the Caribbean have considerable agency for self-defense individually and/or cooperatively. Having a substantial defense establishment with intra-regional mutual defense ties gives the Caribbean island states an important edge in promoting their security agenda with the larger powers. Bilateral and multilateral military cooperation with extra-regional powers such as Canada, the UK and the US provide important avenues for defense communication. Significantly, their defense capacity also buys these states a seat in the Committee on Hemispheric Security of the Organization of American States.

If avenues for defense influence similar to those of the Caribbean island states existed in the Pacific Island region, they could potentially enhance PSIDS agency in navigating their security interests through the emerging complexity of the Indo-Pacific arrangements. As it is, the mechanisms available for the PSIDS to directly advance and protect their

regional defense interests are limited. The primary vehicle is the relatively recently formed South Pacific Defense Ministers' Meeting. This is comprised of representatives from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, New Zealand, France, Chile and Australia. The US and UK have been included as observers and Japan will be added in 2022. The only inclusive regional mechanism is the PIF's Regional Security Committee (FRSC). The FRSC serves as a clearinghouse for a range of specialist security agencies ranging from customs, police and political security concerns but is not a vehicle for defense cooperation either intra-regionally or externally.

Historically, but only desultorily, the ANZUS mutual defense pact has provided some general defense framework for the region.<sup>19</sup> The principal focus has been to deter military threats to the three allied states through the region rather than to the region generally. The treaty does not define the region as a defense theatre in the same way that the NATO Treaty identified the north Atlantic area. No Island state is a member or directly associated with ANZUS. Thus, the alliance has served more of a political role in the region by cultivating and supporting the sentiment amongst the Island states of belonging to a security community. This has meant that the ANZUS states have enabled regional development and security aspirations with the expectation that stronger regional ties with their neighbors will encourage the regional states to avoid actions that undermine the security of their neighbors or the defense objectives of the alliance.

The mutual obligations in this arrangement had not been especially challenging until the recent rising tensions regarding China. Australia and New Zealand carried the bilateral networking throughout most of the 70 years of the ANZUS alliance as well as much of the defense burden such as through the Pacific Patrol Boat scheme to strengthen regional resource protection capacity. The Pacific states have not pushed the boundaries of "adventurism" although flirtations with alleged Soviet surrogates, Cuba and Libya, ruffled some ANZUS feathers in the 1980s as did two short-lived and benign fisheries deals with the USSR. More seriously, during the period of the 'war on terror,' Western states took steps to deal with the security consequences of a perceived "misuse" of microstate sovereignty. The US reacted strongly to evidence that some states had facilitated or assisted terrorist bodies through passport sales, flags of convenience and/or

19 Richard Herr, Anthony Bergin and Nikolaos Skondrianos, "Sliding-door moments: ANZUS and the Blue Pacific", ASPI Special Report, November 2021, [https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/ad-aspi/2021-11/SR%2020178%20Sliding%20door%20moments\\_0.pdf?](https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/ad-aspi/2021-11/SR%2020178%20Sliding%20door%20moments_0.pdf?)

lax financial regulation that enabled significant amounts of money laundering<sup>20</sup>

The willingness of the Pacific states similarly to accept ANZUS today as a sympathetic regional defense interlocutor on their behalf in the contemporary international environment is problematic. While the PIF members are concerned that the network of security arrangements being developed through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue<sup>21</sup>, Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific project<sup>22</sup> and AUKUS<sup>23</sup> will minimize their security interests, these complex and largely opaque negotiations seem inaccessible and, probably worse, intended to inhibit their relations with the PRC. The quiet, almost subliminal, trust that has existed between the ANZUS states and the Pacific Island region for more than three decades is losing credibility. In part this is due to internal differences within the alliance on appropriate relations with China and how coordinated they need to be in sharing intelligence about the PRC.<sup>24</sup> Yet, if the Pacific Island states genuinely do not want to be the recipients of unwelcome Indo-Pacific decisions regarding defense arrangements impacting on their regional security aspirations, some ANZUS-based support seems the best option – if it is available.

Individually, the ANZUS partners have embarked in recent years on reconfigured programs to engage bilaterally more fully and effectively with the Pacific states to build the older security linkages. Australia has called its renewed emphasis “Step-up”, New Zealand has “Reset” its relations while the US has made a “Pacific Pledge.”<sup>25</sup> These initiatives serve mainly

20 See for example, Richard Herr and Donald Potter, “Nauru in the Arc of Instability: Too Many Degrees of Freedom?” in Dennis Rumley, Vivian Louis Forbes and Christopher Griffin (eds), *Australia and the Arc of Instability: The political and cultural dynamics of regional security*, Dordrecht, Springer, 2006.

21 Daniel Hurst and Justin McCurry, “Australia and Japan agree in principle to defense pact that will increase military ties”, *The Guardian*, November 17, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/nov/17/australia-and-japan-agree-in-principle-to-defence-pact-that-will-increase-military-ties>

22 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Towards free and open Indo-Pacific*, Japanese Government, November 2019, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000407643.pdf>

23 Ramesh Thakur, “Integrating AUKUS into the Indo-Pacific”, *The Strategist*, September 28, 2021. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/integrating-aukus-into-the-indo-pacific/>

24 “Mahuta’s Five Eyes comment about China unnecessarily created ‘drama’ - Foreign policy expert” 1News, New Zealand, April 21, 2021, <https://www.1news.co.nz/2021/04/20/mahutas-five-eyes-comment-about-china-unnecessarily-created-drama-foreign-policy-expert/>

25 DFAT, ‘Pacific Step-Up’, Australian Government, no date, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/pacific>; Winston Peters, “Shifting the dial”, eyes wide open, Pacific Reset’, speech at the Lowy Institute, Sydney, March 2, 2018, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/>

to add resources to support the human security emphasis of the 2018 Boe Declaration on Regional Security currently serves as the PIF island states definitive statement on their priorities.<sup>26</sup> It is hoped that these measures along similar initiatives by the UK, France and Japan will reinforce the regional security community sentiment as compatible and inclusive of the defense interests of the region’s “traditional friends.”

It is too soon to draw a definitive conclusion but AUKUS seems likely to be particularly problematic in papering over divergent security perceptions between the PIF states and the defense objectives of their closest Western partners. It has reinvigorated the region’s nuclear allergy both within the alliance and within the region. New Zealand has not participated in ANZUS Council meetings since the mid-1980s when it banned nuclear ship visits to its ports and the US suspended Wellington’s role in alliance policymaking. Prime Minister Jacinta Ardern immediately responded to the AUKUS announcement by reaffirming that New Zealand ports would not be open to Australian nuclear submarines.<sup>27</sup> Australian critics saw the move to nuclear submarines as undermining Australia’s claim to be part of the “Pacific family”.<sup>28</sup>

### The end of the regional unity?

While ANZUS and related Western defense interests are trying to develop an effective collective security architecture that does not alienate the Pacific Islands and their concerns, the PIF states are presently struggling to maintain their own coherence. The PIF states have routinely acknowledged the importance of unity in order to achieve their broader security objectives including the sweeping claims of the Blue Pacific agenda. However, from mid-2020, events conspired to drive a wedge may well have ended the PIF as a unified association. At the time of writing this

winston-peters-new-zealand-pacific; Office of the Spokesperson, ‘US engagement in the Pacific Islands: 2020 Pacific Pledge’, fact sheet, State Department, US Government, October 1, 2020. <https://2017-2021.state.gov/u-s-engagement-in-the-pacific-islands-2020-pacific-pledge/index.html>.

26 Pacific Islands Forum, ‘Boe Declaration on Regional Security’, September 5, 2018, <https://www.forumsec.org/2018/09/05/boe-declaration-on-regional-security/>.

27 Ben McKay, “Australian nuclear subs not welcome in NZ”, *Canberra Times*, September 16, 2021, <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/7432973/australian-nuclear-subs-not-welcome-in-nz/>

28 Greg Fry, “AUKUS undermines Australia’s ‘Pacific family’”, Devpolicy Blog, Australian National University, 4 November 2021, <https://devpolicy.org/aukus-undermines-australias-pacific-family-20211104/>

chapter, the denouement of these events has yet to be reached. However, whatever the outcome, the likelihood of a return to pre-2020 harmony appears remote. Thus, it is worthwhile to consider how the region reached a juncture where apparently there are issues more important than maintaining regional unity despite protestations to the contrary. What might be the consequences of the apparent fragility of the regional security architecture?

There is an argument that this PIF crisis could be laid at the door of the COVID-19 pandemic. Certainly, the pandemic has had an outsized influence on the personal cohesiveness of the PIF leadership but it was probably only the final straw or, perhaps, straws. The PIF's 2020 Leaders' Meeting was scheduled to decide on a successor to Secretary General Dame Meg Taylor. COVID-closed borders and related travel restrictions prevented the scheduled in-person PIF Leaders' Meeting from being hosted by Vanuatu. Despite some support for deferring a decision on Dame Meg's replacement, the Micronesian members managed to get support for a virtual Special Leaders' Retreat early in 2021 to make the appointment. Unlike the usual face-to-face Leaders' Retreats where difficulties are hammered out privately and without bureaucratic support, the February 2021 virtual meeting did not work on a consensus but rather by a majority vote.

There are several factors that contributed to the messy and unsatisfactory up-and-down vote for the new Secretary General. The five Micronesian members of PIF decided as early as September 2019 to nominate a consensus Micronesian candidate and, later in the same month, wrote a letter to inform the Chair of the PIF of this formally.<sup>29</sup> In addition to nominating Gerald Zackios, the Marshall Islands' ambassador to the US, the letter asserted strongly that it was Micronesia's sub-regional turn for the position. Following the cancelation of the August 2020 PIF Leaders' Meeting where the SG position was to have been decided, a special meeting of the Micronesian Presidents' Summit in Palau's capital, Koror, in October 2020 reaffirmed their support for Zackios. However, beyond pressing his candidature, the meeting made an ominous threat. The Presidents agreed that "in the 'Pacific Way', a 'Gentlemen's Agreement' is

29 Nic Maclellan, "Who Will Lead the Pacific Islands Forum?", *The Diplomat*, August 20, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/08/who-will-lead-the-pacific-islands-forum/>

an agreement, and if this agreement is not honored, then the Presidents would see no benefit to remaining in the PIF.”<sup>30</sup>

The sub-regional démarche was felt to be necessary as contrary to their collective expectation, three other candidates were nominated by other PIF members. The highest-profile candidate was former Cook Islands’ Prime Minister Henry Puna who resigned in September 2020 after a decade in power to stand for the PIF office.<sup>31</sup> Dr. Jimmie Rodgers, from the Solomon Islands, was well-credentialled having been a successful Director General of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC). The Tongan economist Amelia Siamomua was nominated from her post in London as head of the Commonwealth Secretariat’s Gender section. Finally, Fiji advanced former foreign minister Ratu Inoke Kubuabola. It was a surprise move in that Fiji was due to host the 2021 PIF Leaders’ Meeting and so had a great deal riding on a successful summit. Indeed, Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama indicated that he wanted to invite the incoming US President, Joe Biden to attend.<sup>32</sup>

The Micronesian states expected to force the issue by insisting on a virtual Leaders’ Meeting where a vote would be taken if a consensus could not be reached. It was a brave but misconceived gamble as the Micronesians only had their five votes (FSM, Kiribati, Marshalls, Nauru and Palau), amongst the 18 expected for the 3 February 2021 meeting. After a failed attempt to find a consensus, Fiji pulled its candidate Ratu Inoke. This left three candidates on the ballot as the appointment went to a vote for the 17 participating PIF members. New Caledonia was unavailable.

Although the vote was secret, a credible Samoan media account reported that the first round gave Henry Puna 7 votes, Gerald Zackios 6, Jimmie Rodgers 3 and Amelia Siamomua 1.<sup>33</sup> It appears that the

30 Office of the President and Cabinet “Micronesian Presidents’ Summit Special Leaders’ Meeting 2020” press release, Marshall Islands, October 5, 2020, <https://rmigov.info/?p=1001>

31 “Cook Islands Prime Minister Henry Puna to stand down in September”, nzherald.co.nz, June 17, 2020, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/world/cook-islands-prime-minister-henry-puna-to-stand-down-in-september/YTA3BGCP2J17FDBT47OZ4JGCGM/>

32 Talebula Kate, “Bainimarama congratulates Biden; extends invitation to visit Fiji”, *The Fiji Times*, November 9, 2020, <https://www.fijitimes.com/bainimarama-congratulates-biden-extends-invitation-to-visit-fiji/>

33 “Forum Leaders Elect Former Prime Minister of Cook Islands as Secretary General of PIFS”, *Samoa Global News*, February 4, 2021, <https://samoaglobalnews.com/forum-leaders-elect-former-prime-minister-of-cook-islands-as-secretary-general-of-pifs/>

Polynesian members accounted for at least four of Puna's seven votes (Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Niue, and Samoa), with Tonga voting for its own candidate, Siamomua. It has been claimed privately that Fiji threw its support to Puna because Ratu Inoke had a close political relationship with Puna bringing in five of Puna's initial seven votes. The Micronesian bloc was solid delivering Zackios five of his six votes. It is accepted that Rodgers garnered the three available Melanesian votes (PNG, Solomons and Vanuatu).

Apportioning the other three votes in the first round are subject to conjecture. Private inquiries and public accusations suggest that Australia and New Zealand favored Puna and Tuvalu sided with the Zackios.<sup>34</sup> This distribution of first round votes gives a second-round vote that fits neatly with claims about the 4 votes that were re-allocated in the second round. Tonga and Vanuatu voted for Puna to give him the nine votes to win a narrow majority, while the other two Melanesian votes went to make up Zackios final total of eight. At the time of writing, the consequences of the vote are still being played out. The immediate reactions were dramatic but not quite as uniform as they looked in the rear-view mirror. Although the last Micronesian state to join the Forum, Palau was the first to declare it would carry out its threat to withdraw from the PIF. It added, for emphasis, that it would also close its mission to Suva.<sup>35</sup> David Kabua, President of the Marshall Islands, recognizing the gravity of the unfolding events, initially indicated that he wanted to review the RMI's engagement with the PIF rather than pulling out entirely.<sup>36</sup> Yet, less than a week after the ill-fated vote, the five Micronesian leaders issued a joint communique, stating that they were starting formal procedures to leave the Forum.<sup>37</sup>

Recognizing the depth of Micronesian anger, the rest of the PIF leadership set up a Political Dialogue mechanism in March 2021 to

<sup>34</sup> Stephen Howes and Sadhana Sen, "Who blew up the Forum?", Devpolicy Blog, Australian National University March 5, 2021, <https://devpolicy.org/who-blew-up-the-forum-20210305>

<sup>35</sup> Damien Cave, "Pacific Islands' Most Important Megaphone Falls Into Discord", *The New York Times*, February 5, 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-02-09/five-micronesian-nations-set-to-quit-pacific-islands-forum/13133600>

<sup>36</sup> Stephen Dziedzic, "Pacific Islands Forum future on the line at critical meeting of Micronesian leaders", ABC News, February 8, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/05/world/asia/pacific-islands-forum.html>

<sup>37</sup> "Micronesian nations to quit Pacific's peak regional body, leaving it in disarray", Pacific Beat, ABC News, February 9, 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-02-09/five-micronesian-nations-set-to-quit-pacific-islands-forum/13133600>

engage with the Micronesian leaders to pursue reconciliation. The Forum entrusted the dialogue to a leadership group known as the “Troika Plus.” The Troika is a leadership arrangement within the PIF composed of both the past and present PIF Secretaries General and the current PIF Chair. The “Plus” element involved the addition of leaders from Tuvalu, Nauru, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and Samoa. The following month, at the end of April 2021, Fiji’s Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama, as Chair of the PIF, offered an unreserved apology to the Micronesian PIF member states with the hope it might start to heal the rift.<sup>38</sup> However, nothing was done to meet Micronesian demands that the vote be reversed. Due to COVID, the early August 2021 PIF’s annual Leaders’ Meeting was again held virtually. Nauru, a founding member of the PIF, was the only Micronesian state to attend which it did merely to express the group’s continuing unwillingness to remain in the PIF under the current conditions.<sup>39</sup> The PIF’s working party nevertheless was not disbanded and persists, it seems, with efforts to find a path to reconciliation

The Micronesian states immediately began carrying through with their threat to formally withdraw from the PIF. Palau was the first while Kiribati and Nauru had domestic processes that delayed their denunciations for some months. Nevertheless, the communique for the 20<sup>th</sup> Micronesian Presidents’ Summit (MPS) recorded in early September that all members have deposited “their letters of denunciation from the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat with the first withdrawal taking effect in February 2022.”<sup>40</sup> Just what these denunciations will achieve seems peculiarly uncertain. The February 2021 MPS Leaders Meeting communiqué asserted that all states would denounce the 2000 Agreement to Establishing the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.<sup>41</sup> At the time that was the only relevant treaty.

nesian-nations-set-to-quit-pacific-islands-forum/13133600

38 Government Information Office “Micronesia receives unreserved apology from Forum”, Press Release, Republic of Nauru, April 27, 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-02-09/five-micronesian-nations-set-to-quit-pacific-islands-forum/13133600>

39 “Micronesian leaders boycott Forum, stand firm on plan to leave bloc”, Asia Pacific Report, August 7, 2021. <https://asiapacificreport.nz/2021/08/07/micronesian-leaders-boycott-forum-stand-firm-on-plan-to-leave-bloc/>

40 “Naoero Communiqué”, 20th Micronesian Presidents’ Summit, 30th August to 2nd September 2021, Republic of Nauru, [http://naurugov.nr/media/149932/naoero\\_communique.pdf](http://naurugov.nr/media/149932/naoero_communique.pdf)

41 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Agreement Establishing the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. 2000, <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Agreement-Establishing-the-Pacific-Islands-Forum-Secretariat-2000.pdf>

However, on February 17, 2021, the Federated States of Micronesia's *note verbale*<sup>42</sup> denounced the 2005 Agreement Establishing the Pacific Islands Forum.<sup>43</sup> At the time, the 2005 treaty was not in force. Some weeks later, Fiji, the last state needed, brought this treaty into force by ratifying it. The August 2021 MPS communiqué strangely did not denounce the 2005 PIF Treaty that superseded the 2000 PIFS Treaty but continued to refer to the 2000 treaty.

The apparent confusion as to which treaty to denounce is only one of the peculiarities in the political confrontation between the Micronesian members and the rest of the PIF. As matters stand at the time of writing, the only clear resolution to the impasse appears to be for Henry Puna to surrender the office he won in the closely contested February 2021 virtual vote. In the unlikely event that this extreme concession was to be made, the scars within the PIF would not heal easily. The MPS leaders have indicated that they rated respect and collegial trust as more important than the Blue Pacific agenda or the objectives of the Boe Declaration. They even placed these above the privileged position they enjoyed with the PIF.

The MPS states have a significant force-multiplying influence within the PIF. The five presently constitute the majority in the influential eight-member smaller island states caucus within the PIF. This caucus has been an institutionally supported program unit since 2006. It was established specifically to target sustainable development in the smaller island states. With the help of this unit, the disaffected Micronesian states set most of the regional strategy for the smaller states, which has promoted their priorities on such issues as climate change, labor (mobility) and transportation. Whether the MPS as an autonomous agency could secure a similar level of international influence is problematic, especially if any aspect of the MPS agenda ran counter to the PIF agenda.

The question of institutional support has crossed the mind of the MPS leaders. Their 2021 Summit “acknowledged the importance of positioning the Micronesian subregion at the international level” and undertook work to formalize the legal status of the Micronesian Presidents’

42 Department of Foreign Affairs, *Note Verbale on the Denunciation of the Agreement Establishing the Pacific Islands Forum*, Federated States of Micronesia, [https://gov.fm/files/Note\\_Verbale\\_\\_Statement\\_of\\_Denunciation\\_February\\_17\\_2021.pdf](https://gov.fm/files/Note_Verbale__Statement_of_Denunciation_February_17_2021.pdf)

43 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Agreement Establishing the Pacific Islands Forum, 2005, <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Agreement-Establishing-the-Pacific-Islands-Forum-Secretariat-2005-1.pdf>

Summit supported by its own secretariat.<sup>44</sup> It was agreed that Nauru would serve as the headquarters for the interim MPS secretariat. Depending on the size of the proposed secretariat, financial support could be an issue. Apart from the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA), Pacific Island regional bodies depend heavily on non-Island sources of funding both for administrative and program activities. There is a hint that some in the MPS might be looking to the US to provide significant support.

Palau's President, Surangel Whipps Jr, appeared to argue for a stronger American accent in the PIF by including more US Pacific territories. Whipps sought to strengthen the Micronesia voice with the inclusion of Guam and the Northern Marianas, two US ethnically Micronesian territories, but he also suggested adding two Polynesian entities – American Samoa and the state of Hawaii.<sup>45</sup> Taking a swipe at Australia and New Zealand's influence in the PIF, Whipps argued that they had undermined the contribution the US could have made to the region. Had they supported Zackios, his “connections in Washington could have eased pathways for the (US) Pacific Deterrence Initiative and other funding to help the people of the whole region”<sup>46</sup> Whether Washington would want to contribute to the break-up of the PIF is questionable. However, should the MPS disaffiliate from the PIF, US strategic interests in this sub-regional grouping, the largest share of China's putative “second island chain,” would be a difficult prize to ignore.<sup>47</sup>

The ultimate outcome of the sub-regional tensions within the PIF will not be resolved even by February 2022, when the first of the denunciations are due to take effect. Assuming the denunciations are valid, it will take some months for all five to come into force and then sometime after that for the financial obligations and administrative engagements to be worked through. Nevertheless, most of the time available since the

44 “Naoero Communiqué”, 20th Micronesian Presidents’ Summit, 30th August to 2nd September 2021, Republic of Nauru, [http://naurugov.nr/media/149932/naoero\\_communique.pdf](http://naurugov.nr/media/149932/naoero_communique.pdf)

45 Johnny Blades, “Pacific Forum’s consensus failure lamented”, Radio New Zealand News, February 14, 2021, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/436302/pacific-forum-s-consensus-failure-lamented>

46 Bernadette Carreon and Ben Doherty, “Future of Pacific Islands Forum in doubt as Palau walks out”, *The Guardian*, February 5, 2021, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/436302/pacific-forum-s-consensus-failure-lamented>

47 A Erickson, J Wuthnow, ‘Barriers, springboards and benchmarks: China conceptualizes the Pacific “island chains”’, *The China Quarterly*, 2016, 225:1–22, doi:10.1017/S0305741016000011.

February 2021 MPS démarche has elapsed. Thus far, it does not appear that cooler counsel or diplomatic balm has successfully restored the pre-COVID regional balance. Whatever early 2022 brings, the Pacific Island regional security architecture will be bruised, if not broken. The capacity to agree on a regional approach to meeting the PIF's self-identified challenges of the new complex geo-political environment has been sidetracked and, quite possibly, significantly diverted.

## Concluding Thoughts

The challenges and opportunities of relations with China have dominated Pacific Island regional security and defense debates in the years since Xi Jinping became President of the PRC. The analysis of which perspective predominates has shifted as his leadership has become more assertive and Chinese military capacity more global. One of the more significant consequences for the Pacific Island region is the subtle appearance of a divide in perceptions of the distinctions regarding defense and security between the Island states and their traditional extra-regional security partners. The heightened defense concerns of regional partners like Australia, New Zealand and the US have elevated Island concerns for their security as strategic rivalry is seen as a threat. This alone would have put significant pressure on the region's security architecture. However, quite separately, the PIF states have thrown their own spanner into the works putting regional unity itself a risk.

The security-defense divide has always been a feature of the Pacific Island regional architecture, and indeed, arguably, it might have been a causal factor in the distinction. The Pacific Island experience with post-independence defense arrangements has been quite unlike that of the Caribbean island microstate region where national defense was part of the decolonization process. A significant reason for the muted role of defense in Pacific Island in the region's security architecture was a shared assumption that ANZUS (and related Western) defense policies were compatible with the Islands' security interests. During the Cold War, the ANZUS allies crafted a defense policy focused on containing the USSR that incorporated the Islands' human security priority on national development. The assumption that there is a basic compatibility of defense and security aims between Western and Island interests in the current era of strategic rivalry appears to be less easy to make today for two reasons. The PIF Island states are concerned that Western defense policies may adversely impact

their economic ties with China, an issue that did not arise in the case of the Soviet Union.

A second factor is the weakening of policy coherence within ANZUS from the mid-1980s New Zealand ban on nuclear ship visits which resulted in Washington's decision to end ANZUS Council meetings. The ANZUS alliance has the legacy of experience and intimacy with the regional states to serve as a sympathetic interlocutor on behalf of the Islands in the development of Indo-Pacific defense arrangements. However, the ANZUS alliance appears not to be entirely on the same page regarding relations with the PRC or the risks of China's influence in the region. The AUKUS agreement has added to the division within ANZUS states and apparently pushed the alliance member most closely aligned with Island security thinking further to the sidelines of regional defense policy. However, without something like a general ANZUS commitment ensuring Indo-Pacific defense policy respects the Islands' concerns, PIF fears about being marginalized appear apt to be realized.

These circumstances have put a premium on maintaining the unity of purpose and objective of the PIF states in the face of the current strategic challenges. The deep fracture that has emerged over the organizational leadership of the PIF legitimately calls into question the member states commitment to their expressed security aims as expressed in the Boe Declaration and the Blue Pacific agenda. If the collapse of the PIF is avoided, it is possible that regional unity will be recovered over time but perhaps not fully. On the other hand, if the PIF does bifurcate along subregional lines, the security consequences could be quite significant. Dame Meg's prediction that the division would be exploited for strategic advantage seems unavoidable. The Micronesian sub-region comprises key elements of the strategically important second island chain. The American defense investment in Palau, along with the existing facilities in Guam and the Northern Marianas, would have a significant influence on the defense and the security posture of the newly autonomous sub-regional association.

For all the potential missteps that endanger regional unity as the key element of regional security architecture, a final note of optimism is in order. An argument should be made that there is an underlying robustness to the regional architecture that will maintain its security interests even if the PIF collapses. Should the PIF be reduced back to a South Pacific membership, this would not necessarily undermine entirely collective support within the region for the human security objectives of the Boe Declaration. The Pacific Community is the oldest, most comprehensive

and best resourced of the Pacific Island regional organizations. In addition to including all the region's states and territories, Australia, France, New Zealand and the US are full members while the UK also maintains some connection. The SPC does not have the political mandate to create a security policy framework such as the Boe Declaration. Nevertheless, it has the technical mandate and the expertise to provide its key deliverables. Moreover, the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) also has a comprehensive regional membership to pursue the climate change agenda. The Forum Fisheries Agency and the Parties to the Nauru Agreement will continue to unite the Island states on sustainable marine resource protection. Thus, the region would be the poorer if the PIF does fracture but it would not be entirely bereft.

# Associations and Agency: US-Pacific Island Relations Since 2015

*Eric Y. Shibuya*

## Introduction

In 2015, I wrote the piece “Still Missing in the Rebalance.”<sup>1</sup> Among the arguments I made then were that many elements of the Obama Rebalance policy had prior antecedents from the George W. Bush Administration prior to the September 11 attacks. Secondly, while certainly a significant allocation of resources were focused on the Middle East, much of the resources in what was then known as the United States Pacific Command were still focused on the Indo-Pacific region. Finally and most importantly, perception dominated reality, and the prevailing notion, was that the US had been “distracted” from issues in the Indo-Pacific due to activities in the Middle East thereby allowing other actors, most notably China, to fill this perceived vacuum.

Six years later, these main arguments still hold up, but there have been at least three issues that require updating. While the first is more a matter of degree, the other two were not anticipated in 2015 and are fairly significant, if not unprecedented, changes. It is clear that all of these issues highlight the need for greater and more visible responses on the part of many countries, to include the United States. These three issues are (1) the continued rise of China and the trajectory of US-China Great Power Competition, (2) The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and (3) the fracturing of the Pacific Islands Forum. On this last event, what is clear

1 <https://apcss.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/C4-StillMissingInRebalance-Shibuya.pdf>

is that the security environment and the Compact relationship with the United States have illuminated clear differences for the North Pacific and South Pacific states. While the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) overall may be “missing in the rebalance,” circumstances are such that the US Compact States may be actively bringing themselves into the security architecture of US Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM).

## **China and US-China Competition**

The so-called “rise of China” has been an ongoing issue for decades now, and one which regional countries (not only the Pacific Island Countries) have been navigating. The articulation in the Trump Administration’s National Security Strategy that “Great Power Competition” had returned<sup>2</sup> was hardly news to most in the Indo-Pacific region, who had been living with this reality and many of whom had already exhibited their “hedging” strategies to avoid being forced into unpleasant choices.<sup>3</sup> In terms of the larger Indo-Pacific, 2017 saw the resurgence of the “Quad” arrangement between Australia, India, Japan and the United States (first established in 2007). Forming an “arc of democracy”<sup>4</sup> around China, the Quad arrangement, while understandable in the geopolitical context, continues the overall rhetoric of the Oceania region as a “hole in the donut.” After all, “arcs” generally arch over empty space.

US-China competition clearly was well on its way but visible tensions certainly increased after the election of Donald Trump in 2016. The associated shift in rhetoric (and behavior, though much of the tension was arguably over form more than substance in the majority) regarding US-China relations had larger reverberations for the world, and PICs were no different. Relations between the United States and the PICs have always ebbed and flowed. The Oceania region has never been a major priority for

2 *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, December 2017, p.27.

3 Evelyn Goh, *Meeting the China Challenge: The US in Southeast Asian Regional Security Strategies*, Policy Studies Monograph 16 (Washington DC: East-West Center, 2005). See also Goh’s excellent update in “Southeast Asian Strategies toward the Great Powers: Still Hedging after All These Years?” *The ASAN Forum* February 22, 2016, <https://theasanforum.org/southeast-asian-strategies-toward-the-great-powers-still-hedging-after-all-these-years/#2>

4 Richard Javad Heydarian, “Quad alliance forms ‘arc of democracy’ around China,” *Asia Times*, July 27, 2020, <https://asiatimes.com/2020/07/quad-alliance-forms-arc-of-democracy-around-china/>. The “arc of democracy” term was popularized by Japan’s then-Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, back in 2007, with the initial establishment of the Quad arrangement. Note also that this is a different relationship than the earlier “Quadrilateral” meetings between Australia, France, New Zealand, and the United States that worked to synchronize those nations’ activities in Oceania.

US relations, generally only an afterthought to other regional or global priorities. Descriptions of the PICs being “pawns” in the geopolitical game or understanding the region as “the hole in the donut”<sup>5</sup> have been common. The visible contrast to that of today’s China is clear, as Finin notes:

The Pacific’s political leadership has a clear understanding of China’s desire for strong bilateral relationships that will increase its influence. At the same time, official state visits like that of [Federated States of Micronesia’s] president provide a basis for comparison with Washington’s overall lack of high-level attention to the FAS, and the Pacific region more generally. Indeed, while on some rare occasions, Pacific Island leaders have had working meetings in the West Wing, there has never been a formal state visit to the White House for a Pacific Island leader or group of leaders. Over the last three decades, the US president has engaged with the Pacific Island leaders as a regional group on only four occasions, with each of these events taking place in Honolulu, Hawai‘i.<sup>6</sup>

While much of the criticism was valid, there were also efforts to shift this narrative during the Trump Administration. March 2019 saw visits to Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands by senior White House staff, including the senior director for Asian affairs and the director for Oceania and Indo-Pacific Security on the National Security Council. Adding to this was a working-level meeting convened on May 21, 2019 by President Trump with the Presidents of the Compact States: Hilda Heine (Republic of the Marshall Islands), David Panuelo (Federated States of Micronesia) and Tommy Remengesau (Republic of Palau). While the main focus for the meetings was the renegotiations of the terms of the Compacts of Free Association between the US and each of the three states, public state-

5 Robert Underwood, Keynote address to conference on Island State Security, Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, June 5, 2001, <http://www.pireport.org/articles/2001/06/14/congressman-robert-underwood>

6 Gerard A. Finin, “Associations Freely Chosen: New Geopolitics in the North Pacific,” in *The China Alternative: Changing Regional Order in the Pacific Islands* edited by Graeme Smith and Terence Wesley-Smith, Canberra: ANU Press 2021, p. 182.

ments prior to the meetings by Presidents Remengesau and Heine specifically noted China's growing influence in the region.<sup>7</sup>

Increasing concern and focus on Oceania by both China and the US is not limited to the respective governments. While there are long-standing institutions such as the East-West Center's Pacific Islands Development Report, the University of Hawai'i's Center for Pacific Island Studies, and the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, all located in Hawai'i, Finin also notes the development of new centers in the United States, alongside new research programs and conferences from larger think tanks.<sup>8</sup> On the China side, Paskal points to six Oceania-specific research centers established since 2012.<sup>9</sup>

The PICs are deeply tied to the military legacy of World War II, with places like Tarawa and Guadalcanal etched into the lore of the US military. The remnants of that conflict are still visible on or around many of the islands. While not a legacy they wish to repeat, international forces are encouraging greater military presence in the region and, perhaps, back on the islands themselves. First, there was a request from President Tommy Remengesau in 2019 for the US to build a military base in Palau.<sup>10</sup> Remengesau's successor, Surangel Whipps, Jr., has reinforced this invitation.<sup>11</sup> The Peleliu Port has long been a coveted location by the US Navy. (Even this is not a completely unprecedented offer, as in 2010 the Palau Senate approved a resolution asking then-President Toribiong to offer use of Angaur State Airfield as a replacement for the Futenma Airbase on Okinawa).<sup>12</sup>

Palau is not the only Compact nation to make a presidential-level request for the US to consider a larger and more persistent military

7 Finin, pp. 169-170.

8 Finin, p.169.

9 Cleo Paskal, "The Strategic Importance of the Pacific Islands," testimony to the Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, Central Asia, and Nonproliferation, October 20, 2021.

10 Gordon Lubold, "U.S. Military is Offered New Bases in the Pacific," *Wall Street Journal*, September 8, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-military-is-offered-new-bases-in-the-pacific-11599557401>. Bernadette Carreon, "Palau invites US military to build bases as China seeks regional clout," *Yahoo News*, September 4, 2020, <https://www.yahoo.com/now/palau-invites-us-military-build-012513813.html>

11 Richard S. Ehrlich, "Tiny Palau in not-so-pacific middle of US and China," *Asia Times*, May 8, 2021, <https://asiatimes.com/2021/05/tiny-palau-in-not-so-pacific-middle-of-us-and-china/>

12 Bernadette H. Carreon, "Palau Senate offers home to Okinawa Military Base," *Pacific Islands Report* April 28, 2010, <http://www.pireport.org/articles/2010/04/28/palau-senate-offers->

presence. Negotiations with the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) for a “more frequent and permanent US Armed Forces presence” came in July 2021.<sup>13</sup> While there are concerns over the details of the base in Micronesia, FSM President David Panuelo noted the special relationship in the Compact that obligates the US to defend FSM as if it were the United States.<sup>14</sup> The Compact obligation from the US is arguably its highest level of security commitment the US has with another nation: to defend it as the US would defend itself. Even NATO’s oft-cited Article 5 is a reactive commitment to consider an attack on one member an attack on all members. While this wording has been present since the Compact relationship began, domestic politics on both sides have generally kept a stronger push for large US military access on the Compact States (Kwajalein Atoll excepted) to a minimum. The fact that both Palau and FSM have come forward at this time asking for a larger military commitment is a testament to the changing geopolitical situation in the region.

To date, there has not been much public negotiation between the PICs and Beijing over Chinese military presence on the islands.<sup>15</sup> That said, the discussions in Palau and FSM can be contrasted with the Chinese agreement in 2018 to fund the development of Luganville Port in Vanuatu. The port is now the largest in the South Pacific and its depth would accommodate aircraft carrier size vessels. Both Beijing and Port Vila deny any discussions of a Chinese military presence in Vanuatu, but Australian national security sources have expressed concern over such overtures.<sup>16</sup> Other scholars argue that the voiced concerns over Chinese presence in

home-okinawa-military-base

13 Kevin Knodell, “Micronesian President Discusses Military Issues During Hawaii Visit,” *Honolulu Civil Beat*, July 28, 2021, <https://www.civilbeat.org/2021/07/micronesian-president-discusses-military-issues-during-hawaii-visit/>

14 Ashley Westerman, “The US is building a military base in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Micronesian residents have questions,” *The World*, August 24, 2021, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2021-08-24/us-building-military-base-middle-pacific-ocean-micronesian-residents-have>. The text itself reads, the United States has “the obligation to defend the Federated States of Micronesia and its people from attack or threats thereof *as the United States and its citizens are defended*” (emphasis added).

15 Arguably, the most significant overt Chinese military presence in Oceania was the satellite tracking station in Kiribati, established in 1997 but removed in 2003 when Kiribati switched recognition to Taiwan. Beijing and Kiribati restored relations in 2019 but as of October 2021 the tracking station has not been replaced.

16 David Wroe, “The great wharf from China, raising eyebrows across the Pacific,” *Sydney Morning Herald* April 11, 2018, <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/the-great-wharf-from-china-raising-eyebrows-across-the-pacific-20180411-p4z8yu.html>.

Oceania can be likened to the Cold War fears of Soviet incursion into the region in the 1980s, which proved more hyperbole than anything else.<sup>17</sup>

The contrast lies in the focus of concern and effort, with the Australian (and by extension, US) focus on potential military applications of national power, while the more long-standing and difficult problem may in fact be the economic influence that China will gain by the port. Unlike the Soviets, the economic engine that is China is proving a more difficult issue to navigate, with fears of “debt-trap diplomacy” proving a more likely (and possibly more dangerous) long-term threat to Western interests.<sup>18</sup>

## **Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

The COVID-19 pandemic created international impacts recalling parallels to the Great Influenza of 1919. (1919 resulted in 50 million deaths, about 2.1% of the world’s population). Early on in the pandemic’s spread, the island states remained relatively isolated from infection due to their distance and the quick closing of borders by political leaders.<sup>19</sup> While this protected these small populations from the virus early on, eventually cracks in the armor were revealed, and infections are continuing to rise. Also, these overarching closures resulted in severe economic hardship for the island states.<sup>20</sup> While there had been some concern that these small states would be forgotten in the mix to distribute vaccines, Australia and New Zealand (among others, to include work by the World Health Organization) have generally ensured the islands have not been missed. (The United States has

17 Jon Fraenkel, “China in the Pacific: where there’s smoke, there’s mirrors,” *East Asia Forum*, April 23, 2018, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2018/04/23/china-in-the-pacific-where-theres-smoke-theres-mirrors/>

18 Brahma Chellaney, “China’s debt-trap diplomacy,” *The Hill*, May 2, 2021, <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/551337-chinas-debt-trap-diplomacy>. The most often cited example is the 99-year lease obtained by China for parts of the Port of Hambantota in Sri Lanka. However, Deborah Brautigam and Meg Rithmire argue that the characterization of the situation in Sri Lanka has been misleading. See “The Chinese ‘Debt Trap’ is a Myth,” *The Atlantic*, February 6, 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2021/02/china-debt-trap-diplomacy/617953/>

19 Jonathan Pryke, “The Pacific went a year without COVID. Now, it’s all under threat,” *The Conversation*, April 29, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/the-pacific-went-a-year-without-covid-now-its-all-under-threat-158963>.

20 Roland Rajah and Alexander Dayant, “Avoiding a ‘Lost Decade’ in the Pacific,” *The Interpreter*, December 16, 2020, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/avoiding-lost-decade-pacific>

included the Compact States in its “Operation Warp Speed” program). The concern now has not been supply, but effective distribution.<sup>21</sup>

Secondly, while the ability to close off its borders with no small effectiveness kept infection rates down, the economic impacts have been significant. The near-universal stoppage of international movement made it impossible for states which may have lost travelers from one area to make up for it by gaining tourists from another. With the enormous revenues from tourism suspended through much of 2020, some estimate the recovery back to pre-COVID levels might take through 2028.<sup>22</sup> There are some PICs that do not rely as heavily on tourism. The FSM, for example, with much of its economy from fisheries and Compact payments, was able to buttress its economy with stimulus funds.<sup>23</sup> The impacts of the pandemic turned longtime discussions of an overreliance on a single sector such as tourism into a harsh reality.

## The Breakup of the Pacific Islands Forum

The island nations have long searched for a greater sense of regional identity, something that would allow for them to speak as a more unified voice in the international community. Early regional organizations were dominated by colonial powers and/or prohibited discussion of “political issues.” Even as those barriers have come down, the power of regional organizations to serve as amplifiers for island interests has been limited.<sup>24</sup> Attempts to draw a larger mental sense of an island community can be found in Epeli Hau’ofa’s classic essays, “Our Sea of Islands,” and “The Ocean in Us.”<sup>25</sup> Hau’ofa’s sentiment continues in the articulation of the “Blue Pacific.” The idea that the water is not a barrier but connects the people of the island states, as evidenced by its great history of maritime navigation

21 Pryke

22 Ashley Westerman, “The pandemic wiped out tourism on Pacific island nations. Can they stay afloat?” *The World*, January 28, 2021, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2021-01-28/pandemic-wiped-out-tourism-pacific-island-nations-can-they-stay-afloat>

23 Westerman

24 See generally Eric Shibuya, “Problems and Potential of the Pacific Islands Forum,” in *The Asia-Pacific: A Region in Transition*, (Jim Rolfe, Editor), Honolulu: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2004.

25 Epeli Hau’ofa, “Our Sea of Islands,” *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands*, edited by Vijay Naidu, Eric Waddell, and Epeli Hau’ofa. Suva: School of Social and Economic Development, The University of the South Pacific, 1993 and “The Ocean in Us,” *The Contemporary Pacific* 10, 2 (Fall 1998).

and travel, reconceptualizing the PICs from “small island states” to “large ocean states.” As Wyeth says, “While it would be overstating their influence to suggest that these new multilateral initiatives focused on ocean welfare are the sole outcome of Pacific diplomatic activity, it would also be remiss to underestimate their influence. In recent years Pacific Island states have developed a much more assertive diplomatic posture, becoming highly active in promoting agendas that are vital to their interests, and using the weight of their votes to try and shape the issues that the UN and other multilateral forums deal with.”<sup>26</sup>

As powerful as it is as an emotional concept, the rhetoric ran up against regional/interisland tensions almost as soon as it started. The “Blue Pacific Continent” suffered its first break with the withdrawal of the Micronesian PICs (Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of Palau, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Kiribati, and Nauru) from the Pacific Island Forum (PIF). The triggering event for the withdrawal was the selection of former Cook Islands Prime Minister Henry Puna as Secretary-General of the PIF.<sup>27</sup> Micronesian leaders felt slighted after the close vote that led to Puna’s appointment, suggesting that the “gentleman’s agreement” that the position generally rotates between the three major island groups (Melanesia, Polynesia, Micronesia) had been violated.<sup>28</sup> Doherty points to the effects of the pandemic creating a situation where less face-to-face interactions occurred this past year. Those touchpoints, so important in nearly all cultures, but perhaps especially so in small island societies, may have hindered the general consensus-building experience usually found in the Forum, thereby making the “gentleman’s agreement” less powerful.<sup>29</sup> (It

26 Grant Wyeth, “Paying Attention to the Blue Pacific,” *The Diplomat*, October 30, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/10/paying-attention-to-the-blue-pacific/>

27 “Micronesian nations to leave Pacific’s peak regional body, leaving it in disarray,” Pacific Beat, February 9, 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-02-09/five-micronesian-nations-set-to-quit-pacific-islands-forum/13133600>

28 Bernadette Correon, “Pacific Islands Forum in crisis, as one-third of member nations quit,” *The Guardian*, February 8, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/09/pacific-islands-forum-in-crisis-as-one-third-of-member-nations-quit>.

29 Ben Doherty, “Zoomed to fail? Cracks appear in Pacific Islands Forum as Covid pulls nations apart,” *The Guardian*, February 1, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/02/zoomed-to-fail-cracks-appear-in-pacific-islands-forum-as-covid-pulls-nations-apart>

should be noted that despite the rhetoric of this agreement, the “rotation” of the Forum’s top position has not been completely in accordance).<sup>30</sup>

This withdrawal should be evaluated in terms of the power of regional cooperation and the amplifying force of speaking as one. Certainly, the loss of nearly a third of its membership cannot be considered a success. However, especially since the entry of the Compact States into the Forum, there have always been tensions between the islands of the North Pacific and those below the equator, with Micronesian states feeling that they have been looked down upon by their South Pacific neighbors.<sup>31</sup> If these wounds are not healed, the loss of these members will certainly hurt the collective voice of the Forum, but this could only be for the short term if the remaining members are adept. Certainly, there will continue to be concerns that Australia and New Zealand will dominate the Forum (but that concern exists regardless of the Micronesian membership), but a return to the “South Pacific Forum” may in fact allow the remaining members to build a more coherent agenda. An association of the North Pacific island states (which did meet in caucus at PIF meetings) is perhaps less likely given the compact agreement between the US and only three of the five Micronesian nations.<sup>32</sup>

The schisms that led to the Micronesia departure highlights two significant things. First, the PICs are not monolithic, and the bias to treat them as such, to expect institutions like the Forum to serve as an amplifier ignores that the PICs do not speak as a single voice on many issues. Perhaps of greater importance, this split should serve as a clear reminder for

30 Deon Canyon, “Time for the Pacific Islands Forum to Step-Back and Heal,” *DKI APCSS Security Nexus*, February 2021, [https://apcss.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Canyon\\_PIF\\_Step\\_Back\\_R2.pdf](https://apcss.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Canyon_PIF_Step_Back_R2.pdf)

31 Mala Darmadi, “Micronesian President flags quitting Pacific Island forum over SG election,” *Pacific Beat*, February 4, 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/radio-australia/programs/pacific-beat/fsm-pres-covid-pif/13120114>

32 Paskal makes a provocative recommendation in her Congressional testimony that the US should offer Compact status to Kiribati and Nauru. Though she notes potential resistance from Australia regarding Nauru, the US may also be reluctant to enter into agreements that politically could be painted as fiscally irresponsible. More importantly, these nations get a choice too. It would certainly be an interesting discussion for Kiribati to choose between a Compact relationship with the US (which would include the right of strategic denial) and the benefits of the Chinese satellite tracking station (and the other associated benefits that come with a cordial relationship with Beijing).

the world that the PICs are independent agents capable of independent choices.

Indeed, one can go even further to note that not all of the PICs are, in and of themselves, “nations” in the political science understanding of “shared community.” Ethnic tensions have reared their ugly head in places like Bougainville, Fiji, and the Solomon Islands. The island state of Chuuk, the largest in the FSM, has in the past made some grumbling mention of separation from the rest of the FSM, alleging that if they were separate, they would gain greater financial contributions from the Compact arrangement. This notion is theoretical, and the US has been adamant that, should separation occur, payments would stop. However, with the potential that Compact payments will drop anyway in the newest rounds of negotiations (the current Compact financial arrangements end in 2023), Chuuk could possibly consider closer ties to China. Chuuk lagoon would certainly be of strategic interest to China.<sup>33</sup>

## Conclusion

Alternative/expanded security arrangements in the Indo-Pacific continue to leave out the PICs. The Quad arrangement is yet another Great Power arrangement in the region with little focus on the PICs, its “arc of democracy” in fact “arching” over the islands themselves. Traditional partners (and Forum members) New Zealand’s “Pacific Reset” and Australia’s “Pacific Step Up” announcements have proven both more culturally sensitive but still regarded as neocolonial. Familiarity has, to some extent, bred contempt and many of the Island states have seen China not as an outside destabilizing force but as the new balancer to the western powers.

For all of the Western “understanding” of China’s ability to “play the long game,”<sup>34</sup> the West fails to understand the scope of the game, focusing almost exclusively on our military options and on China’s growing military capabilities when the greater concerns of diplomatic and economic influence are the real “long game.” Pundits often quote Sun Tzu’s observation, “to win without fighting is the acme of skill,” but miss its central point. To “win without fighting” isn’t the Art of “War,” but rather the art of

33 Finin, p. 185

34 Rush Doshi, *The Long Game: China’s Grand Strategy to Displace American Order*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.

“Strategy,” of achieving one’s objectives without the danger of sacrificing blood and treasure.

The US needs to put much greater effort into dealing with the PICs as independent agents, and these relationships do not have to be zero-sum calculations with other agreements. The US part of the Quad arrangement, for example, is, in fact, enhanced by better relations with the Compact States, most notably the possibility of a more robust US military presence in Palau and FSM. As Paskal says, “Instead of thinking of the region as pawns to be played with, stolen, or “integrated,” the operational reality of each country needs to be understood so that they see partnerships as a benefit to their people.”<sup>35</sup> If we fail to understand that the PICs can all make different choices, we will establish a context where their choices will be increasingly constrained, and very likely inimical to US interests. As Representative Ed Case notes clearly, “If we leave [the Pacific Islands] to themselves, if we disengage, if we ignore, if we don’t show up — they will have no choice but to take different directions.”<sup>36</sup> While initially being ignored in the rebalance, Palau and FSM are making choices to actively be part of it. The US should not ignore these shifts. The US must also be willing to understand island perspectives, particularly on issues like climate change, which are not simply “national security” threats to the PICs, but existential ones. Mutual understanding and mutual cooperation will be the only way to bridge the gap between “INDOPACOM” and “the Blue Pacific.”<sup>37</sup> The region is no longer “missing” in the rebalance, but we cannot keep making the mistakes of seeing the region as a unified whole, nor can we keep thinking of the PICs as mere objects. We will have to consider how each state “leans” in the “rebalanced” world of Great Power Competition.

While, on the one hand, small populations, landmass, and infrastructure, along with great travel distances, make large and frequent interactions with island leaders less tenable, the fact is that a little can go a long way in those small populations. The volume of interaction isn’t really the point, but the density of those exchanges, and how deep and meaningful they can be. Some countries, such as FSM and Palau, are clearly trying to

35 Cleo Paskal, “How the Pacific Islands Forum Fell Apart,” *The Diplomat*, February 10, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/02/how-the-pacific-islands-forum-fell-apart/>

36 Quoted in Paskal, “Strategic Importance of the Pacific Islands”

37 Wesley Morgan, “Oceans Apart? Considering the Indo-Pacific and the Blue Pacific,” *Security Challenges* 16, 1 (Special Issue: How does the ‘Pacific’ fit into the ‘Indo-Pacific?’) 2020.

balance with the US, inviting greater military presence, while others are continuing to hedge. The United States cannot have an “Oceania” policy. It needs to recognize the diversity of cultures and interests of each Pacific Island Country in order to develop a policy that both the United States and the island nations find agreeable.

# New Zealand and Pacific Security

## Re-engagement in the Face of Strategic Competition

*Rouben Azizian*

“To start- I have a question for you. Where do you see our place in the world? If you were to ask me, I would give you a very literal answer. The Pacific. This is our home. It is the region we most squarely identify with. We very literally share a population base.”

--Jacinda Ardern, New Zealand Prime Minister<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

In 2018 New Zealand Government announced a Pacific Reset towards the Pacific Islands region. As detailed in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT)’s Strategic Intentions 2018-2022 report, the Pacific Reset is meant to “shift New Zealand’s engagement with the Pacific to a relationship built on understanding, friendship, mutual benefit and a collective ambition to achieve sustainable results in collaboration with its Pacific neighbours.”<sup>2</sup>

The Pacific Reset recognized the shortcomings in New Zealand’s foreign policy in terms of appreciating and responding to significant changes

<sup>1</sup> Jacinda Ardern, New Zealand Prime Minister, *Prime Minister’s Speech to NZILA Annual Conference*, July 21, 2021, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/prime-ministers-speech-nzila-annual-conference>)

<sup>2</sup> Strategic Intentions 2018-2022, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [https://www.parliament.nz/resource/en-NZ/PAP\\_80613/9cf327bac942f0c4279c48e9d87dbf2ee631e722](https://www.parliament.nz/resource/en-NZ/PAP_80613/9cf327bac942f0c4279c48e9d87dbf2ee631e722)

within the region, such as increased regional assertiveness in advancing climate change priorities, non-traditional security and diversified foreign policy. At the same time, the Pacific Reset represented an attempt by New Zealand to address and, where possible, contain in collaboration with its Western allies and partners the rising influence of China in the region. Like Australia’s “Pacific Step-Up,” the United Kingdom’s “Pacific Uplift,” and Japan’s “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy,” the “Pacific Reset” is a [direct reaction](#) to heightened interest and competition in the region.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter analyses the drivers and implications of the Pacific Reset in terms of New Zealand’s declared re-engagement within the region in the face of increased strategic competition. It will use the terms Pacific, Pacific Islands region, Pacific Island Countries (PIC) and Oceania interchangeably given the differences in the foreign policy vocabulary used by New Zealand and its regional partners.

## **Why is the Pacific important to New Zealand?**

In his speech to Australia’s Lowy Institute on March 1, 2018, which is considered to be the philosophical foundation of the Pacific Reset, the then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of New Zealand Winston Peters detailed the rationale for New Zealand’s renewed interest to the Pacific. He argued that New Zealand was a Pacific country, linked by history, culture, politics, and demographics. One in five New Zealanders – approximately one million people – now have Maori or Pasifika heritage, and this demographic trend is growing. Secondly, New Zealand’s national security is directly affected by the Pacific’s instability and vulnerability to trans-boundary security challenges, including gangs; criminal deportations; drug production and distribution; cyber and financial crime; and aviation and border security. The stability in the region also depends on the economic well-being and resilience of the island nations. Thirdly, the Pacific has become an increasingly contested strategic space, no longer neglected by great power ambition, and so Pacific Island leaders have more options which leads to a degree of strategic anxiety.<sup>4</sup> While the international assertiveness of the Pacific Island nations is viewed as a

<sup>3</sup> Claire Huitt, “The Pacific Reset: New Zealand Re-Engages Oceania”, December 20, 2019, <http://sites.utexas.edu/climatesecurity/2019/12/20/the-pacific-reset-new-zealand-re-engages-oceania/>

<sup>4</sup> Rt Hon Winston Peters, “Shifting the Dial,” *Speech to Lowy Institute, Sydney*, March 1, 2018, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/shifting-dial>

positive development, it is also recognized as an indicator of New Zealand's declining influence in the region. As Winston Peters stated: "in navigating a more complex strategic environment, New Zealand's view is that we must be respectful of Pacific Island countries' clear wish to manage their own international relations while at the same time retaining New Zealand's traditional emphasis on human rights, the rule of law, transparency, good governance, and the promotion of democracy."

This values-based approach signaled New Zealand's intention to differentiate its role in the Pacific from that of some external powers, such as China, and also emphasize the common operational platform for Western nations involved in the region. While the Pacific Reset doesn't mention China by name, the China challenge in the Pacific is clearly articulated in a number of New Zealand government statements. The New Zealand Strategic Defense Policy Statement of 2018 states "that China is enhancing its influence in the region, including through development assistance and support for economic engagement." While this statement doesn't suggest any malign intentions, China is not mentioned in the document as one of New Zealand's partners in the region. In fact, it expresses a concern that China "holds views on human rights and freedom of information that stand in contrast to those that prevail in New Zealand."<sup>5</sup>

Many commentators have interpreted the Pacific Reset as primarily driven by and focused on China which is questionable. China's increased role in the region is not just a trigger but an outcome of complacency displayed by successive New Zealand governments towards the region. As Anna Powles, a prominent New Zealand expert on Oceania and one of the authors of the previous APCSS book on Oceania, points out, New Zealand's influence in the Pacific has waned significantly, "although Wellington has been reluctant, indeed resistant, to acknowledge the fact."<sup>6</sup>

Integrating and balancing the notions of common identity, shared prosperity and values-based approach has been a challenging exercise for New Zealand's diplomacy and has received mixed reactions from the region thus requiring a "reset to the reset" announced recently by

5 Strategic Defense Policy Statement, 2018, New Zealand Government, pp.17, 22, <https://www.defence.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/8958486b29/Strategic-Defense-Policy-Statement-2018.pdf>

6 Anna Powles, "Finding Common Ground: New Zealand and Regional Security Cooperation in the Pacific," in *Rouben Azizian and Carleton Cramer, Regionalism, Security and Cooperation in Oceania*, APCSS, 2015, p.80.

New Zealand's new Minister of Foreign Affairs Nanaia Mahuta. The details of her Pacific Resilience policy will be discussed later in the chapter.

## **Principles**

The Pacific Reset was centered around five core principles: friendship, understanding, mutual benefit, collective ambition and sustainability.<sup>7</sup> It declared an intention to move away from the donor-recipient dynamics of the past and build more mature relationships with the Pacific Island countries with the recognition that as a region, the Pacific is not a passive actor. At the center of this was building deeper, more mature relationships with many partners in the region, including other countries active in the region, as well as key multilateral organizations and entities.

The key priorities of reset policy focused on the following directions:

- Climate change impacts on the people of the region as coasts erode, sea levels rise, and fish stocks move.
- Economic resilience and distance to market challenges.
- Human development, particularly health and education for remote populations, key areas where government services in the Pacific are often stretched.
- Transnational crime, including drug trafficking, cyber-crime and the activities of gangs and criminal deportees which is putting pressure on law enforcement and border security agencies in the region.<sup>8</sup>

## **Aid and Development**

Regarding concrete projects that formed part of the Pacific Reset, the primary focus has been on aid. New Zealand has robust development aid partnerships with its Pacific Island neighbors which covers American Samoa, Nauru, Tokelau, the Cook Islands, New Caledonia, Tonga, the Federated States of Micronesia, Niue, Tuvalu, Fiji, Palau, Vanuatu, French Polynesia, Papua New Guinea, Wallis and Futuna, Kiribati, Samoa, the Marshall Islands, and the Solomon Islands. Though China is now the second-largest state lender to the region, New Zealand remains the

7 Our Aid Partnerships in the Pacific, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/aid-and-development/our-aid-partnerships-in-the-pacific>

8 Rt Hon Winston Peters, "Pacific Futures: Connections, Identity and Security," *Speech to the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs*, October 18, 2019, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/speech-new-zealand-institute-international-affairs-pacific-futures-connections-identity-and>

second-largest state donor, behind Australia. Economic assistance to PIC accounts for over 60% of all international aid provided by New Zealand's MFAT. Aid amounts have been increasing under the Pacific Reset. This included a NZ\$714 million boost to aid and development spending, as well NZ\$180 million for a new strategic international development fund.<sup>9</sup> In addition, through the Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme, every year New Zealand supports over 12,850 people from the Pacific to work in New Zealand, which translates into NZ \$40 million dollars' worth of remittances.<sup>10</sup>

Through this development assistance, New Zealand has been doing more on issues that matter to the region, including climate change, economic resilience, health and education, governance, gender, human rights, and youth.<sup>11</sup> New Zealand Government's Pacific aid program receives cross-party political support.<sup>12</sup>

## COVID-19

New Zealand has worked intimately with Pacific Island governments to support their COVID-19 preparedness. An initial \$50 million package of support helped the Pacific countries to prepare health systems and address wider health, economic, governance and social challenges arising from the effects of the pandemic. New Zealand's stringent border settings complemented those of Pacific countries, and in most places, has meant case numbers and deaths remained low. In response to the COVID-19 outbreak in Fiji that started in April 2021, the New Zealand Government has been assisting Fiji respond to the pandemic, including bolstering the

9 Christian Novak, "New Zealand's China reset?", *The Strategist*, December 20, 2018, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/new-zealands-china-reset/>

10 Aid and Development, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/mi/aid-and-development/>

11 Our Aid Partnerships in the Pacific, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/aid-and-development/our-aid-partnerships-in-the-pacific>

12 Special Debates — Inquiry into New Zealand's Aid to the Pacific—Report of the Foreign Affairs, Defense and Trade Committee, February 25, 2021, [https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/hansard-debates/rhr/combined/HansDeb\\_20210225\\_20210225\\_20](https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/hansard-debates/rhr/combined/HansDeb_20210225_20210225_20)

health system, providing vaccines and essential equipment, and providing economic support for communities in need.<sup>13</sup>

## Climate Change

Climate change has been one of the contentious issues between New Zealand and the Pacific Islands, although to a much lesser degree than in Australia's case. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has acknowledged that "whenever I meet with those who live on Pacific Islands, climate change is top of their agenda."<sup>14</sup>

The Reset has increased New Zealand's support for the Pacific region's resilience and collective response to climate change. Of the NZ\$300 million global commitment to climate change-related development assistance, \$150 million has now been dedicated to a Pacific program to bolster New Zealand's climate change support in the region. The practical package of support includes:

- Providing infrastructure such as water tanks, along with better tools and training to manage droughts, floods and coastal inundation
- Further climate hazard mapping and risk planning
- Customized climate information that will support priority sectors such as agriculture, tourism, health and infrastructure
- More projects to get rid of invasive species that threaten food security. This will boost the resilience of key crops that are also vulnerable to increasingly unpredictable weather driven by climate change
- Improving access to international climate finance through technical assistance
- \$5.6m to Tuvalu-specific climate resilience projects, the first of which will be a water storage facility on the island of Vaitupu, along with renewable energy and drought modeling support<sup>15</sup>
- The investment should help enable clean energy projects, ensure crops were drought resilient and communities were

13 Covid Response and Recovery, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/mi/peace-rights-and-security/covid-19-response-and-recovery/>

14 Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern, NZ boosts support for climate action across the Pacific, August 15, 2019, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/nz-boosts-support-climate-action-across-pacific>

15 Ibid, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/nz-boosts-support-climate-action-across-pacific>

protected from sea level rise and storm surges, bringing down the greenhouse gases of the islands themselves, but it particularly helps with resilience in terms of cyclones.

According to New Zealand Minister of Climate Change James Shaw, “the way that we conduct our programme is that it’s actually led by the islands themselves, so we really respond to the kinds of requests that they make.”<sup>16</sup>

Climate change is identified as one of the greatest security challenges for New Zealand Defense in the coming decades. Wellington is concerned that the environmental impacts of climate change on the ocean and marine life, particularly in the Pacific and in the Southern Ocean, could see fishing vessels operating in new areas, including in international waters and New Zealand’s expansive search and rescue area of responsibility in the coming years. With the intensifying impacts of climate change intersecting with other challenges, New Zealand may be faced with increasingly concurrent operational commitments, which could stretch resources and reduce readiness for other requirements.<sup>17</sup>

## National Security and Defense Priorities

New Zealand has increased its focus on and investment in Pacific security issues, and advancing new initiatives that support Pacific island countries on key security priorities, including security sector leadership capability; tackling transnational crime; illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing; border management and security; and cyber security.<sup>18</sup>

This support is guided by the Boe Declaration on Regional Security and the Pacific Islands Forum’s Framework for Pacific Regionalism. New Zealand actively supports wider regional security organizations, including the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police, the Oceania Customs Organisation, and the Pacific Immigration Development Community. New Zealand agencies – such as Police, Customs, and Immigration – work closely with

16 Big Jump in NZ Climate Funding, *The New Zealand Herald*, October 19, 2021, <https://www.pressreader.com/new-zealand/the-new-zealand-herald/20211019/281724092744117>

17 The Climate Crisis: Defense Readiness and Responsibilities, New Zealand Government, p. 9, <https://www.defence.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/66cfc96a20/Climate-Change-and-Security-2018.pdf>

18 Rt Hon Winston Peters, Pacific Futures: Connections, Identity and Security Speech to the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, October 18, 2019, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/speech-new-zealand-institute-international-affairs-pacific-futures-connections-identity-and>

their Pacific counterparts to strengthen border security. New Zealand's Transnational Crime Unit works closely with the Pacific Transnational Crime Coordination Centre in Apia and supports Pacific Transnational Crime Units in Tonga, Cook Islands, and Niue. New Zealand Police and Customs work with Police and customs in Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and the Cook Islands on the Pacific Detector Dog Programme. New Zealand also provides monitoring, control and surveillance support that helps Pacific countries to protect their fisheries from illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. New Zealand also administers the Pacific Security Fund (NZD\$2.7 million each year), which is used by New Zealand agencies to support Pacific countries. The initiatives that are funded include ethical leadership training delivered through the New Zealand Defense Force, improving aviation security capability and providing equipment, and helping Pacific countries to comply with international maritime codes and regulations.<sup>19</sup>

The New Zealand Police has launched a new Pacific Island Prevention Programme (PIPP), which aims to support police in the Cook Islands, Kiribati, Niue, Samoa, Tokelau, Tuvalu and Vanuatu and help them develop Prevention Operating Model (POM). The key objective is to encourage local police to operate with a prevention mindset that looks beyond simply responding to crime, and adopt a partnership approach with local communities.<sup>20</sup>

Stability in the Pacific is critical to New Zealand's national security. The 2018 Strategic Defense Policy Statement raised the priority placed on the Defense Force's ability to operate in the South Pacific to the same level as New Zealand's territory, the Southern Ocean and Antarctica. It states that resource competition and resource scarcity in the maritime domain will continue to challenge New Zealand and the Pacific.<sup>21</sup>

The joint Ministry of Defense and Defense Force Advancing Pacific Partnerships 2019 report recognizes the need to act in new ways and at new levels to protect the New Zealand national interests and the

19 Regional Security, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/mi/peace-rights-and-security/international-security/regional-security/>

20 Prevention in the Pacific, New Zealand Police, <https://www.police.govt.nz/news/ten-one-magazine/prevention-pacific>

21 Strategic Defense Policy Statement, 2018, New Zealand Government, p.8, <https://www.defence.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/8958486b29/Strategic-Defense-Policy-Statement-2018.pdf>

sovereignty of Pacific countries.<sup>22</sup> It aligns its approach with Boe Declarations's expanded concept of security and its Action Plan, as well as with the priorities of "diverse, individual Pacific partners."<sup>23</sup>

The Defense Capability Plan 2019 delivered a significant lift and capacity for operating in the Pacific so that the Defense Force was able to operate independently, or lead combined operations in its neighborhood from the South Pacific through to Antarctica, if required.<sup>24</sup> Although not specifically for the region, New Zealand has also [bought new maritime surveillance aircraft and the C-130J Hercules](#). A Defense Force spokesman noted these purchases were important for the country to continue to contribute to the immediate region.<sup>25</sup>

In response to the Solomon Islands Government's request for assistance after days of rioting, violence and unrest in the capitol Honiara in late November 2021, New Zealand agreed to dispatch NZ Defense Force "assessment team" of about 15 personnel, followed by up to 50 defense and police staff. According to Defense Minister Peeni Henare, the NZDF personnel "will support the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) in maintaining stability, engaging with communities and providing public reassurance." New Zealand Police will work with the NZDF to add to the contribution already made by Australia, Papua New Guinea and Fiji to aid in restoring law and order.<sup>26</sup> New Zealand Police has a long-standing partnership with the Solomon Islands and has had a presence in Honiara for a number of years. More than 1,000 New Zealand Defense Force and Police personnel served in the Solomon Islands from 2003 to 2013 as part of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) and

22 Advancing Pacific Partnerships 2019, New Zealand Government, p.5, <https://www.defence.govt.nz/assets/publication/file/5f6dd307e7/Advancing-Pacific-Partnerships-2019.pdf>

23 Ibid., p. 7, <https://www.defence.govt.nz/assets/publication/file/5f6dd307e7/Advancing-Pacific-Partnerships-2019.pdf>

24 Defense Capability Plan 2019, p. 19, <https://www.defence.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/03acb8c6aa/Defense-Capability-Plan-2019.pdf>

25 Lucy Cramer, "The new militarisation of the Pacific," *Stuff*, August 7, 2021, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/300375964/the-new-militarisation-of-the-pacific>

26 Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern, Hon Nanaia Mahuta, Hon Poto Williams, Hon Peeni Henare, New Zealand Response to assist peace and stability in Solomon Islands, December 1, 2021, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/new-zealand-response-assist-peace-and-stability-solomon-islands>

were recognized as effective and friendly by the Solomon Islands' government and public.<sup>27</sup>

Given that background, Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta referred to the security team dispatched to the Solomon Islands as “people who have vast experience in the Pacific region and are amongst some of the most highly skilled when it comes to de-escalating conflict.”<sup>28</sup>

## Allies and Partners

While introducing the new vision of engagement in the Pacific, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Winston Peters noted: “New Zealand is a small, realistic and pragmatic country. We know we cannot help the Pacific solve its problems on our own - as there will always be someone with deeper pockets than ours and some Pacific leaders are attracted to easy sources of funding.”<sup>29</sup>

The preference in New Zealand’s partnership is clearly given to countries that share collective values and interests, including open access, freedom of movement, and transparency. The refreshed approach in the Pacific is considered as also an important contribution to the international rules-based order.<sup>30</sup>

Prime Minister Ardern has welcomed the increased engagement of the UK and US in the region to serve “our collective objective needs to be the delivery of peace and stability and the preservation of the international rules-based system.”<sup>31</sup>

In July 2021, New Zealand Air Force participated with the United States, France and Australia in an operation to curb illegal fishing led by

27 George Block, “Solomon Islands requests support from NZ - troops assembling at Linton,” *Stuff*, November 30, 2021, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/300466992/solomon-islands-requests-support-from-nz--troops-assembling-at-linton>

28 George Block, “Solomon Islands unrest: Defense Force, police to deploy for weeks-long mission,” *Stuff*, December 2, 2021, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/300467661/solomon-islands-unrest-defense-force-police-to-deploy-for-weeks-long-mission>

29 Laura Walters, NZ ‘resets’ its Pacific strategy, asks Australia to join the mission, *Stuff*, March 2, 2018, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/politics/101907520/nz-resets-its-pacific-strategy-asks-australia-to-join-the-mission>

30 Advancing Pacific Partnerships 2019, New Zealand Government, p.5, <https://www.defence.govt.nz/assets/publication/file/5f6dd307e7/Advancing-Pacific-Partnerships-2019.pdf>

31 Jamie Ensor, “AUKUS: Jacinda Ardern welcomes United Kingdom, United States engagement in Pacific, says NZ nuclear stance ‘unchanged,’ *Newshub*, September 16, 2021, <https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/politics/2021/09/aukus-jacinda-ardern-welcomes-united-kingdom-united-states-engagement-in-pacific-says-nz-nuclear-stance-unchanged.html>

the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency. The operation is believed to be also aimed at countering China's influence in the region.<sup>32</sup> According to a recent Lowy Institute report, New Zealand, Australia and the US are aiming to ensure that no power hostile to their interests establishes a strategic foothold in the Pacific Islands, “particularly as the strategic reach of China’s ambitions increases, and climate-related, security and crisis management concerns escalate.”<sup>33</sup>

New Zealand’s association with like-minded partners includes a number of joint projects. Wellington has partnered with the governments of Papua New Guinea, Australia, the United States and Japan on a major new electrification program to lift access to electricity in PNG. With Japan, New Zealand has built the Pacific Climate Change Centre in Apia. New Zealand and the EU are working together, along with France and Australia, to tackle the interconnected challenges of biodiversity and climate change.<sup>34</sup> Police from New Zealand and Australia are increasing their presence in the Pacific as part of a new agreement to tackle transnational crime. New Zealand, Australia, Fiji and Tonga have established a task force to tackle transnational crime. Drug traffickers will be the task force’s main targets but gangs responsible for cybercrime and child exploitation will also be part of its operations.<sup>35</sup>

## Australia

Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade describes Australia and New Zealand as “natural allies with a strong trans-Tasman sense of family.” New Zealand claims it has “no better friend than Australia.”<sup>36</sup> Robert Ayson from Wellington’s Victoria University notes that despite

<sup>32</sup> Lucy Cramer, “The new militarisation of the Pacific,” *Stuff*, August 7, 2021, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/300375964/the-new-militarisation-of-the-pacific>

<sup>33</sup> Joanne Wallis and Anna Powles, “Shouldering their fair share? The ANZUS allies in the Pacific Islands,” *The Interpreter*, 23 July 2021, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/shouldering-their-fair-share-anzus-allies-pacific-islands>

<sup>34</sup> Rt Hon Winston Peters, Pacific Futures: Connections, Identity and Security Speech to the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, October 18, 2019, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/speech-new-zealand-institute-international-affairs-pacific-futures-connections-identity-and>

<sup>35</sup> “Australia, NZ police expanding Pacific presence,” *RNZ*, February 15, 2019, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/382588/aus-nz-police-expanding-pacific-presence>

<sup>36</sup> Anna Powles and Joanne Wallis, “Kiwis and hawks: Is New Zealand edging closer to Australia on China?,” *The Interpreter*, October 14, 2020, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/kiwis-hawks-nz-edging-closer-australia-on-china>

bilateral challenges, “the Pacific has remained a big part of the security glue for trans-Tasman solidarity.”<sup>37</sup>

Both Australia and New Zealand have a long-standing relationship and consensus on the importance of their role in the Pacific. The conclusion of PACER Plus (Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations) regional free-trade agreement showcased the success of their collective diplomatic activity. Both Australia and New Zealand have relented to increased Pacific pressure to reform seasonal worker and labor mobility programs, with the two regional heavyweights making significant changes to their respective schemes.<sup>38</sup>

Wellington and Canberra acknowledge “the unique role of the Pacific Islands Forum in projecting a strong and unified Pacific voice on the global stage.”<sup>39</sup> However, the two countries have been blamed for the decision of five Micronesian states to withdraw from the 18-member forum in the wake of former Cook Islands Prime Minister Henry Puna’s controversial selection as its next Secretary-General. Cook Islands is a realm state of New Zealand and Puna is perceived as NZ’s protégé.<sup>40</sup>

The presidents of Nauru, the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands and Palau have complained that South Pacific countries dishonored a “gentleman’s agreement” to rotate the post evenly among sub-regions. According to them, the smaller islands of Micronesia are often overlooked by “their large Polynesian and Melanesian cousins, with Australia and New Zealand also “viewing them as an afterthought.”

<sup>37</sup> Robert Ayson, “New Zealand: No longer Australia’s Pacific security partner?,” *The Interpreter*, November 30, 2021, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/new-zealand-no-longer-australia-s-pacific-security-partner>

<sup>38</sup> Kai Loyens, “Hitting reset: Australia and New Zealand in the Pacific,” *Foreign Brief*, January 30, 2019, <https://www.foreignbrief.com/asia-pacific/hitting-reset-australia-and-new-zealand-in-the-pacific/>

<sup>39</sup> Hon Nanaia Mahuta, Australia-Aotearoa New Zealand Foreign Minister Consultations, November 12, 2021, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/australia-aotearoa-new-zealand-foreign-minister-consultations>

<sup>40</sup> Jonathan Milne, “Pacific standoff creates space for China-US proxy war,” *Newsroom*, February 16, 2021, <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/pacific-standoff-creates-space-for-china-us-proxy-war>

Australia and especially New Zealand have been identified by Micronesian leaders as part of the problem at the Forum.<sup>41</sup>

Marshall Islands diplomat Gerald Zackios, beaten to PIF's top job by Puna, suggested that Australia and New Zealand "share a common worldview which is an imperfect match for our subregion", with a focus on economic integration through initiatives like the PACER Plus trade deal less appealing to the Micronesian states who are more focused on security than trade.<sup>42</sup>

While the Australian and New Zealand resets highlight the growing importance of the region and emerging geopolitical competition, domestic politics within both countries has led to the development of quite different 'resets.' This has been evident in one of the most significant issues for the region, climate change. New Zealand has taken firm commitments to step up direct assistance to helping the region combat the threat posed by rising sea levels. This comes in addition to pledges to end oil exploration and production in New Zealand, increase domestic renewable energy targets, and other measures aimed at lowering carbon emissions.

Wellington's actions are in stark contrast to Australia, which remains one of the highest carbon emitters per capita amongst the G20. Australia's conservative government has repeatedly ignored international concerns, as well as those of Pacific leaders, about the threat of climate change, refusing to expand renewables investment or increase its foreign assistance to counter climate threats.<sup>43</sup>

Divergences in Australia and New Zealand's policies and practices raise questions about the status of their alliance and how the two states will work together to address challenges in the Pacific Islands. It is not clear how compatible New Zealand's purportedly principles-based 'Pacific Reset' is with Australia's more security-driven plan to 'step-up' its engagement in the region. It is also not clear how the two states will reconcile their apparently different approaches to the United States and China, both

41 Koroi Hawkins, "Pacific Forum split could cost region's global role," RNZ, February 12, 2021, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/436298/pacific-forum-split-could-cost-region-s-global-role>

42 Sam Sachdeva, "Where next for the Pacific Islands Forum?," *Newsroom*, February 26, 2021, <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/where-next-for-the-pacific-islands-forum>.

43 Kai Loyens, "Hitting reset: Australia and New Zealand in the Pacific," *Foreign Brief*, January 30, 2019, <https://www.foreignbrief.com/asia-pacific/hitting-reset-australia-and-new-zealand-in-the-pacific/>

in the region and beyond. Joanne Wallis from Australia's Strategic and Defense Studies Centre and Anna Powles from New Zealand Centre for Defense and Security Studies at Massey University identify four points of convergence between Australia and New Zealand in the Pacific Islands: a shared commitment to preserving and promoting the international rules-based order; a shared commitment to crisis management; a shared commitment to Pacific regionalism; and a shared commitment to regional trade liberalization. They also come up with four points of divergence between Australia and New Zealand in the Pacific Islands: differing approaches to regional diplomacy; New Zealand's Pacific identity as a domestic driver of foreign policy; and differing priorities on climate change and nuclear disarmament.<sup>44</sup>

## USA

In his address to the Center for Strategic and International Studies on July 16, 2019, the then Foreign Minister Winston Peters called for the United States to reestablish ties with the Pacific for improved trade and economic opportunities — warning of the impact of the changing geopolitics in the region.<sup>45</sup> “We ourselves, dare I say it, along with Australia and the US and others, had taken our eyes off the area of our nearest neighborhood — the Pacific — and there are consequences of that,” Peters told the audience. According to him, Chinese influence was one of the results, as well as a reduced capacity for economic growth in the Pacific.<sup>46</sup>

There has been noticeable warming of relations between New Zealand and the United States with the change of administration in Washington D.C. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has indicated strong interest in collaborating with the United States in the Pacific. After some hesitation,

<sup>44</sup> Joanne Wallis and Anna Powles, “Australia and New Zealand in the Pacific Islands: Ambiguous Allies?”, ANU, 2018, <https://bellschool.anu.edu.au/experts-publications/publications/6508/australia-and-new-zealand-pacific-islands-ambiguous-allies>

<sup>45</sup> Rt Hon Winston Peters, “Enhanced Pacific Partnerships,” Address to the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, July 16, 2019, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/%E2%80%99enhanced-pacific-partnerships%E2%80%99>

<sup>46</sup> Lisa Cornish, “NZ’s Winston Peters calls for US trade agreements in the Pacific,” Devex, July 22, 2019, <https://www.devex.com/news/nz-s-winston-peters-calls-for-us-trade-agreements-in-the-pacific-95308>

New Zealand has accepted the concept of Indo-Pacific albeit with a diplomatic caveat of its inclusivity.<sup>47</sup>

While both countries share concerns about China's assertiveness, Wellington avoids calls for containment of China and opposes a purely military response to China's rise. In her interview with Richard Haas from the US Council on Foreign Relations, the New Zealand Prime Minister urged the United States to look beyond just strategic and defense perspectives and "embed itself more in the regional economic architecture."<sup>48</sup> This sentiment was shared by Kurt Campbell, Indo Pacific Co-ordinator on the US National Security Council, in his speech to the New Zealand Institute of International Relations, in which he emphasized the need to help the Pacific on issues like poverty, health and climate change. Campbell called for a closer partnership and promised that the United States would be "working with others to try to bring elements of unity back to the Pacific Islands, given the magnitude of what we're facing today."<sup>49</sup>

Despite New Zealand's non-inclusion and reservations about the Aukus agreement, Foreign Minister Mahuta has welcomed the United States' interest in the region, adding that "a more peaceful, prosperous, stable region is in our shared interests".<sup>50</sup> The United States, but not China, was one of the countries Minister Mahuta visited during her first 17-day official foreign tour. In her statement in Washington D.C., she emphasized the "deep, long-lasting friendship that is based on shared values and a commitment to the importance of human rights, democracy and maintaining the system of international rules and norms."<sup>51</sup> In response,

47 Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister's Speech to NZIIA Annual Conference, July 14, 2021, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/prime-ministers-speech-nzia-annual-conference>

48 Russell C. Leffingwell Lecture with Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern of New Zealand, June 16, 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/event/russell-c-leffingwell-lecture-prime-minister-jacinda-ardern-new-zealand>

49 Sam Sachdeva, "A 'wounded' US and an inclusive NZ on the Indo-Pacific," *Newsroom*, July 16, 2021, <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/a-wounded-us-and-an-inclusive-nz-on-the-indo-pacific>

50 Geoffrey Miller, "Decoding Nanaia Mahuta's first foreign trip," RNZ, November 15, 2021, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/on-the-inside/455748/decoding-nanaia-mahuta-s-first-foreign-trip>

51 Nanaia Mahuta meets with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on final stage of world trip, RNZ, November 28, 2021, <https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/politics/2021/11/nanaia-mahuta-meets-with-us-secretary-of-state-antony-blinken-on-final-stage-of-world-trip.html>

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken praised “New Zealand’s leadership in the Pacific; that’s something that we look to.”<sup>52</sup>

### **China- “the non-traditional partner”**

In her address to the New Zealand China Council, New Zealand Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta referred to China as “one of our most significant partners.”<sup>53</sup>

China is New Zealand’s largest trading partner, with the value of imports and exports between the two countries reaching more than NZ\$31 billion (US\$22.4 billion) in 2020. The two countries also moved to eliminate nearly all trade tariffs between them after upgrading their free-trade agreement.<sup>54</sup>

The New Zealand government does not seek to exclude China from the South Pacific. In fact, it has looked to collaborate with Beijing where it can. The Tripartite Cook Islands/China/New Zealand Water Project<sup>55</sup> is an example of this.<sup>56</sup>

China has urged New Zealand to increase cooperation between the two countries, including helping the Pacific islands recover from the CO-VID-19 pandemic. The two sides have neither “historical grievances” nor “actual conflicts,” Foreign Minister Wang Yi told his counterpart Nanaia Mahuta in a video conference. Wang said China is willing to strengthen dialogue with New Zealand on addressing climate change<sup>57</sup> and is willing to communicate with New Zealand on the values of democracy and human

52 Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of State, Remarks, November 23, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-and-new-zealand-foreign-minister-nanaia-mahuta-before-their-meeting/>

53 Sam Sachdeva, “Mahuta warns against economic overexposure to China,” *Newsroom*, April 19, 2021, <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/mahuta-warns-against-economic-overexposure-to-china>

54 Key Facts on New Zealand-China Trade, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/mi/trade/free-trade-agreements/free-trade-agreements-in-force/nz-china-free-trade-agreement/key-facts-on-new-zealand-china-trade/>

55 <https://www.victoria.ac.nz/chinaresearchcentre/programmes-and-projects/china-symposiums/china-and-the-pacific-the-view-from-oceania/27-Pete-Zwart-The-Tripartite-China,-NZ,-Cook-Islands-A-NZ-Perspective.pdf>

56 Reuben Steff, “New Zealand’s Pacific reset: strategic anxieties about rising China,” *The Conversation*, June 1, 2018, <https://theconversation.com/new-zealands-pacific-reset-strategic-anxieties-about-rising-china-97174>

57 *South China Morning Post*, [https://www.scmp.com/knowledge/topics/china-and-climate-change?module=inline\\_auto&pctype=article](https://www.scmp.com/knowledge/topics/china-and-climate-change?module=inline_auto&pctype=article)

rights through “various appropriate methods”. He also said the two sides can use their respective advantages to work with Pacific Island nations in fighting COVID-19 and helping the economic recovery.<sup>58</sup>

While welcoming cooperation with China, New Zealand has also signaled its concern about so-called “debt-trap diplomacy” in the Pacific. Wellington calls for a more sustainable Pacific that “respects Pacific sovereignties, and builds on Pacific peoples’ own capabilities, towards long-term resilience.”<sup>59</sup> New Zealand’s trade with China “doesn’t mean we have to recoil from the values and principles that we uphold,” Minister Mahuta told The Washington Post.<sup>60</sup>

New Zealand openly opposed any militarization of the Pacific after reports that China had approached Vanuatu about building a permanent military presence in the South Pacific.<sup>61</sup> Responding to media queries, New Zealand Foreign Minister stated that the militarization of the Pacific was something New Zealand had been “seriously concerned about.”<sup>62</sup>

Several New Zealand strategic experts believe that it is inevitable that China’s regional influence will continue to grow at the expense of the influence New Zealand and Australia hold. According to Reuben Steff from New Zealand’s Waikato University, decisions will need to be made as to how New Zealand calibrates its foreign policy with this in mind. Ultimately, balancing China in the South Pacific will require greater coordination with Australia and reaching out to other states. However, Beijing could

58 Amber Wang, “China tries to court New Zealand with offer to work together in helping Pacific islands recover from Covid-19”, *South China Morning Post*, June 23, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3138482/china-tries-court-new-zealand-offer-work-together-helping>

59 Hon Nanaia Mahuta, “He Taniwha He Tipua, He Tipua He Taniwha - The Dragon and the Taniwha,” Speech to the NZCC, April 19, 2021, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/%E2%80%9Che-taniwha-he-tipua-he-tipua-he-taniwha-dragon-and-taniwha%E2%80%9D>

60 Charlotte Graham-McLay, “New Zealand’s neighborhood just got tougher. A top Maori official will help chart a course,” *The Washington Post*, January 13, 2021, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/new-zealand-china-australia-maori/2021/01/13/f2db9884-3a8d-11eb-aad9-8959227280c4\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/new-zealand-china-australia-maori/2021/01/13/f2db9884-3a8d-11eb-aad9-8959227280c4_story.html)

61 David Wroe, “China eyes Vanuatu military base in plan with global ramifications,” *The Stuff*, 10 April 2018, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/world/south-pacific/102967115/china-eyes-vanuatu-military-base-in-plan-with-global-ramifications>

62 Laura Walters, “PM opposes Pacific militarisation as China eyes Vanuatu military base,” *Stuff*, April 10, 2018, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/102971730/pm-opposes-pacific-militarisation-as-china-eyes-vanuatu-military-base>

interpret increased collaboration with larger powers as a sign of regional containment of its growing influence.<sup>63</sup>

## From Reset to Resilience

On November 4, 2021, Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta gave her first major foreign policy speech on Aotearoa New Zealand's policy in the Pacific. It was highly anticipated amongst Pacific watchers. Minister Mahuta had signaled at the outset of her term that she intended to deliver a foreign policy distinct from that of her predecessor Winston Peters. At its core is New Zealand's policy transition from the Pacific Reset, launched by Peters in 2018, to a Pacific Resilience partnership approach announced by Nanaia Mahuta and laid out in a subsequently released New Zealand Cabinet paper.<sup>64</sup> To frame this approach, Minister Mahuta employed a Maori proverb- as the old net is cast aside a new net goes fishing, noting its appropriateness in referring to the Reset as building the net – or architecture – to enable New Zealand's policy shift towards the Pacific; and the Resilience focus as learning how to 'utilize the net' for the benefit of all. She noted that COVID had stressed the region's resilience. "It has also taught us many lessons: learnings from what hasn't worked as well as how integrated partnerships can strengthen resilience. I have re-oriented the position beyond reset to resilience, understanding that the biggest issue facing the Pacific is climate change."<sup>65</sup> A resilient Pacific, according to Minister Mahuta, will also be better able to withstand the pressures of strategic competition, drive Pacific priorities, and manage unintended consequences.<sup>66</sup>

The New Zealand Cabinet paper further explains that COVID-19 has offered insights into places where previous development models have not delivered sustained results, as well as lessons on how to strengthen resilience by being more integrated in partnerships (for example, across

63 Reuben Steff, "New Zealand's Pacific reset: strategic anxieties about rising China," *The Conversation*, June 1, 2018, <https://theconversation.com/new-zealands-pacific-reset-strategic-anxieties-about-rising-china-97174>

64 Anna Powles, "From Reset to Resilience: Unpacking Mahuta's Pacific Vision," *Incline*, November 15, 2021, <https://www.incline.org.nz/home/from-reset-to-resilience-unpacking-mahutas-pacific-vision>

65 Hon Nanaia Mahuta, Foreign Minister, "Aotearoa New Zealand's Pacific Engagement: Partnering for Resilience," Speech to the NZIIA, November 3, 2021, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/aotearoa-new%C2%A0zealand%E2%80%99s-pacific-engagement-partnering-resilience>

66 Ibid.

health and border sectors). It calls for a posture of “accompaniment”, “meeting each partner where they are and working together towards priority strategic objectives that create impact and build positive change.” It urges government agencies to embed Pacific cultural frameworks in their work, including by strengthening cultural competence and regional awareness as well as ensuring that Pacific expertise is recognized and valued. The paper emphasizes the importance of building capability on the ground, rather than preferencing ‘fly-in, fly-out’ models of delivery.<sup>67</sup> Anna Powles believes this indicates a long-needed ideational shift from a paternalistic approach to a partnership approach.<sup>68</sup>

The change of course reflects some shortcomings in New Zealand’s development cooperation criticized by developmental experts and NGOs. One such report claims that there is no evidence that New Zealand’s international development cooperation has refocused on what it is actually for: reducing global poverty and inequality.<sup>69</sup> Oxfam Aotearoa Communications and Advocacy Director Joanna Spratt welcomed the intention to get more cultural diversity, cultural competency and knowledge of the Pacific, but warned that “it’s going to take a lot more than that, I think, to really embed, quite sophisticated values-based approach based on relationships.”<sup>70</sup>

## Conclusion

Winston Peters began his term as New Zealand Foreign Minister in the New Zealand coalition government with a Pacific Reset, a policy designed to step up engagement with and spending on the Pacific and in so doing, increase the importance of New Zealand’s leadership in the region. He explicitly backed the US in the big power competition for dominance in the Pacific. The current Labour government is moving away from such

67 New Zealand’s Pacific Engagement: From Reset to Resilience, Proactive Release, Cabinet paper, November 11, 2021, <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/assets/OIA/Cab-Paper-NZ-Pacific-Engagement-From-Reset-to-Resilience.pdf>

68 Anna Powles, “From Reset to Resilience: Unpacking Mahuta’s Pacific Vision,” *Incline*, November 15, 2021, <https://www.incline.org.nz/home/from-reset-to-resilience-unpacking-mahutas-pacific-vision>

69 Jo Spratt, “New Zealand’s aid a year after shifting the dial,” *DevPolicyBlog*, June 6, 2019, <https://devpolicy.org/new-zealands-aid-a-year-after-shifting-the-dial-20190606/>

70 Thomas Manch and Lucy Craymer ‘New Zealand’s diplomats to focus on ‘resilience’ in Pacific, as climate change and Chinese debt threat grows,’ *Stuff*, November 4, 2021, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/126877134/new-zealands-diplomats-to-focus-on-resilience-in-pacific-as-climate-change-and-chinese-debt-threat-grows?rm=a>

realpolitik stance towards a more balanced and flexible approach. It also recognizes the weakness of the efforts to deter China by pure financial assistance to the Pacific Island nations. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has said that New Zealand “can never outspend China in the Pacific” and it is not trying to compete with the Asian superpower.<sup>71</sup> Ardern’s government believes that the better way of preventing China’s negative influence in the region is by enhancing the resilience and capability of the Pacific Island nations. As the Prime Minister has remarked, “New Zealand is first and foremost a nation of the Pacific and we view foreign policy developments through the lens of what is in the best interest of the region.”<sup>72</sup> This approach isn’t questioned by New Zealand’s expert community. But what is debated is the way Wellington can reconcile its national interests with culturally diverse regional aspirations as well as strategic priorities of its allies and partners. While some New Zealand commentators emphasize the importance of “culture and tradition” in the region,<sup>73</sup> others call for closer cooperation with like-minded partners and not just sticking to “lofty principles.”<sup>74</sup>

It is clear that to be transformative, New Zealand’s policy in the Pacific needs to take a long-term, collaborative and inclusive (of Pacific Islands first and foremost!) approach versus reactive and hasty responses to emerging strategic challenges. Wellington often claims to be a reliable honest broker. It is perhaps time to translate that into initiating and facilitating a comprehensive regional security dialogue with the participation of traditional and non-traditional, likeminded and not-so-likeminded partners. This would be welcomed by the Pacific Island nations who often find themselves in the middle of geopolitical rivalry which promises little for their struggling economies and societies.

71 PM: NZ not competing with China in Pacific, RNZ, March 5, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/RadioNewZealand/posts/prime-minister-jacinda-ardern-says-new-zealand-can-never-outspend-china-in-the-p/10155623931278731/>

72 Jamie Ensor, “AUKUS: Jacinda Ardern welcomes United Kingdom, United States engagement in Pacific, says NZ nuclear stance ‘unchanged,’ *Newshub*, September 16, 2021, <https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/politics/2021/09/aukus-jacinda-ardern-welcomes-united-kingdom-united-states-engagement-in-pacific-says-nz-nuclear-stance-unchanged.html>

73 Iati Iati, “Assessing the Pacific Reset,” *New Zealand International Review*, January/February, vol 46, No 1, 2021, p.10.

74 Robert Ayson, “New Zealand: No longer Australia’s Pacific security partner?”, *The Interpreter*, November 30, 2021, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/new-zealand-no-longer-australia-s-pacific-security-partner>

# The Pacific Dimension of France's Indo-Pacific Policies and Security Cooperation

*Christian Lechervy*

It is not uncommon to express and analyze the politics of France through geographical precepts. This has been the case for a long time, vis-à-vis the Arab world, Africa and, of course, Europe. On the eastern borders, the terminology proved to be more fluctuating. It has even changed a lot in the last thirty years. From a territorial definition inherited from the end of the 19th century (Indochina), we were able to move on to more institutional designations. This is how Paul Mus's beloved Asia Angle came to be known as ASEAN in the contemporary political-diplomatic language. Even if some French speakers have tried to replace the English acronym with its French counterpart, ANASE or even ANSEA, they have had little success in imposing it in everyday language, in the media or in the academic arena. Making a new geographical area definition, your own or even collectively is never certain. The loosening of the Soviet stranglehold on Central Asia and its (re)connection to its neighboring areas since the beginning of the 1990s has not made, for example, the concept of Eurasia a real narrative dimension of French or European Union (EU) foreign policy. Conversely, the establishment of the Pacific Experiment Center (CEP) in 1962 gave the toponym "Pacific" a strategic dimension. The notion of Oceania, which was explicit until 1957 in the name of the French Establishments of Oceania (EFO), has been removed gradually from the political and military lexicon. In imaginaries, the reference to the eponymous ocean was however narrowed to its southern sphere. It is not uncommon, even today, to hear the South Pacific referred to as the states and territories of the island Pacific. This is all the more surprising given that France is located in the Pacific basin both south of the equator (New

Caledonia, French Polynesia, Territory of the Wallis and Futuna Islands, French Southern and Antarctic Territories (TAAF)), but also in the north of the hemisphere (Clipperton Island).

Undoubtedly, France sometimes struggles to approach the Pacific as a whole, but by being territorialized in the Indian Ocean (Mayotte, Reunion) and the Pacific Ocean, France is one of the few states in the world which can legitimately affirm that it is, by nature, Indo-Pacific (I-P) and there are vital interests since they are linked to its territorial and maritime possessions. Oceanic bicephalism is also included in the orthographic expression of the I-P since a dash links the two maritime facets. This method of writing is also far from being new since it is found in the name of the Indo-Pacific Fisheries Council (IPFC) zone, of which France was the first of the eight founding members to file the instruments of ratification (June 30, 1948). This point of history is not without importance because it reminds us that the term Indo-Pacific is far from being new. It is not intended to be a “hedging strategy” aiming to give another name to its Asian policy or to avoid any alignment in order to maintain strategic leeway. The I-P concept was, in a certain way, “French” well before its rebirth in recent years and its updating by politico-military thinkers. Historically, it is also wrong to say that it was “invented” by the Americans and that to use it would be a follow-up to the policy of the United States. Some Frenchmen, like the oceanographer Raoul Serène (1909 - 1980), also played an eminent role in the establishment of the first I-P institution. Oceanography and wise management of the region were at the heart of the first I-P project bounded by the intertropical zone and promoted by France. Over the course of history, however, there is the passage of a latitudinal construction of the I-P to a longitudinal acceptance. Chronologically, the basis of an I-P approach is not justified by military forces, but by “a common interest in the development and judicious use of living aquatic resources.” The implementation of this objective had to involve cooperation with other international organizations (Article 5) and, in the first place, the United Nations system (FAO). The current geographical definition of the I-P is different from 1948, but the concept has been embodied from the beginning in a dedicated executive body and developed with a declared will to cooperate clearly with the globalized multilateral institutions. A lesson for the future!

Today, in any field, be it security, economic or promoting global public goods, there is still no institution(s) dedicated to I-P, nor a clearly ordered articulation with UN organizations. Aware of this organizational

“vacuum” and the necessity to bring multilateralism to life at the macro-regional level, France has proposed to hold a first Euro-Indo-Pacific forum of Foreign affairs ministers during its presidency of the EU in 2022. Its purpose will be to display the operationalization of the European Union’s concept on defense-security issues, the economy (connectivity) and global challenges (climate, health). This meeting is an affirmation of French and European will to play a major role in the global governance of the I-P and to seek an inclusive and multilateral management free of its 2 antagonistic poles. This is so true that neither the People’s Republic of China (PRC) nor the US were invited. While waiting for its multisectoral implementation, the I-P is often perceived as purely declaratory. This is particularly true if one wants to see in the affirmation of the I-P strategies of the middle powers only a will to exist where the new center of gravity of the planet is to be found, where the History of the world is to be built and where the expressions of supremacy of the two greatest recognized powers “meet.” In such a psychological and geopolitical context, declaring the I-P dimension of its foreign policy is a way of showing that one is in the direction of History. By taking a new look at the Pacific and the world, France needed an innovative vocabulary to say it. For the states attached to their rank, not hesitating to say *urbi et orbi*<sup>1</sup> their intentions to influence world affairs, to say that they have an I-P policy is to emphasize that they cannot be passive actors in international relations, especially where the global world is orchestrated. At a time when certain oracles are proclaiming the decline of Europe and its Member States in the United Nations Security Council, to assert oneself as a proactive and even dimensional actor in the I-P area is to seek to highlight the remanence of its influence, which was once all or part of the empires. It is also implicitly demanding to be associated with the (re)ordering of the world that is taking shape. If the I-P can make the EU more powerful, the Member States and the services of Brussels must guard against displaying ambitions beyond their means, failing which the I-P will show the extent of their weaknesses.

Accepting the I-P concept is anything but a follow-up attitude since it is a question of saying that the powers of yesterday have not given up on changing the course of the world. And to demonstrate that this is indeed not the case, the I-P concept is proclaimed as looking to the future, a vision of the world. To go beyond a tribune dimension, it is declined around multi-country partnerships and on the basis of mobilizing programs, like

1 “to the city (Rome) and the world”— to everyone.

many French and EU public policies. The task is all the more difficult for France because relations between the five French Overseas Territories are distended. They have not experienced any dynamics of rapprochement of the I-P type in recent years. Intra-oceanic synergies between the French Overseas Territories of the Pacific were even quite rare, the Territory of the Wallis and Futuna Islands being somewhat of an exception by having contracted more and more its relations with New Caledonia (December 2003, November 2020) and French Polynesia (February 2019) including in its regional integration component. The statutes, history, internal political stability or even air and sea disconnections had a lot to do with it. It is true that we can speak of a France in the southwest of the Indian Ocean and of a “France-Pacific”, but it seems difficult to speak of a “France-Indopacific” because of its territories. Nevertheless, there is a political will to approach the I-P as a whole. Once again, this is evident in the writing. Whether they come from the French Ministry of the Armed Forces, the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs or the Government, the administrative documents made public speak of partnerships and of France’s strategy in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>2,3,4</sup>

In French, the I-P is written bureaucratically today as a single word. This spelling is far from being insignificant. It carries in itself an area vision, running from the East African coasts to the Oceanic confines, the island of Clipperton in the North Pacific and French Polynesia in the South Pacific. On the scale of the two ocean basins, France is present both north and south of the equator. This singularity means, France has both territories under its sovereignty and/or pre-positioned military forces in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. This factor is unique to it in the Indian Ocean. On the contrary, in the Pacific, France shares with the United States this politico-military particularity, requiring examining all the security dimensions relating to its assets and people but also to submerged territories without permanent populations. For Paris, as for Washington, this requires taking full account of the tyranny of distances as well as of the politico-institutional regimes devolved, over time, to each of the territories. In a way, they have to co-manage part of their foreign policy.

2 La France et la SECURITE en INDOPACIFIQUE, Ministère des Armées, Paris, May 2019, 20 p

3 “Partenariats de La France Dans L’Indopacifique.” [https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/fr\\_a4\\_indopacifique\\_16p\\_2021\\_v7\\_cle4beel.pdf](https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/fr_a4_indopacifique_16p_2021_v7_cle4beel.pdf).

4 [https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/fr\\_a4\\_indopacifique\\_v2\\_rvb\\_cle425385.pdf](https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/fr_a4_indopacifique_v2_rvb_cle425385.pdf)

The conception of I-P and the implementation of the policies it induces can only be modified by the French Overseas Territories. This is particularly true in the Pacific region. Reconciling metropolitan ambitions and interests with those of each of the territories is a real headache, and often an unspoken one. Indeed, the central State must respect the constitutionalized competences of the President of the Government of New Caledonia and the President of French Polynesia, especially in international matters. In the same inclusive spirit, attention must be paid to the deliberative Assembly of the Wallis and Futuna Islands (cf. presidency, regional integration commission), while being aware that the statutory law of 1961 conferred all international competences on the prefect-administrator.

In addition to the parliamentary assemblies, the executive powers of New Caledonia, French Polynesia, and the Territory of the Wallis and Futuna Islands each have a seat in a territorial capacity, as full or associate members in regional political organizations (e.g., Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), Pacific Development Forum (PIDF)), thematic organizations (e.g., Pacific Community (SPC), Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP)) or even UN organizations (e.g., UNESCAP, UNESCO, WHO).<sup>5</sup> This relational skein makes it possible to decline French positions with an “Oceanian” or even “Melanesian” or “Polynesian” tone (e.g., Polynesian Leaders Group (PLG)). The “Melanesian” sound is the most difficult to state, as the political and partisan positions are so divergent according to the communities. In addition, the independence fringe finds itself associated in inter-State fora where “Loyalists” are in principle excluded, and the French State even more. This is particularly the case with the FLNKS at the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) since its founding in March 1988, even if recently the treatment of economic subjects has required a rapprochement with the New Caledonian executive, or even with the Non-Aligned Movement.<sup>6</sup> The place offered to partisan training to the detriment of a broader political platform, not to say more representative, offers it a network of solidarities where sovereign states are the spokespersons not only of a cause but the interests of a single actor on the Caledonian scene, however important it may be. Thus, on October 19, 2021, the Ambassador of Papua New Guinea to the United Nations spoke, on

5 C. Lechervy : L'intégration régionale de la France dans le Pacifique océanien, une diplomatie multimodale, *Le Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, n°140, June 2015

6 The free trade agreement signed on July 29, 2004 between the MSG Member States stipulates in article 3 that a permanent observer status is granted to the FLNKS until New Caledonia becomes a party to this agreement.

behalf of the MSG, before the United Nations Committee on Special Political Affairs and Decolonization in New York to ask France the postponement of the 3rd referendum on the full sovereignty of New Caledonia (December 12, 2021), by taking up the only arguments put forward by the FLNKS. This diplomatic expression reminds us that because of its politico-institutional links with its overseas territories, France is in the I-P region a power “from within” and “from without”. It can be said that it is almost the same for the EU. In the name of the statutes of the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTA) and of the Outermost Regions (ROs) under European law, the island territories wish to embody the EU in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. They are anxious not to be considered as “simples’ partners” of Brussels, in the same way as the states belonging to the Africa - Caribbean - Pacific (ACP) group. To do so, they requested and obtained to be associated with regional projects conducted with sovereign states, in particular in the most important areas (economy, environment). It is, therefore, a new tripartite cooperative scheme France - OCTA (or RUP) - Island State(s), which is currently emerging.

In the Pacific, very clearly, Nouméa and Papeete wish to be relays from the EU to Pacific island states and territories (PICTs) and vehicles for escalating island concerns to Brussels, including on security matters. This reflexive ambition assumes that the EU and its Member States consider French territories as European assets for the Union’s foreign and security policy. Therefore it is a matter of convincing that the French presence in the region makes the EU an actor “resident” of the I-P and “resilient” to an excessive, not to say dangerous, polarization of the region. At the same time, the political leaders of the three French Pacific territories, who still do not work together enough to develop common positions due to the lack of tripartite platforms for exchange, must explicitly state their policies as those of their territory, of France and of the EU, and demonstrate the concrete concordance of the three approaches. This is a task in itself, because there is a constant temptation, including for domestic political reasons, to privilege the most regionalist of the dimensions according to a “pro-Melanesian” or “pro-Polynesian” scheme. Nevertheless, showing one’s primary belonging to the “Oceanian” or “Moana” family is often considered the most essential. At the PIF, it is true that the status of full membership was obtained with a hard fight and very recently (2016) for New Caledonia and French Polynesia. It was the same for the Territory of the Wallis and Futuna Islands; Mata Utu has only been an associated country with the PIF since September 2018. Regional integration is not only political or legal, it is also linguistic and even conceptual. The French

territories of the Pacific are thus all as attached as their neighbors to the Pacific Way. It remains to be seen whether this Oceanian narrative dimension is fully compatible with the I-P projects!

Doctrinally, the question arises in the same way for the ASEAN Way, especially whether Southeast Asia is to be considered as being quite “central” in the I-P area. In the meantime, as far as the nations of the Blue Pacific are concerned, we must be attentive to their way of asserting their “Pacificity.” The Pacific Way being as much an element of identity as a behavioral expression, it expresses a politico-diplomatic language aimed at consensus and the distinction of the geographical area. This vocabulary is expressed in a “calming” spirit, perhaps at the antipodes of an I-P dialectic, more anxiety-provoking, and capable of sending a quasi-warlike message. In some respect, Oceanic terminology is smoother, even easily mirroring the “silky” language of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It does not evolve less. By favoring more and more the semantic and identity expression “Moana” instead of “Pasifika,” certain Oceanic nations, in particular within the Polynesian Triangle, the island states and territories (re)define de facto “their” vision, not to say their expectations of the P pillar of the I-P. In this context, the powers that be that assert themselves as I-P must make this concept that of the different sub-regions. I-P must not simply and mechanically impose itself on PICTs. This narrative must become theirs. The P dimension of I-P is not intended to be driven solely by peripheral powers and, as far as French territories are concerned, by the metropolitan State. In fact, it cannot be strictly State-centered. In order for it to be appropriated by overseas communities, the I-P idea cannot be devoted solely to sovereign areas. It must also respect very hierarchical societies in which seniority continues to play a major role. The appropriation of the I-P by the societies and leaders of New Caledonia, French Polynesia and Wallis and Futuna is absolutely essential for France to have lasting credibility with the sovereign states of Oceania. It is not built only with speeches. They forget each other too quickly. Only co-action offers the opportunity to anchor a “Pacific-France” acting by itself and by the autonomy of its territories. Sensitivities are not just an expression of ego. They remind us that the islanders have their own vision of the world and of “their” region, of their history as well as of their future.

The consequence of these anthropological realities is to encourage the metropolitan State to also think of itself as an island State. By adopting an island perspective, in practice, France finds itself sharing this similarity with less than half of the sovereign states of the I-P. As a counterpoint

to this, the I-P presents a real opportunity for the overseas territories to structure their regional integration policy, alongside France but also Australia, New Zealand, Japan, US or EU. The three French territories in the Pacific, if they are acting as a block of interests and with shared strategies, can both influence regional debates and orchestrate new partnerships, including in the area of soft security.

In the I-P region, France is first and foremost an island power. If this data is demanding for the Metropolitan State, the birth of Asian I-P (cf. ASEAN, Australia, China, South Korea, India, Japan, Taiwan) taking into account the PICTs requires for New Caledonia and French Polynesia to specify, to their inhabitants and their surroundings, their international project. This is a very complicated task when most of the political energies are turned towards the definition of institutional futures and all the hard security issues are in the hands of the central state. For the island states, thinking about the I-P and its Pacific component is not so easy, since the states are faced with “existential” challenges (e.g., collapse of tourism, indebtedness not very sustainable over the time, isolation in the name of the fight against COVID-19, rising sea levels, etc.) and very disruptive in the political life of nations but not necessarily requiring armed forces. We must also not forget the limited human resources that can be devoted to thinking about international relations in general and the I-P in particular. An intellectual effort that is proving to be considerable for states with very limited diplomatic tools and having relays in Asia that generally do not go beyond a few capitals: Tokyo, Beijing or Taipei. In such a pattern of setting up diplomatic missions, I-P exchanges are limited to only one or two Asian partners and three or four Western countries. Cross-linking with ASEAN via the PIF Secretariat is also not very efficient in this regard.

In an I-P project with two oceanic sides and having rejected the idea of apprehending the region under the name of Indo - Asia - Pacific (AIP), the clear and precise definition of the P pillar is imperative in order to understand the inclusiveness or know of the concept. There would be danger in not taking into account the small and micro-states if the P were to mean, for the biggest powers, an Asia-Pacific folded, once again, on its only states bordering on the western rim of the Pacific, forgetting in practice the 23 island states and territories of Oceania. The more we will be clear about the contours of the P, the more certain States (e.g., Fiji, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea) will be able to assert themselves as “bridges” between Oceania and the I-P, starting with Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia. However, this westward vectorialization could be profoundly

undermined if the five Micronesian states quickly leave the PIF. This “Micronesexit” can only have a lasting effect on Oceania’s regionalism, since it will put an end to 30 years of integration. Strategically, its realization will give a very “South Pacific” connotation to the gathering of PIF states and territories, which is not in the political interest of France, especially since the non-sovereign American territories have never found a full place in it, even if it is certainly to the regret of several of their island leaders.

As an inclusive Pacific policy cannot ignore the geopolitical importance of the Micronesian area, France will have to be all the more active in this sub-region, since neither New Caledonia nor French Polynesia maintains very close relations, even if the recent statutory evolutions of the French territories to the PIF owe a lot to the presidents of the Federated States of Micronesia and Nauru. But *ceteris paribus*, no matter how strategically important the Micronesexit is, it will not fundamentally change the way Nouméa and Papeete see their Pacific and I-P integration. New Caledonia, which is much more of a sub-regional hub than French Polynesia, does not hesitate sometimes to call itself a French or even EU “aircraft carrier”, a “bridgehead” or even an “avant-garde” to the Pacific, expressions that are hardly heard on the Polynesian side. Admittedly, the idea of a tricolor “aircraft carrier” cannot be consensual among all the New Caledonian leaders and a fortiori Kanak, for whom the Melanesian identity prevails. Therefore, to slip into a French I-P policy will be all the more complicated, especially if geopolitical subjects are perceived internally as an opportunity for the “Parisian” State to tighten the grip on sovereignty and for the Loyalists to agitate the Chinese threat to the country’s heritage resources. Conversely, French Polynesia will slip more easily into a French I-P strategy, especially if it takes advantage of it and sees itself associated with it in practice, which would, it is true, be a (geo)political and major behavioral with History, the installation of the CEP having been in no way, as the collective memory strongly emphasizes, a co-decision of Fenua with the metropolitan State.

Demonstrating the “strategic” utility of the French territories in Oceania by developing new neighborhood relations and as a relay of vital concerns to Paris or even the EU takes and will take time. In the Pacific, France will therefore remain very close by its territories but also far away, even beyond the confines of the I-P. A two-sided reality, whatever the means committed, political, financial or material! However, the development of the international relations of the overseas territories, although not limited to the peripheral island states, is nevertheless densifying the

fabric of France's exchanges with the Pacific community as a whole. It was partly under pressure from New Caledonian and Polynesian elected officials that the 4th and 5th France-Oceania Summits were held under the presidencies of F. Hollande (Paris, December 26, 2015) and E. Macron (Paris, July 19, 2021). Their weight has forced France to give a regular rhythm to political exchanges at the highest level; a pledge of its determination and commitment in the region.<sup>7</sup> In other words, nearly 60% of the summits bringing together the Heads of State and Government of the Pacific Islands around the President of the French Republic since 2003 have been held between 2015 and 2021, and half of them in Nouméa in a "France - Pacific Community" architecture (November 17, 2014 - May 4, 2018), the headquarters of the SPC being statutorily in Nouméa since 1949 and should stay there. Presidents F. Hollande and then E. Macron have each held four summits with the Oceanian leaders during their term of office. These meetings are very specific to France because these events do not rely on the architecture of the PIF. The France - Oceania summits saw invitations extended to participants from the United States and Japan, Chile and Timor-Leste, as well as to the general secretaries of sub-regional organizations (e.g., MSG, PIDF).

As for the meetings with the heads of state and government of the SPC, these are firsts. Ironically, Paris was during the sixties, seventies and eighties very hostile to give a political dimension to the organization having its seat on its soil, giving the implicit start to the creation of the PIF. France is, therefore, the only partner country of the Pacific Islanders to have built and perpetuated two types of interstate meetings at the Pacific level and to have extended them beyond full participants in the PIF format. What has been developed is bound to last. It was indeed decided to organize a 6th summit France - Oceania from the first part of the presidential mandate 2022 – 2027.<sup>8</sup>

In the I-P region, the Pacific holds a special place since it is the only region where leaders' summits are held at relatively regular intervals in the presence of the French president. In the Indian Ocean, the desire to presidentialize relations was illustrated in 2020 by the revision of the founding

7 The summit was held by video conference. It had been scheduled the previous year in French Polynesia and was postponed due to the spread of COVID-19.

8 The press release of the 5th summit announced the dates of 2023-2024 for the holding of the 6th edition. [https://www.nouvelle-caledonie.gouv.fr/content/download/8432/64941/file/2021.07.19-CONCLUSION\\_DU\\_PRE%CC%81SIDENT\\_DE\\_LA\\_RELATION%CC%81PUBLIQUE\\_DU\\_5E\\_SOMMET\\_FRANCE\\_OCEANIE.pdf](https://www.nouvelle-caledonie.gouv.fr/content/download/8432/64941/file/2021.07.19-CONCLUSION_DU_PRE%CC%81SIDENT_DE_LA_RELATION%CC%81PUBLIQUE_DU_5E_SOMMET_FRANCE_OCEANIE.pdf)

Victoria Agreement in order to give the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) the means to carry out collective actions and to give a statutory place to the summit of heads of State and government. The upcoming synergies of the IOC and France-Oceania or France-Pacific Community leaders' summits will further underline the island dimension of the French approach to I-P. These island dynamics also reflect the extent to which the I-P strategy and partnerships are supported on the French side by the highest figure in the State: the President of the Republic. France's I-P words was solemnized by several speeches by President E. Macron, in particular during his successive trips to New Delhi (March 2018), Sydney (May 2018), Nouméa (May 2018), Tokyo (June 2019), Saint Denis de La Réunion (October 2019) and Papeete (July 2021) or in the foreword given to the government document for the summer of 2021. It is also a double French singularity to have seen the policy expose French I-P both from its metropolitan capital, its island territories and from the capitals of its so-called "strategic" partners (e.g., Australia, India, Singapore) but also through the voice of its Head of State. The French approach is much more assertive at the highest level of governance than that adopted by ASEAN or EU Member States. Many of France's partners have confined the expression of their I-P policy to the level of their Foreign affairs ministers, with heads of State or government being less forthcoming on a subject likely to assert strategic hostility to the rise of the PRC or a lukewarm attitude towards the logic of the alliance implied by the American desire to contain the policies of domination implemented by Beijing.

Over time, the Chinese threat in the I-P and island Pacific region has been highlighted by the President of the Republic. It reached its climax in July 2021. The President of the Republic did not hide, neither during the 5th France - Oceania summit nor during his trip to French Polynesia, his fears of seeing certain islanders increasingly subservient to Chinese interests, to the point of losing all or part of their sovereignty. This language is a message from one Pacific power to another. It nevertheless denotes particular attention to the protection of small and micro island states. In the I-P region, it should not be forgotten that 7.2% of UN member states have a maritime border with France and more than a quarter have oceanic proximity to France. Globally, 68.7% of the States adjoining the French Republic are in the Pacific. In this part of the world, no less than 12 States (2.4 times more than in the Indian Ocean) have a common border with

the French Republic. Unparalleled territorial connectivity since 65% of Oceania States has a maritime limit with France.

In terms of security, France's Pacific policy is linked to the contiguous nature of maritime territories, but with states that for the most part do not have an army to enforce their sovereignty. This reality is particularly significant in Polynesia and gives France and its military command in Papeete (ALPACI) a primary responsibility. The Polynesian centrality is important for the P pillar of the French I-P because one in two countries of the I-P having a territorial demarcation with France have it with French Polynesian territories and French Polynesia is the most populated territory of the sub-region. It represents more than 40% of the population of the non-American Polynesian world. A situation which is not set to change! French Polynesia has a demographic multiplier coefficient 1.5 times higher than its neighbors. But what is less known is that 45% of the states and territories of the Pacific with a French border have it with the Territory of the Wallis and Futuna Islands (Fiji, Samoa, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu). But it is the entire Polynesian area that determines the French I-P identity and its "Pacificity"; not to be forgotten if Franco-Caledonian relations were to be radically transformed, and this even if 15% of the French soldiers based in the I-P region are in New Caledonia.

In Oceania, 72.7% of the Republic's neighbors are Polynesian States or territories in whole or in part. Not only are 25.8% of the countries having a border with France are Polynesians but the kilometers of seafloor of the I-P, which must be taken care of, are overwhelmingly in the Pacific (71.9%) and in French Polynesia for the Pacific basin (56.4%). These physical realities mean that French "indo-pacificity" imposes primary diplomatic attention to oceanic and environmental issues, the Pacific being in many ways the ocean of the Oceanians but also to a certain extent that of the French. In this context, cross-border maritime proximity is an issue.<sup>9</sup> This is why also France is working to see the conclusion, as soon as possible in 2022, of an ambitious new treaty to protect biodiversity beyond national jurisdictions and to recognize areas of the ocean located beyond national jurisdictions as a common resource to be preserved for the benefit of present and future generations. In this context, maritime proximity and cross-border relations are dimension political issues. It is all the more important for France as 15 of the 31 states and territories with a maritime

9 The French coastal lines in the I-P area constitute 57.7% of the French coastline.

border with France are in the I-P region, as it does not hesitate to assert the honorary titles of second highest maritime ranking in the world and the first submarine nation in the world. It has taken care over the last few years (2015, 2019) to define a National Maritime Security Strategy in which it is concerned about the effects of the lack of anticipation in the I-P area of a competition for fishery resources which results in the massive influx of Asian fishing fleets in the South Pacific and is concerned about a Chinese policy which arouses suspicion by its lack of transparency in the scientific research activities on the climate that it carries out there.<sup>10,11</sup>

In addition to their sovereignty missions, the Armed Forces of New Caledonia (FANC) and French Polynesia (FAPF) help to secure the maritime space surrounding French territories by participating in maritime surveillance operations in EEZs and zones of high seas adjacent to PICTs. These actions are conducted in close coordination with Pacific Quad partners (Australia, New Zealand, USA). As such, the 5th France - Oceania summit confirmed the principle of annual coastguard training as part of the exercises of the quadripartite initiative in the Pacific in support of the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA); the first of these courses being held in Papeete at the end of 2021 and the next in Nouméa in 2022.<sup>12</sup> To be more precise, and “to better cope with the predatory logic we are all victims of, I want to boost our maritime cooperation in the South Pacific,” President E. Macron said. In this perspective, he decided to launch a network of coast guards for the South Pacific around three main objectives: information sharing, operational cooperation and training. French forces are also mobilized to respond to natural disasters that strike the region within the framework of the FRANZ mechanism, with Australia and New Zealand. This instrument of civil-military projection has established itself as an effective tool and of very frequent use. This is good news as the recurrence and intensity of disasters increase due to climatic change, of which the

10 France is likely to further expand its I-P maritime area of responsibility. In 2018, she filed a dossier to do so off the Territory of the Wallis and Futuna Islands, French Polynesia, south-eastern New Caledonia and in the Crozet archipelago.

11 *Stratégie nationale de sûreté des espaces maritimes*. December 10, 2019. [https://www.gouvernement.fr/sites/default/files/contenu/piece-jointe/2019/12/snsem\\_2019\\_finale.pdf](https://www.gouvernement.fr/sites/default/files/contenu/piece-jointe/2019/12/snsem_2019_finale.pdf)

12 “Final Declaration - 5th France-Oceania Summit.” 2021. Elysee.fr. July 19, 2021. <https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2021/07/19/final-declaration-5th-france-oceania-summit>.

PICTs are the first victims. The I-P policy of practical action and solidarity also needs to be well integrated into the network of regional institutions.

Since the signing of the Paris Agreements that ended the Third Indochina War just 30 years ago, France has been able to integrate itself in a national capacity in almost all the security forums of the I-P region. It participates in ministerial political meetings (e.g., South Pacific Defense Ministers' Meeting (SPDMM)) as well as in meetings of military hierarchs: chiefs of staff of the armed forces (Indo-Pacific Chiefs of Defense (CHOD)), navy chief at the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS) and Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), high ranking officer to Asia-Pacific Intelligence Chiefs Conference (APICC) or the Asian Coast Guard Agencies Meeting (HACGAM). France has also been involved in regional initiatives such as the Pacific Environmental Security Forum (PESF). This very dense institutional network allows Paris to act both politically and from an operational point of view. These exchange platforms cover not only the PICTs but also quite often Asian continent states. In view of this overlapping, the emphasis on the Pacific pillar is essential because investment in Oceania cannot be interpreted as a simple extension of actions focused on Asia and the management of its stability. By this logic, we should avoid saying as in the past that by acting in this part of the world, we look to Australasia. The I-P is not the synonym of Asia, but the sum of sub-regions requiring institutionalized sub-unit approaches. However, it is important to avoid that multiple minilateral initiatives undermine the possibility of the emergence of an institutionalized I-P space.

The emergence of reticulated maritime information-sharing enclosures is the best example of the juxtaposition of regional institutions. The Information Fusion Center in Singapore has been complemented by the establishment of comparable instruments for the southwest of the Indian Ocean (Regional Maritime Information Fusion Center (RMIFC) in Madagascar), cooperation in the ocean Indian (Information Fusion Center - Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) in Gurugram (India)) and for the Southeast Pacific (Callao (Peru)). It remains to be seen how to fill the missing holes in the I-P space, for example, by creating a Security Information Fusion Center in the Indian Ocean (SIFCIO),<sup>13</sup> or at the entire I-P scale.<sup>14</sup>

13 N. Regaud : From the Pacific Fusion Center to the Security Information Center in the Indian Ocean?, IRSEM, Strategic Brief, October 29, 2020

14 Canyon, Deon, Wade Turvold, and Jim McMullin. 2021. Review of A Network of Maritime Fusion Centers throughout the Indo-Pacific. *Security Nexus* 22 (February). <https://apess.org/>

The same applies to the coordination of humanitarian assistance with the Regional HADR Coordination Center (RHCC) located in Singapore, or to the fusion of open information relating to security issues in the broad sense with the Pacific Fusion Centre created at the initiative of Australia and located in Port Vila.

The sharing of accurate information and developing of shared knowledge on safety and security at sea of all types (e.g., pollution, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU), piracy at sea, illicit trafficking, etc.) at the sub-regional level, reinforces cooperation and confidence between the PICTs and thus facilitates intervention and protection capacities. In addition to the regional role of the armed forces, other police forces in the hands of the French State contribute to integration policies and regional actions. This is notably the case for the police and customs services. Since the end of the 90s, on behalf of its French overseas territories, the State's civil servants have been sitting in most of the regional security organizations. This can be done in the name of two territories (New Caledonia, French Polynesia) as is the case for the meetings of the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police (PICP), of the 3 territorial entities for the Pacific Immigration Development Community (PIDC) and the Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO) or even in the name of France itself (cf. the observer status at the Asia - Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG)).

French participation in these institutions underlines how keen the State is to contribute to regional security, not by sending officials from its capital but by having those who are closest to the realities of the Pacific and work alongside local executives. A State-centered dynamic but which support the indigenization of the police forces and their territorial hierarchies and strengthen relations not only with the riparian states but even more with the countries having significant means of action and investigation, in the first place Australia, New Zealand and the United States. This construction of security cooperation from below makes France and its operational resources a very important partner. In all these fora, France can hope to boast of its peaceful place and seek synergies of action with the EU. However, regionally, France and the EU have conflicting statutes which may raise obstacles in Brussels and/or among EU Member States to the development of common strategies. In certain regional fora, France has a more eminent status than that of EU (e.g., Indian Ocean Commis-

sion (COI), SPC, PIF). It is also the only European Member State in few organizations (e.g., Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF)). At this time, the only exception to this tangle where France is a junior partner to the EU is with ASEAN. The Union is a “dialogue partner” of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and, since December 2020, a “strategic” partner, whereas France can only display a so-called “development partnership” (September 9, 2020). Everywhere else, Paris is justified in emphasizing its partnership history. In order to establish a European dynamic, it must, however, convince itself that it is not using the EU’s I-P strategy for its own purposes and sub-regional interests, that it is not over-militarizing European ambitions and that it is indeed seeking the collective interest in a region perceived as very distant by many Europeans, leaders and citizens. An excessive valuation of I-P through its military naval dimension is not without danger even in the European arena. It risks being taken as a lack of interest in the neighborhood of the EU, which would be unacceptable to many Europeans given the challenges posed by Libya, the recurrent tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean or the Russian forces demonstrations in the North Atlantic and the Baltic Sea. Moreover, some might see this as a neocolonial expression or a renaissance of gunboat policies whose belligerent consequences in the past have left many with bad memories.

The EU, in unveiling its I-P strategy, has indicated its willingness to secure maritime transits, contribute to capacity building, and enhance naval presence in the region. Obviously, some EU States feel a little more distant than others from this part of the world, but all agree that the new regional strategy of the EU can only have positive consequences. However, not all countries will have the same level of commitment but all have an interest in a EU strategy in the I-P mega-region. At the end of 2021, only four Member States (Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, Spain) declared themselves available to send warships to the I-P and thus add to a permanent French naval presence. This shows very limited capacities. However, a coordinated European maritime presence (CMP) in I-P and the Pacific would show that the EU will be a player in regional maritime security. This reinforcement of the operational commitment by ensuring a permanent maritime presence and coverage in the areas of interest established by the European Council, the promotion of new cooperation and partnerships at sea are intended to underline the reliability and sustainability of the Union’s commitments. However, it relies on a limited number of actors, because within the EU, 15% of States do not have a seafloor, 11% are neutral and more than 30% have means that allow them

to intervene mainly along their coastline. In this context, the generation of forces for distant operations is and will be a challenge, a constraint for the EU but also for NATO. The interoperability specific to the I-P, especially at the naval level, will be a new issue as it differs somewhat from the highly standardized transatlantic environment. In any case, Europeans are encouraged to militarize their presence in the I-P, even if the request is not so explicitly formulated. It is almost a prerequisite if Europeans are to exchange intelligence, cyber, anti-submarine warfare and connections of weapon systems with their Allies in the best possible way. This politico-technical dimension gives rise to and will give rise to many transatlantic debates, both from a doctrinal, partnership, operational and equipment supplier point of view. In this regard, President E. Macron called for strategic clarification within NATO, well before the announcement of the establishment of an AUKUS partnership. By declaring “for my part, China is not part of the Atlantic geography, or else my map has a problem”,<sup>15</sup> the French President has clearly set a first limit, while knowing that the action of the PRC is not only deployed in the I-P region but from now on a more global scale, including in the Euro-Atlantic area and with reinforced cooperation with Russia. Beyond its nuclear and ballistic capabilities, the People’s Liberation Army has moved closer to NATO’s priority areas of interest, having installed its soldiers in Djibouti and showing a presence in the Mediterranean and the Baltic.

This westward march of the PRC opened NATO debates on the need for a global alliance. In Brussels, the conviction is emerging that the relevance of NATO for the United States could well be measured by the extent to which it takes into account the Chinese challenge. As a result, there is a new need for EU-NATO exchange platforms on China or EU-US exchanges on the I-P. At the same time, NATO will have to clarify the role of Global Partners from and in the region. The European message in these discussion channels will aim to say that the EU’s I-P strategy does not ignore Chinese challenges and show complacency. In terms of communication, it is about defending European interests while having inclusive strategies, at least where possible. This makes some diplomats and think-tankers say that the EU seeks to propose a “third way” between the logics of exclusive alignment with the United States or the PRC. This formula smacks of Cold War times and deserves to be discussed or even better formulated because it was a dead end especially in Indochina. In the

15 *Le Monde* June 12, 2021

meantime, the upcoming transatlantic discussions on I-P will bring the British and French to the forefront of the European scene, including because these two countries collect intelligence worldwide by their own, are space and nuclear powers, requiring permanent facilities in the I-P region.

Undeniably, London and Paris have common interests in the I-P region. In recent years, both countries have made great efforts, on their own, to develop coherent I-P strategies. Each has been careful not to limit them to expressing their vision of the future and an analysis of the risks. Both sides of the Channel have sought to ground strategic I-P projects in action and planning to bring together allies with local interests. A Franco-British rapprochement makes all the more sense to analysts since both states share a common history with the I-P, have pre-positioned forces there, have signed more or less binding defense agreements, and project common values at the heart of their political systems (i.e. attachment to democracy, freedom of navigation, promotion of the market economy, support for cooperative multilateralism). But if the United Kingdom ignores the EU in the I-P region for much longer, it will complicate the definition of Franco-British coactions. If it withdraws into the Anglosphere, it will be even worse, especially since France, unlike Britain, has never left the Pacific and its institutions. It has simply never claimed to withdraw east of the Suez. In Europe, everyone knows that a Franco-British engine in the I-P can only encourage the other Europeans, starting with Germany, to mobilize resources and to exercise more strategic influence. In Brussels, as in other European capitals, the positioning of London and Paris in the games of transnational organizations will be followed with great attention, especially if the debates to transform the G-7 into a D-10 with Australia, South Korea and India gain in consistency, if multi-party defense agreements are outlined with certain members of the Commonwealth (e.g., Australia, Brunei, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore) or with the Quad. Nevertheless, London's difficulties in implementing Brexit (cf. Northern Ireland, fishing licenses, London's anti-EU narrative,...) and its posture on the AUKUS cloud the prospects for cooperation, especially in the I-P region.

In terms of security architecture, even if we were still a long way from seeing the emergence of an Indo-Pacific Defense Treaty Organisation (IPTO), the announcement of the AUKUS has pushed potential partners further apart, while the I-P doctrines being asserted were gradually bringing them closer together. This is true with London but also with Canberra and Washington. The New Anglosphere Pact has given way to bitterness

and suspicion; states of mind that will last for some time yet. It also sent an inappropriate signal to the EU, both in timing and substance. Apparently despite its global weight, the EU and its Member States are still not considered serious geopolitical players. An attitude without surprise on the part of Great Britain still in its “Brexit” maneuvers but unwelcome on the part of the United States of J. Biden because it immediately generated angry reactions which one would be wrong to believe are only posturing to mark the disappointment of having lost an important commercial contract. France's irritation is all the more understandable since the contract value of its submarines was not so much financial or industrial as the sign of a long-term commitment by an Allied State, the EU only country with significant military forces in the Pacific. With Australia, it was the symbol in front of the I-P of a desire to move from a situation of good neighborliness between two riparian States to that of an affirmation of a politico-military alliance rooted in common interests, a similar understanding of security issues in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and shared democratic values. Around the “Future Submarine Program” (FSP), it is any ecosystem of military cooperation that was involved with, for example, an Australian liaison officer to the FANC or the definition of a five-year cooperation model.<sup>16</sup>

In practice and intellectually, the AUKUS has dissociated partners called upon to come to an understanding, which is bad news for the countries concerned and very good news for those who have hegemonic ambitions or are worried about seeing them appear in the I-P region a synergistic Western approach, especially since they have been working for a long time to divide Europeans and even Westerners on their relations to be maintained with Russia and/or China. These manipulations must be taken seriously so that disinformation activities that could call into question the relevance of the European approach to the I-P are immediately counteracted. The AUKUS, even in its infancy and imprecise as to its articulations with the Quad or with possible new partners, is a strategic game-changer. This is true for France but also for many others (e.g., ASEAN, New Zealand, PRC, South Korea).

As soon as it was announced, this led Paris to refresh its government document on France's I-P strategy, published three months earlier. Strictly speaking, it was not a doctrinal and operational overhaul, but it

16 *Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes* July 26, 2021

demonstrated a willingness to adapt tactically to any new situation. In the longer term, the new Australian-American-British partnership in the Pacific contains in itself implications for the drafting of a military programming law to come into force in 2025 and whose work will be launched shortly after the presidential election of 2022. But as of today, the AUKUS is stimulating the French strategic review because its statement has accentuated the underlying idea since the Obama administration and its refusal to bomb Syria that the United States is, after all, an “unreliable ally”. In addition, the AUKUS partnership was immediately used by the PRC to justify new Chinese politico-military offensives, by overplaying the role of the aggressed power, which cannot be ignored from the point of view of the defense of French interests, particularly in the Pacific.

During the first meeting of China - Pacific island states foreign ministers in October 2021, Wang Yi used the constitution of the AUKUS to denounce an instrument endangering the nuclear-free zone of the South Pacific and pushing the region “on the brink of war”<sup>17</sup> at the same time when for the first time Chinese and Russian warships patrolled together in the western Pacific, thus adding a naval dimension to the joint strategic air patrols scheduled each year since 2019 in-over the East China Sea and the Sea of Japan. In fact, the AUKUS partnership has been integrated by both Washington and Beijing in a logic of blocs, inducing a little more instability in the I-P region and making the Pacific islands a growing issue even as the Australian nuclear propulsion submarine program does not yet exist and the timetable for its launch is very, very uncertain, which is not the least of the paradoxes of Canberra’s choices. Consequently, the Anglosphere but also France found themselves caught more than ever in a squaring of the circle. Indeed, it is a question of both not making the I-P concept a strictly security mobilization tool, while invigorating its defense component so that it can be perceived as a credible affirmation of military commitments at the scale of any the region. In this context of growing geopolitical tensions, the island states will above all seek to protect their individual and collective autonomy and to fully control their Pacific narratives so that they are not dissolved in the I-P issues, at the risk of transposing their most brutal expressions to the heart of the Blue Pacific continent. It would be a mistake to propose a management of the I-P and its P-pillar based on a sum of fears, real or imagined, linked to China’s new globalized ambitions. Nevertheless, Western support for the sovereignty of the PICTs is all the

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more important. This objective is probably shared by Paris and Canberra but the termination of the FSP contract will make it very difficult, at least in the short term, the synergies that France wanted to build with its neighbor. Even the cooperation envisaged in the FIA (France - India - Australia) dialogue will be affected, at least slowed down for some time. Not only will cooperation in the South Pacific be affected, but it is a good bet that other irritants have diminished in recent years (cf. the EU-Australia free trade agreement, the place of coal in the Australian energy policy, New Caledonia, etc.) will reappear, underlining the capacity for harm from one to the other. Not only will a geographical segment of I-P be disrupted, but its absence carries an even greater risk by encouraging the construction of an I-P policy based on a few partners, first and foremost India, Japan as a second partner and even a few South-East Asian nations (e.g., Indonesia, Singapore).<sup>18</sup> This de facto deconstruction of an overall Indo-Pacific approach in favor of an imaginary axis linking three to four capitals, each of which would be the center of a sub-regional effort, would be a return to privileged partnerships with hardly any knock-on effects on an I-P scale, and even less so on a global level.

Not only has the announcement of the AUKUS so soon after the unilateral and disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan shaken the confidence of a key US ally, but it requires Washington to simultaneously pursue a policy of containment of China while rebuilding trust with its only European Ally with the will, the capacity for immediate politico-military action and the determination to act in the operational theatres farthest from its territory. A partner which also trains its armed forces with those of the region in an extended format and deploys first rank military resources.<sup>19,20</sup> Fortunately for Washington and for Canberra that the geopolitical and Pacific interests of France are in no way aligned with those of China and that Paris does not hide seeing in the communist regime a “competitor” and a “systemic rival”. A long-term commitment, transcribed in the Treaty of Manila (1954), which was demonstrated even with weapons in hand

<sup>18</sup> Tertrais, Bruno, and Michel Duclos. 2021. Review of *Après AUKUS - Comment Relancer Notre Stratégie Indopacifique ?* Institut Montaigne. October 4, 2021. <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/blog/apres-aukus-comment-relancer-notre-strategie-indopacifique>.

<sup>19</sup> The joint biennial exercise *Croix du Sud* organized by the FANC in 2018 mobilized more than 2,000 soldiers from 11 countries.

<sup>20</sup> e.g., *Quad* exercise in March 2021 with a helicopter carrier or the large-scale joint maneuver with Japan, Australia and the United States in May 2021 on the island of Kyushu with ships and, for the first time, ground forces.

in Indochina, Korea or on the occasion of sales of strategic superiority weapons to Taiwan (e.g., frigates, Mirage 2000-9, observation satellite,...). While this is not set to change, debates over I-P policy are no less deeply agitated and likely to be for a long time. They are not just the preserve of a few experts. They invited themselves to the parliamentary and partisan field. As I-P has been one of the foreign policy markers of President E. Macron's first term, the AUKUS and the manner in which discussions on the FSP program were brought to an end have become matters of French domestic politics. They even appeared as a component of the dialectic of opposition to the potential president-candidate, from the government left to the extreme right. The virulent debates that have been orchestrated since mid-September 2021 have, however, revealed several points of consensus on the fact that France has not been treated as a valuable trusted partner, a provider of security in the Indo-Pacific and that it has been deceived in particular by the highest Australian politico-administrative officials.

Even if foreign policy is rarely, if ever, a very profitable theme during election campaigns, one cannot underestimate that for a candidate-President diplomatic implementation is an element of his credibility and his legitimacy in front of all his opponents in search of a first supreme mandate. The diplomatic crisis born of AUKUS shook two narratives at the heart of the 8th President of the Fifth Republic's foreign policy: the one on the I-P but also the one devoted to the rise of a united Europe. Its echo will only be more lasting because these two axes are not intended to be substantially corrected for a long time. While the AUKUS is still a poorly identified object, it has become an essential subject in the development or even the implementation of the I-P policies of tomorrow. It is, therefore, all the more urgent that Washington, Canberra and even London define its outlines, starting with their closest Allies. Strategic surprises between Allies are the worst off when you have the same geopolitical concerns.

# Evolving Security Framing in the Pacific: Connecting the Local with the Regional

*Prof. Meg Keen and Dr. Henry Ivarature*

The recent confluence of COVID, cyclones and civic unrest in the Pacific islands has added to existing security and development challenges. The cross-sectoral and multi-jurisdictional nature of these security threats create pressures and impacts that bleed across national jurisdictions, ministerial responsibilities and levels of government. To deal with the transborder security issues and national responses, regional strategies have been used to frame security challenges related to resilience, security, and an expanded range of climate, human and transnational issues. In particular, the Blue Pacific security narrative recognizes the connectivity of the region, its valuable but vulnerable maritime resources, and the merits of coordinated action. It also acknowledges the centrality of Pacific culture and identity to security and the need to tailor action to national and community contexts and cultures.

The regional framing of security issues provides a conceptual basis for national policy action and regional coordination. To date, the framing has had a high level of continuity with respect to issues raised and capacity constraints recognized. In 1997 the Pacific Island Forum's (PIF) *Aitutaki Declaration on Regional Security Cooperation* noted that achieving regional and national security would require attention to “national disasters, transnational crime . . . and economic, social and environmental policies.” It acknowledged the need for

good governance, strong coordination and better management of external threats. The attention to the security-development nexus has been echoed in other regional declarations such as the Honiara Declaration on Law Enforcement Cooperation (1992), Biketawa Declaration (2000) and the Boe Declaration on Regional Security (2018). The challenge has been translating the declaratory words into action.

The Boe Declaration is the most explicit about the range of security challenges, the primacy of climate security threats and the institutional and geopolitical challenges ahead. It explicitly takes account of the interplay between security and development with its strong focus on human and environmental security. Subtly, the Boe Declaration is a challenge to external security narratives which focus predominantly on law and order and geopolitics. By explicitly endorsing the expanded concept of security inclusive of climate, human, environment/resource, and traditional security (i.e., cybersecurity, transnational crime), it creates a regional and national platform for action that is more cognizant of human security issues and committed to integrated and multi-sectoral approaches.

Like all PIF declarations, the Boe Declaration is not legally binding on nations, but it lays the foundations for action via the Boe Declaration Action Plan overseen by the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and creates a hook for national action via the commitment of all Forum Island Countries (FICs) to produce and implement National Security Strategies (NSS). The dual regional-national commitment to action is important because it provides a coordination mechanism among countries to promote complementarity between regional – national levels of action. A few NSSs have now been produced (Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu), and several are in development (e.g., Cook Islands, Fiji, Palau, and Tonga). The NSSs cover the expanded security agenda, incorporate views from extensive local consultations, and establish the institutional mechanism to better coordinate security-development agendas. They are one more

step toward a more assertive and proactive Pacific approach to security and give us insights into priorities and challenges ahead.

Outside the NSS, there are advances in security interventions that humanize and contextualize the security agenda, giving greater attention to the local dynamics affecting voice, identity and power. The current Secretary General of the PIF, Henry Puna, has in the past called for an application of “island sense”<sup>1</sup> when dealing with development and security issues, that is taking account of cultural and social values which are often the glue of Pacific communities and central to their security. Scholars familiar with the contested and diverse terrain of the region have also made the case for a more nuanced, localized and culturally sensitive approach to security.<sup>2</sup> Recent progress in localizing and integrating Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) responses provide insights for more inclusive and contextual security practices;<sup>3</sup> as do advances in networked policing inclusive of customs, immigration, private and community sectors, as well as traditional leaders.<sup>4</sup>

Beyond national borders, Pacific leaders are working to shape the global security narrative to advance national and regional priorities. Leaders are actively challenging the minimal engagement of the Pacific in the now dominant Indo-Pacific security framing and the implications for Pacific voice and power, questioning who is setting the security agenda.<sup>5</sup> There have been concerns about the efforts of

1 Puna H. 2014. PM’s speech at the second plenary meeting of the third international conference on small island developing states (SIDS), Samoa.

2 C.f. Ratuva S. 2019. *Contested Terrain: Reconceptualising Security in the Pacific*. ANU Press, Canberra.

3 Keen M, Sanderson D, Osbourne K, Deo R, Faith J and Ride A. 2021. *Putting People First: Area Based Approaches to Disaster Response in the Pacific, Fiji, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands – Regional Synthesis*. Australia Pacific Security College, ANU, Canberra. Available at: <https://pacificsecurity.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ABAs-in-the-Pacific-Resilience-Report-April-2021.pdf>

4 C.f. Dinnen S and Walton G. 2021 Networked Security: Public Police, Private Security and the Changing Shape of Security Governance in PNG. Special Edition: *Perspectives on Pacific Security: Future Currents*. Development Bulletin 82. Pp 145-150; Watson D, Sousa-Santos J and Howes L. 2021. Transnational and Organised Crime in Pacific Island Countries and Territories: Police capacity to respond to security threat. Special Edition: *Perspectives on Pacific Security: Future Currents*. Development Bulletin 82. Pp 151-154. Available at: <https://pacificsecurity.net/resource/development-bulletin-82/>

5 Tuilaepa, S M. 2018. Speech by the Hon Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi on Pacific Perspectives

Western powers to contain geopolitical competition with inadequate consultations with Pacific governments.<sup>6</sup> The Pacific response has been to increase their assertiveness and independence in regional and global diplomacy<sup>7</sup> especially in the areas of climate and ocean security, and to diversify coalitions and networks that can advance their security concerns.

This chapter reviews the high levels of continuity in the framing of security issues in the Pacific reflected in regional declarations and selected national development strategies and the prominence given to the nexus between security and development. It examines national security strategies and policies for their insights into Pacific security priorities and institutional challenges to shaping the security agenda. Finally, we consider the issues and processes used to project Pacific regional and national security perspectives into regional and global forums and the successes and barriers. This review makes clear that the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) are increasingly proactive in setting regional and national security agendas, but challenges remain with respect to rigid institutional arrangements, resource gaps and the politicization of the security agenda.

## Pacific Security Themes: More Continuity than Change

Pacific security concerns have been remarkably consistent since the seventies when most PICs gained independence. A review of key regional security declarations reveals a consistent balancing of ‘hard’ (law and order) security issues and soft ‘human’ security issues. Geopolitical contestation is often framed as part of the security context which is ‘crowded and complex’ and presents both threats and opportunities to be managed by sovereign nations. Box 1 (see page 96) gives a snapshot of how security issues have

on the New Geostrategic Landscape. Lowy Institute, Sydney. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/speech-hon-prime-minister-tuilaepa-sailele-malielegaoi-pacific-perspectives-new>

6 Taylor M. 2018 ‘Keynote Address by Secretary General Meg Taylor to the 2018 State of the Pacific Conference’, 8 September 2018, Canberra, Australian National University; Wallis, J. 2020. How Should Australia Respond to China’s Increased Presence in the Pacific Islands? *Security Challenges*. 16(3): 47-52.

7 Fry G and Tarte S. 2015, ‘The new Pacific diplomacy: An introduction’, in G Fry and S Tarte (eds), *The New Pacific Diplomacy*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, pp. 3-19.

consistently ranged across the ‘expanded security agenda’. The existential threat of climate change has been recognized by PICs for over two decades, as has the interplay between different types of security. Woven in amongst security declarations, speeches and policies is the consistent drive to humanize the security agenda by integrating traditional and non-traditional security, dealing with issues of voice, identity, power and location, and framing security as integral to sustainable development.

The challenge has been, and remains, the translation of these regional security declarations and policies into action. The Boe Declaration attempts to deal with this translation gap through an ambitious regional action plan and the leaders’ commitment to develop and implement NSSs. NSSs are still few, but those that have been produced by Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu reflect the Boe Declaration’s expanded concept of security and regional commitments to the broad goals, often repeated in regional declarations, of ‘sustainable development, security, resilience and prosperity’ — that is seeing security as part of a development agenda.

All national security strategies put the security-development nexus at their center and are multi-sectoral in their coverage but have yet to gain traction. There are lessons to learn from the 2013 PNG National Security Policy (PNG NSP) that preceded the Boe Declaration and subsequent NSS. While the PNG NSP clearly stated that “security enhances development whilst development entails comprehensive security” and committed the government to greater action on priority issues inclusive of law and order, corruption, human rights and gender abuses, border control and environmental disasters, what was lacking were clear responsibilities for action, adequate resourcing and supportive institutional arrangements.<sup>8</sup> In a 2017 Lowy Institute analysis of security threats affecting PNG, many of these security concerns raised in the PNG NSP persisted and indeed have been raised regularly in recent reflections by PNG nationals.<sup>9</sup> Despite the shortcomings, the PNG NSP set a template

<sup>8</sup> The government of PNG. 2013. PNG National Security Policy. PNG Government, Port Moresby, p 4.

<sup>9</sup> Dinnen, S 2017. *Internal Security in PNG: Trends and Prospects*. Lowy Institute, Sydney.

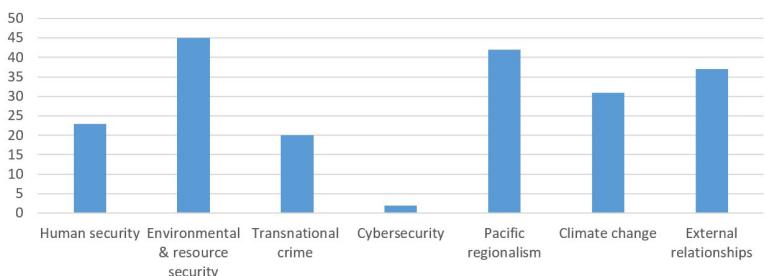
### **Box 1: Pacific Voices - Security Issues in PIF Leaders' Declarations**

Over the last 50 years, the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Declarations have dealt with a wide range of security themes (see chart below). The most recent Declaration dealing directly with regional security, the Boe Declaration, explicitly recognizes the 'expanded concept of security', but this is not new. The Pacific security lens has always been 'expanded' and reached far beyond issues of national border protection, law and order, and geopolitics.

Climate change has been recognized as a major security challenge for over three decades. Since it was first mentioned in the 1988 PIF Leaders' Declaration, climate change has been high on the security agenda, when it was noted that "The Forum expressed concern about climatic changes in the South Pacific and their potential for serious social and economic disruption in countries of the region."

Unsurprisingly, resource and environment security have consistently been raised in Leaders' Declarations given the strong cultural associations with land and water, and thriving subsistent economies. Similarly, the desirability of collective action has also been regularly recognized, if not always translated into action. Even geopolitics and donor engagement/external relationships have figured large — but in recent times the challenges of balancing external and internal agendas have been far more assertively advanced.

Security References in PIF Leaders' Declarations



New security issues are creeping into the Declarations in recognition of a globally connected and digitized world that is reaching its tentacles into the Pacific, creating development opportunities (e.g., cybersecurity and transnational crime).

Note: Only themes that had significant text were recorded in this rapid assessment, not those security issues merely in a list or just mentioned in passing.

*Source:* M Keen. 2021. Security through a Pacific Lens. Pacific Development Bulletin. 82: 5-11. Available at: <https://crawford.anu.edu.au/rmap/devnet/devnet/DB82-final-manuscript-23-02-21.pdf>

for nations to address the expanded security concept, give a high priority to domestic security (getting your own house in order first) and consider how best to manage the interplay between domestic and external security. It was unambiguous about the importance of a ‘people-centered’ focus and human security issues. Most subsequent NSSs have built on this foundation.

To achieve greater traction and ownership, the NSSs produced in response to the Boe Declaration have all involved extensive government and community consultation. Efforts have been made to conduct a nationally owned and negotiated process, often extending over a year and reflective of the Pacific Talanoa approach.<sup>10</sup> For example, in the Solomon Islands, the consultation process began early in 2018 and concluded in 2019; it included at least two rounds of consultations with provinces and communities, as well as national government agencies. Those responsible for the Solomon Islands’ NSS intend it to be a ‘living document’ and to continue with community engagement throughout its implementation.

The themes covered in the NSSs are consistent with the Boe Declaration, but the nuance and context are evident. For example, the Vanuatu NSS links security and development through reference to key development policies — Vanuatu National Sustainable Development Plan, and the 2015 UN Sustainable Development Goals — and, to the importance of culture and valued social institutions. It endorses “our culture, traditional knowledge and Christian principles.”<sup>11</sup> Within the NSS, the role of chiefs, churches and communities in enforcing the rule of law and social cohesion is acknowledged. The Strategy also does not shy away from issues of customary land and cultural security issues. Like other NSSs, it focuses on the domestic and then projects outward, with a key objective to secure national sovereignty, assets, infrastructure and institu-

Available at: <https://interactives.lowyinstitute.org/archive/png-in-2017/png-in-2017-internal-security-png-trends-prospects.html>; Ivarature, H 2021. COVID-19 Reconfiguration of human security relations between state and society: The Papua New Guinea experience, *Development Bulletin*, no. 82, pp.75-78.

10 Halapua, S. 2002. *Talanoa helps rebuild unity in Fiji*. East-West Centre, Honolulu.

11 Salwai, C. 2019. *Launching of the Vanuatu National Security Strategy*. Independence Park, Port Vila.

tions, and to convey Vanuatu’s national interests globally. Work still needs to be done internally to build ownership, coordinate action, and strengthen implementation capacity, but the basis for action is set.

Regional and national security strategies nearly all acknowledge that intersectoral cooperation is hindered by weak institutional arrangements. The Samoan NSP (2018) supports a ‘whole of government approach’ and has established an interagency coordinating mechanism — the National Security Committee. The Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have also made similar arrangements, with Solomon Islands also advancing legislation to support implementation — concerned that relying on an executive order to underpin the NSS could create vulnerability when governments and priorities change. Inter-agency institutions have the potential to improve information flows, data sharing and external intervention coordination, as has been positively demonstrated by the HADR inter-agency coordination clusters.<sup>12</sup> In the case of the National Security Committees, it is too early to judge their effectiveness, but their oversight by peak government agencies with coordination capacity is an advantage. For example, Samoa’s National Security Council, arguably one of the most advanced, is overseen by the Ministry of Prime Minister and Cabinet; in Vanuatu, responsibility rests with the powerful Ministry of Internal Affairs; and, in Solomon Islands, the National Security Council will be housed in the Prime Minister’s Office.

External forces that can destabilize are also addressed, such as transnational crime, cyber crime and the repatriation of criminals, but largely in reference to domestic impacts on community security, safety and culture. To protect national interests from external pressures, the value of a ‘rules-based international order’ and collaborations to strengthen border protection are endorsed in nearly every NSS. Engagement with Pacific regional agencies is frequently affirmed, but there is less attention on how to influence the wider international institutions. Samoa invites those implementing its

12 For an overview of the UN Cluster system see: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/coordination/clusters/what-cluster-approach>. This approach has been used in the Pacific and coordinated through the National Disasters Management Offices. Evaluations have been positive, albeit with room for improvement, see Keen et al 2021 above.

strategy to learn from its own strong leveraging of coalition diplomacy to advance climate change and sustainable development (e.g., SAMOA Pathway regional conference), its articulation of security priorities in the Indo-Pacific, and its engagement with regional agencies.

All of these PICs face the same challenges of operationalizing the NSSs, getting over the culture of working in silos, building intelligence and capacity, and sustaining resourcing to translate words into action. In Solomon Islands, legal and institutional arrangements to support NSSs are only slowly evolving given competing development and policy challenges. In PNG, the challenge remains coordination between the different state agencies and key stakeholders. While NSSs are given political support in their initial stages, sustaining commitment in the face of changing political priorities and security policy proliferation remains a challenge, further complicated by the need to also maintain support across sectors, provincial and local jurisdictions. The NSSs are a start to articulate and advance national security priorities; making more sustained progress will benefit from learning from successful security initiatives in the region.

### **Moving the Domestic Security Agenda Forward**

What the above overview highlights is that naming security problems is one step. The next step of taking action is much harder. While the strong interrelationship between security and development is acknowledged in regional and national policy, in practice the two often remain stubbornly separated by institutional bodies, political interests and intervention mechanisms. Security and development initiatives are largely conceptualized and implemented through the lens of state mechanisms and drivers of change which can be at odds in a region where formal institutions have limited reach and community inclusion is integral to success.<sup>13</sup> The drivers of insecurity often have their roots in socio-economic relationships,

<sup>13</sup> Osbourne J, Kenni L, Abraham S et al. 2020. *A moment in Time: COVID, Localisation and the Pacific*. DevPolicy Blog, December 17, 2020. Available at: <https://devpolicy.org/a-moment-in-time-covid-localisation-and-the-pacific-20201217/>

and thus a state-centric approach without community engagement can falter.

Local commentators point out that governments often prefer to externalize security and development issues — both blame and response — and neglect the deep socio-economic and cultural drivers of instability.<sup>14</sup> For example, in the 2021 Solomon Islands riots, the government evoked the 2017 bilateral security treaty with Australia to access external support to quell riots across Honiara, stemming from deep-seated discontent about the recognition of China, accusations of government corruption, and anger about growing inequalities and social exclusions. The more problematic domestic drivers of instability are recognized in the Solomon Island NSS but effectively dealing with them through policy and strategies remains difficult.

Government reports following social unrest in the Solomon Islands have repeatedly highlighted human and domestic security issues related to weak central governance, corruption in government and the resource sector, land disputes, uneven economic development affecting youth opportunities and widening ethnic divisions.<sup>15</sup> Only domestically driven processes can resolve these issues; not external fixes. The enduring solutions are local, requiring integrated efforts across the expanded security agenda and social engagement.

Localized responses to security issues can provide a deeper reflection on culture and strength-based responses. A survey of employees to the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) which extended from 2004–2017 highlighted the value of taking better account of culture and community when dealing with

14 Aqorau, T. 2021. Solomon Islands' *Slippery Slide to Self-implosion*. DevPolicy Blog, ANU, Canberra. Available at: Available at: <https://devpolicy.org/solomon-islands-slippery-slide-to-self-implosion-20211125/>

Ride, A. 2021. *Solomon Islands Security – Blame and Breakable Gifts After the Riots*. Australian Institute of International Affairs, Canberra. <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/solomon-islands-security-blame-breakable-gifts-after-riots/>

15 C.f. Solomon Islands government. 2009. *Commissioner of Inquiry into the April 2006 Honiara Civil Unrest in Honiara*. Available at: [https://www.parliament.gov.sb/files/library%20and%20information/commision\\_of\\_inquiry/Commission\\_of\\_Inquiry.pdf](https://www.parliament.gov.sb/files/library%20and%20information/commision_of_inquiry/Commission_of_Inquiry.pdf)

security in order to improve justice, development and governance outcomes, particularly by involving local chiefs and church leaders.<sup>16</sup> As noted in a report on the legacy and lessons of RAMSI: “Culture matters to policing and can affect relationships between receiving and visiting forces. Perhaps there needed to be more attention to the relationship between culture, and law and order.”<sup>17</sup> This is a theme picked up in the Solomon Islands NSS but the mechanisms to make this a reality are only slowly evolving as Pacific nations break away from the shackles of neocolonial and Western approaches to policing and law and order, and evolve more contextually appropriate approaches of community policing.

Moving the domestic security agenda forward will also require all to make room for local leadership and voice. The same RAMSI report highlighted above argued that the Pacific was ready and wanting to take a stronger role. Often it takes a crisis to make change. The strengthening of locally-led HADR occurred in response to the closed borders following COVID.<sup>18</sup> Critical reviews of performance following cyclones noted stronger local leadership of disaster response with one evaluation claiming that institutional arrangements and capacity have been enhanced and effective; there will be ‘no turning back’.<sup>19</sup> Strong coordinating mechanisms such as the National Disaster Management Offices, community-based response

16 Australian Government, UNDP. 2019 Access to Justice Study: Solomon Islands. Available at: <https://www.pacific.undp.org/content/pacific/en/home/library/eg/SOI-A2J-study-report.html>

17 Putt J, Dinnen S, Keen M, and Batley J. 2018. The RAMSI Legacy for Policing in the Pacific Region. Department of Pacific Affairs, ANU, Canberra. Available at: <https://dpa.bellschool.anu.edu.au/experts-publications/publications/5956/ramsi-legacy-policing-pacific-region>

18 Osbourne J, Kenni L, Abraham S et al. 2020. A moment in Time: COVID, Localisation and the Pacific. DevPolicy Blog, December 17, 2020. Available at: <https://devpolicy.org/a-moment-in-time-covid-localisation-and-the-pacific-20201217/>

Keen M, Sanderson D, Osbourne K, Deo R, Faith J and Ride A. 2021. Putting People First: Area Based Approaches to Disaster Response in the Pacific, Fiji, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands – Regional Synthesis. Australia Pacific Security College, ANU, Canberra. Available at: <https://pacificsecurity.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ABAs-in-the-Pacific-Resilience-Report-April-2021.pdf>

19 Humanitarian Advisory Group. 2020. No Turning Back: Local leadership in Vanuatu’s response to Tropical Cyclone Harold. Humanitarian Horizons Practice Paper Series, VANGO and HAG, Melbourne. Available at: [https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/TC-Harold-Practice-Paper\\_final-electronic.pdf](https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/TC-Harold-Practice-Paper_final-electronic.pdf)

networks, and NGO-government agencies' partnerships are making a positive difference. External interventions are becoming better aligned with local systems, with initiatives such as the Australian Humanitarian Partnership improving coordination and inclusion in the NGO sector. Domestically, strengthening resilience further will depend on ongoing enhancements of regional-national-local linkages and management systems, data sharing, and applying lessons from past disaster responses effectively to future efforts.<sup>20</sup>

## **Learning from Regional Security Successes**

Advances in localization and leadership in the Pacific are reflective of a transformation from a posture of victimhood in the face of global security pressures to one of agency and determination to shape the context and the future. Increasingly, the Pacific is taking the lead in proposing changed institutional arrangements and global actions to manage security risks of greatest concern to it. This was recently demonstrated in the strong PIF 2021 Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the Face of Climate Change<sup>21</sup> that pushed for global action to affirm national sovereignty over exclusive economic zones even if land territories are lost as a result of rising sea levels from climate change — a security impact beyond the control of small island states. There has also been strong advocacy at global climate summits and the first 2017 global Ocean Summit, which Fiji co-hosted and all subsequent ones, where PICs are advancing their own security agendas.

One of the Pacific's greatest security successes in managing transboundary security threats is the collective approach to protecting and managing tuna fisheries and minimizing the damaging

20 Keen M, Sanderson D, Osborne K, Deo R, Faith J and Ride A. 2021. *Putting People First: Area-based Approaches to Disaster Response in the Pacific Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu Regional Synthesis report*. Australia Pacific Security College, ANU, Canberra. Available at: <https://pacific-security.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ABAs-in-the-Pacific-Resilience-Report-April-2021.pdf>

21 Marinaccio J. 2022. How the Pacific Climate Diplomacy is Changing. *Asia and the Pacific Policy Forum*. January 22, 2022. Available at: <https://www.policyforum.net/how-pacific-climate-diplomacy-is-changing/>

effects of geopolitical jostling.<sup>22</sup> The Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) and the PIF Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) leveraged a legally binding decision-making regime, strong collaboration, better surveillance/regulation and evidence-based management to impose a regionally driven rules-based order on external fishing nations operating in its waters.

Key to the success is regional-national linkages through the provision by FFA and the Pacific Community of technical assistance to member countries to implement strong fisheries policy and management, and advocate for fisheries security. Other security issues could benefit from consideration of this institutional and evidence-based approach that sparked and maintained strong political support. Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing still accounts for significant economic losses, about \$43 million per annum, but this is significantly reduced from estimates from five years ago — partially due to more accurate assessments, but also improved information sharing, regulation, management coordination and partnerships.<sup>23</sup> Strong regional coalitions were also key to advancing pacific resource security priorities to the Western Pacific region, and internationally.

In the more traditional security realm, the regional Pacific Transnational Crime Network (PTCN) and the 28 national Transnational Crime Units across 20 member nations in the Pacific have been key to building capacity and information sharing. External security challenges are rising faster than the Pacific and their partners, Australia and New Zealand, can respond, and all indications are the pressures will rise as Pacific countries become not just a transit area for crime but also a destination.<sup>24</sup> Despite the rising crime trends,

22 Tarai J. 2016. The New Pacific Diplomacy and the South Pacific Tuna Treaty. In G Fry and S Tarte. The New Pacific Diplomacy. ANU-USP, Suva, pp 237-284; Aqorau T. 2016. How Tuan is Shaping Regional Diplomacy. Ibid. pp 223-236 .

23 MRAG Asia Pacific 2021. The Quantification of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing in the Pacific Island Region – a 2020 Update. Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/52a9273ae4b07fa2610392dd/t/61b7e62aa1cb747d1e6824c0/1639441975812/ZN2869+-+FFA+IUU+2020+Update+-+final.pdf>

24 UNODC 2016. Transnational Organized Crime in the Pacific: A Threat Assessment. Available at: [https://www.unodc.org/documents/southeastasiaandpacific/Publications/2016/2016.09.16\\_TOCTA\\_Pacific\\_web.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/southeastasiaandpacific/Publications/2016/2016.09.16_TOCTA_Pacific_web.pdf)

the PTCN has made a positive difference. Greater institutional integration and information sharing has been key. Improvements are continuing. In 2018, the Pacific Island Chiefs of Police, Oceania Custom Organization, and the Pacific Immigration Development Community recently signed a Declaration of Partnership aimed at improving information sharing, interoperability and capacity across the region and within member countries. This integrated and co-operative approach has the potential to boost national capacity and combat regionally rising drug, counterfeit goods and human trafficking crimes. Importantly, it is a pivot to a more proactive orientation rather than a reactive one.

The constant challenges when considering Pacific security issues are the institutional weaknesses in managing regional and domestic security threats, ephemeral political commitment, coordination between and within scales and institutional architecture that can build capacity and responsibility to act. While much can be done domestically and regionally, security and development partnerships will be key.

### **The Geopolitics of Security: Opportunity or Threat?**

PICs are increasingly assertive in projecting their security concerns beyond their region, but they and their partners still need to open up opportunities for greater engagement in key security dialogues affecting the region. The Boe Declaration and Blue Pacific framing remain disconnected from the externally defined Indo-Pacific security narrative — the former are driven by security-development priorities of the Pacific and the latter by countering China's rising influence in the region and the protection of the status quo among regional powers. While there are tensions and discontinuities between these security narratives, there are also opportunities for “the Pacific states to drive their agenda by leveraging the complementary security interest of major external powers in the region”.<sup>25</sup>

25 Tarte S. 2021. Reconciling Regional Security Narratives in the Pacific. *Regional Outlook Paper No 65*. Griffith Asia Institute, Brisbane, p 8.

These security complementarities and contrasts are briefly explored in this section.

The pursuit of a ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy’ has met with some pushback from PICs who are skeptical that their interests are being included in the new framing of the region. Former Samoa Prime Minister Tuilaepa noted, “There has been a reluctance to engage in open discussions on the issue [the privileging of Indo over the Pacific] and to share information to assist us in decision making”<sup>26</sup> The former Secretary General of the PIF, Dame Meg Taylor, also voiced similar concerns: “I find it so offensive that all of a sudden the region that we all come from is defined by people who are great military powers, who have no consideration for the peoples in the region, or our governments in the Pacific, and the lack of deep consultations”<sup>27</sup> While these are strong markers, they leave open the possibility to advance a common security agenda, if narrative development is more inclusive.

The Pacific framing of security issues in the region, the *Blue Pacific*, could complement the Indo-Pacific security narrative with the common interests in maritime, border and sovereign security. Finding common ground has been hindered by the exclusion of Pacific island countries from important dialogues. To enhance their influence on the global stage, Pacific Island countries have formed diverse coalitions with likeminded interests, including the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), the Non-Aligned Movement, the UN Asia-Pacific group and G77 and niche groups such as the Coalition for High Ambition, a group of over 60 countries committed to strong climate action. Their goal is to project their security

26 Tuilaepa, S M. 2018. Speech by the Hon Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi on Pacific Perspectives on the New Geostrategic Landscape. Lowy Institute, Sydney. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/speech-hon-prime-minister-tuilaepa-sailele-malielegaoi-pacific-perspectives-new>

27 Henry Ivarature. 2021. Creating an Inclusive Indo-Pacific . Policy Forum. Canberra: Asia and Pacific Policy Forum, Crawford School of Public Policy, ANU. <https://www.policyforum.net/creating-an-inclusive-indo-pacific/>

priorities regionally and globally, and to shape the way security issues are framed and addressed.

Partnerships for security and creating a vibrant and genuine Pacific security family is still a work in progress, and requires more opportunities for the Pacific nations to contribute and shape regional security narratives and interventions. The foundations exist. There are joint maritime exercises, joint activities to protect and monitor regional fisheries, collaboration on the supply and operation of Pacific patrols and aerial surveillance, cooperation on maritime trans-national crime, and much more. The difficulty is that the motivation for engagement, and thus the investments, are often driven by external power interest and finance. Since the seventies, external powers, especially Australia and New Zealand, have long seen security in the Pacific region through a lens of their own security interests.<sup>28</sup>

Some shifts in how security is viewed open the door a crack for greater integration of the Pacific expanded concept of security and its preference for a strong development-security nexus. The QUAD (a strategic Indo-Pacific group composed of United States, India, Japan and Australia) is moving toward a more expanded security agenda that, although highly focused on countering China's influence in the Indo-Pacific. Recently it has shifted from a strongly focused traditional security agenda to activities that support regional responses to COVID and vaccine distribution, climate action and critical technologies – all greatly needed in Pacific countries. The recent QUAD Plus included representatives from New Zealand, South Korea and Vietnam to consider security responses in the region to the pandemic<sup>29</sup> — PICs, however, have not (yet) been included.

Not sitting back passively, the PIF has as part of its planned Boe Declaration actions, an ambition to hold a regional security dialogue to broaden and align security thinking affecting the region. When PNG hosted the APEC meeting in Port Moresby, many PICs

28 G Fry. 2019. *Framing the Islands: Power and diplomacy in Pacific Regionalism*. ANU Press, Canberra.

29 Rajagopalan, R. 2020. *Towards a QUAD-Plus Arrangement? Indo-Pacific Analysis Briefs 2020*. Perth US-Asia Centre, Perth.

attended to demonstrate an interest in being engaged in regional dialogues affecting security. The recent announcement of the AU-KUS agreement by Australia, UK and America was initially met with concern about nuclear submarines in the region, the lack of consultation and a seeming disregard for the security priorities of the region.<sup>30</sup> However, even this initiative has the potential to nurture common interests in maritime security, fisheries protection, trans-national crime prevention, cyber security and a rules-based order. However, partnerships and common security understandings need relationships of trust and two-way communications — and this requires being at the table when important decisions affecting Pacific security are made.

All these initiatives have at their core a commitment to peace, stability and prosperity in an increasingly inter-connected region. China's place in the region, maintaining a 'rules-based order' and integrating Pacific security priorities into Indo-Pacific security narrative can only be resolved when all the parties affected engage in critical dialogues and are heard. The PICs are often still sitting on the margins of regional power security dialogues and interventions.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we examined the framing of security issues in the Pacific reflected in key regional declarations, particularly the Boe Declaration and the contents of the existing NSSs, to highlight the nexus between security and development. We compared these NSSs to identify their priorities and institutional challenges in shaping and operationalizing the security agenda. Most security initiatives that have gained traction and resonance in the PICs have been adapted to local contexts, well-integrated across regional-national jurisdictions, and vested in socio-economic and political interest groups (often sub-regional groupings). The localization and contextualization of security has characterized recent security initiatives, including account of identity and culture. But capacity and institutional gaps

<sup>30</sup> Middleby S and Powles A. 2021. AUKUS and Australia's Relations in the Pacific. *East Asia Forum*. November 4, 2021. Available at: <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2021/11/04/aukus-and-australias-relations-in-the-pacific/>

persist and often require external support from regional agencies and development partners.

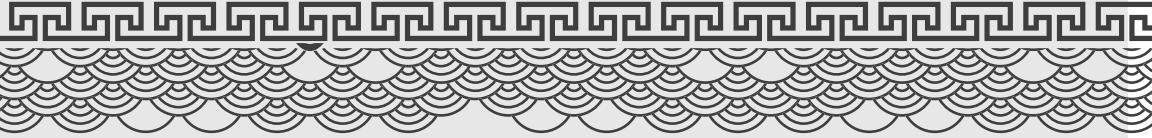
The PICs have become more assertive in their projection of development and security priorities. The Pacific's successful championing of climate and ocean action on the global stage promotes the centrality of human-environment security priorities and reflects the value of a strong Pacific voice. To project their security priorities the PICs have had to strengthen inter-agency and regional collaboration as evidenced in their efforts to combat transnational crime and influence climate and fisheries dialogues. They have also had to strengthen the capacity of national and regional institutions associated with climate, disaster, resource and crime responses.

The Blue Pacific narrative lays some common ground in relation to protecting sovereignty and strengthening a rules-based order that promotes sustainable development and creates spaces for Pacific engagement. The Pacific leaders do not reject the Indo-Pacific framing and many of its values, but they object to the lack of inclusiveness in its formulation and implementation. The Pacific islands "friends to all and enemies to none" approach to global engagement is about balancing development and security interests as all navigate the increasingly contested and crowded geopolitical space of their region. In the 'crowded space' of the Blue Pacific, nearly all players are seen by Pacific nations as development partners, rather than a security threat. The Australian Pacific Step-Up and the New Zealand Pacific Resilience are appreciated, as is their support of the Boe Declaration on Regional Security. However, the price cannot be development and security opportunities with other partners.

Operationalizing the national security strategies and enhancing national security in the Blue Pacific is going to be difficult for many reasons. The existing NSSs are in embryonic stages of operationalization. Issues of coordination between key government agencies, capacity constraints and resourcing, including the elevation of the security-development nexus to the political level will challenge the implementation of NSSs. They must overcome rigid institutional barriers and obtain sustained and strong political will and leadership across governments and, over time, deliver on their human security

aspirations. Nevertheless, NSSs are a start on the ongoing journey of building a safe, secure and resilient Blue Pacific and can be well complemented by regional and development partner support. Making progress however requires security partnerships that make space for Pacific voice and agency, and don't crowd out Pacific leadership.





Part 2:  
SECURITY CHALLENGES  
IN OCEANIA



# The Impact of COVID on Security in the Pacific Islands

*Sebastian Kevany and Deon Canyon*

Nations within the Indo-Pacific region have had a vastly different set of experiences throughout the 2020-21 pandemic, undergoing intense societal and economic pressures as a result of either COVID-19 or related restrictions. Larger land masses and sub-continents such as India have been severely affected in the realms of both public health and personal freedoms, as has China and (at times) Australia, as well as large island archipelagos such as Indonesia and the Philippines. By contrast, some of the only countries in the world that continue to record zero cases are also located in the region. On the surface, it has been an ‘all or nothing’ situation; however, that is far from the reality. Rather, the pandemic has resulted in small Pacific nations with no cases suffering much larger losses to GDP than large nations with many cases.

Nonetheless, common threats bind those countries that were severely affected and unaffected. All countries in the region suffered from isolation, limited access, high impacts on certain economic sectors such as tourism and remittances, along with all of the other social and cultural impacts that the pandemic has brought worldwide. Likewise, the impact of the pandemic on security in the region has many common features across countries.

## **Defining Security in the Pandemic Context**

National security refers to the protection of national and international borders from traditional and non-traditional, internal and transnational threats to peace, prosperity, and economic productivity. In the Indo-

Pacific region, security often is synonymous with maritime security, cyber security, and traditional geographical security related to territorial infringement. Yet there are also geopolitical, human, health and environmental elements of regional security that are dependent on the actions and reactions of different countries in the region that relate to stability.

### *Economic Failure and Security Compromises*

The pandemic has unquestionably negatively affected all countries in the region economically. This includes losses related to tourism, the live entertainment sector, eateries, public transport, trade, remittances, jobs, cost and availability of health care services, and international trade which impact on all aspects of every economy in the region. Traditionally, economic decline is associated with decreased regional security, environmental degradation, and an increase in black market and terrorist activities. The pandemic has caused the deepest recession since the end of World War II.<sup>1</sup> Over the past two years, the global economy shrank by 3.5% each year and almost every nation reported negative growth in 2020 with poorer nations experiencing the worst impact.<sup>2,3</sup>

It remains to be seen how the post-pandemic period will reflect this. The only potential mitigating factor may be the equally-devastating effect the pandemic has had on all regional countries, thus debilitating incentives and resources for conflict or conquest. Framed in that light, there is the chance that economic failures and setbacks may not necessarily lead to more regional conflict, as countries focus on internal affairs and post-pandemic national rebuilding.

A further element of economic security, as affected by the pandemic, is the consideration of the social solidarity economy. Increased demands have been placed on non-governmental means of social support in the absence of anticipated income streams via tourism or other realms. By contrast, areas within the Pacific with more market-based economies may

1 Filippini, Eduardo Levy Yeyati and Federico. 2021. “Social and Economic Impact of COVID-19.” Brookings. June 8, 2021. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/social-and-economic-impact-of-covid-19/>.

2 International Monetary Fund. 2021. “World Economic Outlook, October 2021.” IMF. October 2021. <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2021/10/12/world-economic-outlook-october-2021>.

3 Djankov, Simeon. 2020. COVID-19 in Developing Economies. Edited by Ugo Panizza. CEPR Press. <https://voxeu.org/content/covid-19-developing-economies>.

have suffered more severely in human and economic security terms, as a result of the pandemic.

## Epidemics, the Military, and Conflict

### *Epidemics and Lockdowns as Security Enhancers and Conflict Preventers*

On the positive side, security in the region may be said to have improved as a result of lockdown and limited travel options. The opportunities to launch offensives against neighboring countries or in the region proportionately decrease, with protagonists likely to exercise more caution and care in pandemic environments. Likewise, at the societal level, proponents of improved societal monitoring and surveillance, including capturing personal data, would argue that national security has been improved through limiting opportunities for physical criminal activity. Certainly, we have witnessed a commensurate swell in online crime.<sup>4</sup> The pandemic-excused introduction of increased monitoring and surveillance will most likely remain a long-term part of law enforcement in the region for the foreseeable future.

In terms of border security, any small island states could be said to have gained from the lockdown and pandemic conditions. Limitations on ingress and egress may have, by their nature, also prevented the movement of terrorists, extremists, and other destabilizing influences in the region. Thus, although there have been severe economic consequences as a result of limitations on freedom of movement, there may also have been security dividends.

### *Military Engagement in the Security Context*

A notable development in the pandemic-security nexus context in the Indo-Pacific region was the aid provided by the US Military to assist with pandemic relief in India. Under the auspices of USAID, a series of ‘greytail’ airlifts were conducted to India and Nepal in April and May

<sup>4</sup> Interpol. 2020. “INTERPOL Report Shows Alarming Rate of Cyberattacks during CO-VID-19.” <https://www.interpol.int/en/News-and-Events/News/2020/INTERPOL-report-shows-alarming-rate-of-cyberattacks-during-COVID-19>.

2021. These included the provision of respirators and other critical care equipment in order to assist with spiraling infection rates in both countries.

Though the effort was relatively small scale, it held significance on a number of levels. First, it demonstrated that the military had the capacity to assist in this and future epidemic contexts, which may not have been fully elevated during 2020 for a variety of political, economic, and bureaucratic reasons. Second, the airlifts demonstrated that global health engagement in pandemic responses can have critical alliance and, therefore, security and stability rationales. Unquestionably, the airlift response drew India and Nepal closer to the US as regional and mutually-reliant partners. It should be noted, however, that this impact may have been significantly lessened in comparison with related efforts from China, which took place on a larger geographical and logistical scale throughout the region.

Third, the elevation of epidemics into the realm of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief was unquestionably attained through this airlift. Previously consigned to global health engagement in military terms, with a focus on laboratory and disease surveillance work, the events of the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014, followed by the 2021 response, demonstrated that global health engagement and health security are now undoubtedly part of the purview of all militaries in the region. In turn, this will likely help to assist with safety, security and stability in the region. Thus, COVID 19 has positively influenced security in the region by catalyzing mil-mil alliances and forging health security partnerships.

For example, the first shipment (1.5 million Moderna doses) of the 580 million US pledged vaccines arrived in Honduras, via COVAX, on June 27, 2021. Early in July, Bangladesh received 2.5 million Moderna doses via COVAX. In subsequent months, COVAX shipped millions of US-donated vaccines to partner nations, including 27 countries in the Indo-Pacific region.

USAID and the Department of Defense's Joint Program Executive Office for Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Defense (JPEO-CBRND) have also entered into an interagency agreement (IAA) for the procurement of US-donated Pfizer vaccines. Though the IAA is not expected to include DOD transportation of the vaccines, DOD

assisted in an airlift of 400,000 KN95 masks; 449,000 gowns; and 4,327 pulse oximeters, which arrived in Nepal on June 19.

### *China and India*

A unique dimension of the pandemic on regional security is the contributions the virus has made to perceptions of China in the region and worldwide. In many cases, the emanation of the virus in China and its effect on regional and international economies has resulted in further stigma and resentment towards this burgeoning global power, which many believe already represents a threat to regional security and stability even before the pandemic. The question of China's motives and future strategy in the region remains open, but will inevitably be framed in the context of health as well as regional security.

With the ongoing increase in suspicion and fear of China's motives in the region, suggestions of inadvertent bio-warfare are likely to further limit China's benefits from their own efforts to improve regional goodwill and cooperation. If the pandemic leads to political or policy reforms in China and greater efforts at regional cooperation to prevent global pandemics in the future, then there is the possibility that the pandemic may, in the long term, improve regional security and China's international standing.

The ongoing pandemic crisis in India unquestionably poses security challenges to the nation and the region as it undermines basic government services and increases population dissatisfaction. The increase in persons surviving below the poverty line in India and elsewhere, estimated by the World Bank to exceed 1 billion people by the end of the pandemic, epitomizes this effect of instability and insecurity. India's position as a global leader in both technology, pharmaceutical production, and vaccine manufacture has been destabilized not only by Indian politics, but by the impact of the pandemic, which will take some time to bring under control in the region.

### **Security Realms**

The Indo-Pacific region, as with any part of the world, deals with a range of security realms: health; cyber; economic; maritime; human; national; international; and many other forms. Though it is, as noted above, hard to predict the longer-term effects of the pandemic on regional

security, there are several likely scenarios that may emerge in the region for each of these realms.

### *Maritime Security*

Impacts of the 2020 pandemic on maritime security have already been revealed in various forms. From cruise ship disease incubators to outbreaks on naval vessels to the impact of quarantine leaving many vessels marooned at sea, maritime security has been compromised on a number of levels.<sup>5</sup> In many ways, the full impact has yet to be determined, and will also rely on knock-on, long-term effects via economic changes and associated security implications.

If previous periods of economic downturn after economic shocks are good indicators, however, it is likely that there may be a further increase in piracy and other maritime crime as a result of the pandemic. Conversely, increased levels of health security at the port and seafaring levels may indirectly result in improved overall regional security.

### *Cyber Security*

The impact of the 2020 pandemic on regional cyber security is also worthy of consideration. During the pandemic, much of the region's previously in-person business became virtual in a short space of time. Inevitably, this resulted in a greater risk of cyber threats due to increased amounts of sensitive information and transactions online. To date, there has been an upsurge in cyber threats in the region, though this trend cannot be exclusively ascribed to the pandemic.

However, during the COVID pandemic, INTERPOL reported an alarmingly rapid shift in cybercrime activities from individuals and small businesses to major corporations, governments and critical infrastructure. As organizations make adjustments to accommodate teleworkers, security vulnerabilities have appeared in related remote systems and networks that have permitted intrusion and data theft.

Additionally, the quantity of false information, misrepresented threats, and conspiracy theories have exploded into all public and private sectors. Many misinformation messages are bound to malware as hackers take advantage of humanity's unhealthy appetite for online gossip and

<sup>5</sup> Turvold, Wade, and Jim McMullin. "Ships Become Dangerous Places during a Pandemic". Security Nexus. DKI APCSS. [https://apcss.org/nexus\\_articles/ships-become-dangerous-places-during-a-pandemic/](https://apcss.org/nexus_articles/ships-become-dangerous-places-during-a-pandemic/)

rumor-mongering.<sup>6</sup> The use of misinformation to facilitate the sale of fake medical supplies and the execution of cybercrime has created considerable anxiety in providers and users. INTERPOL called for an increase in public-private cooperation to counter this multi-sector threat.

### *Economic and Political Security*

As noted above, levels of economic security, and therefore regional stability, have inevitably been affected by the 2020 pandemic. Sectors such as travel and tourism have been badly affected, in many cases terminally so. Without these sources of income, economic security declined significantly for many countries in the region in 2020 and 2021. In turn, declining levels of employment and gross national product inevitably produce a decline in remittances, along with social and political instabilities.

In terms of political security, a study from Papua New Guinea suggested that public-state relations have been significantly reconfigured as a result of the pandemic, not least as a result of excessive lockdown policies as well as the need for citizens to ‘forgo democratic rights, liberties, and freedoms’ for undisclosed periods of time.<sup>7</sup> This has been counterbalanced by an equally high level of global protests in countries in which governments have been perceived as too laissez-faire or non-interventionist, such as in Belarus and elsewhere.

### *Health Security*

In contrast to the above thematic security threats and compromises as a result of the 2020 pandemic, health security, including human security, can perhaps be said to have significantly improved as a result of the pandemic. Border checks for health conditions, vaccine passports, quarantine measures, and many other efforts to improve national and international health security have been put in place with alacrity and effectiveness by most regional countries. Whether or not these measures remain in place in the post-vaccine era remains to be seen. It seems likely, however, that

<sup>6</sup> COVID-19 Cybercrime Analysis Report - August 2020. Interpol. <https://www.interpol.int/content/download/15526/file/COVID-19%20Cybercrime%20Analysis%20Report-%20August%202020.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Australian National University, Crawford School, “Development Bulletin 82.” <https://crawford.anu.edu.au/rmap/devnet/devnet/DB82-final-manuscript-23-02-21.pdf>

some measures will inevitably be retained, therefore permanently improving regional health security.

In the same way, the pandemic has significantly impacted investment in regional outbreak management and disease surveillance. Improvements in health security investments, networks and other collaborations are all likely to contribute to improved regional health security. The collaborations inspired by these measures are also likely to indirectly contribute to improvements in regional security.

Many other considerations in the health security context also remain pivotal in the context of regional security. The exposure of many countries' public health infrastructures as inadequate increased reliance on restrictive movement policies, as prevention took precedence over treatment. By contrast, tourism and official delegation travels were only briefly abated at the onset of the pandemic, in turn leading to political unrest and separatist movements in some countries.

Similarly, despite a significant global and regional reevaluation of the importance of functional public health systems, fewer people have been able to access medical attention for non-COVID conditions, particularly in areas where COVID patients are dominating health system capacity. Ultimately, health security in the region will remain primarily a function of efficient, effective, and equitable primary health care provision.

### *Environmental Security*

The interplay between epidemics, health security, climate change, and environmental security is complex and of great relevance to the region. Climate change effects on migration patterns, urbanization, and economic activity are closely linked to the spread and transmission of infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, dengue, and malaria. There is no reason to assume that such environmental considerations will not also play a part in the latter stages of the pandemic in the region, with associated knock-on, downstream health security effects.<sup>8</sup>

Though there is no correlation between countries affected by climate change and those affected by the pandemic, the events of 2020-21 have

<sup>8</sup> Kevany, Sebastian. Climate Change, International Migration, and Health Security: The Need for Smart and Synergistic Global Health Policies and Programmes in The Solomon Islands. *Global Health Governance* X (1): 119–28. <http://blogs.shu.edu/ghg/2020/05/26/climate-change-international-migration-and-health-security-the-need-for-smart-and-synergistic-global-health-policies-and-programmes-in-the-solomon-islands/>.

revealed the significance of environmental security in the public health context. The ongoing destabilization effects of climate change inevitably have public health and infectious disease downstream effects. In turn, public health and infectious disease control and outbreak response considerations play a part in the rationale for increased attention to climate change and environmental security responses, justifying combined and synergistic future public health / environmental efforts.

### *Human Security*

Human security, as defined by the attention to the security and safety of the individual, has been affected on numerous levels by the pandemic. Limitations to economic opportunities, separation, isolation, and an increase in the rule of law over personal freedoms have all been associated with lockdown and other public health policies. Conversely, other elements of human security have been enhanced, not least in terms of falling crime levels and protection of public health.

Informal settlements, in particular, have faced negative human security consequences; the pandemic has been described as having had the greatest impact on those populations that are already disadvantaged.<sup>9</sup> This includes a geographical and environmental security aspect in the context of their location in more marginalized, flood-prone areas.

A further subset of the human security realm, also is associated with health security, is food and nutrition security. This is associated with environmental security, particularly in a region in which 50% of the population live within ten kilometers of a rapidly-changing coastline. The pandemic has been described as a ‘threat multiplier’ in this context, with reference to both economic livelihood and access to resources.

### *Gendered Security*

Amongst the many dimensions of security affected by the pandemic is gendered security.<sup>10</sup> In many countries in the region, females have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, not least via their role in society as careers (and, in particular, nurses).<sup>11</sup> Inevitably, this will lead to a

<sup>9</sup> Australian National University, Crawford School, “Development Bulletin 82.” <https://crawford.anu.edu.au/rmap/devnet/devnet/DB82-final-manuscript-23-02-21.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> The Gender and Covid-19 Project (2022). <https://www.genderandcovid-19.org/>

<sup>11</sup> McKinsey Corporation (2020). COVID-19 and gender equality: Countering the regressive effects. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/covid-19-and-gender->

reevaluation of gender inequality and public health concerns combining to threaten regional security.<sup>12</sup> Only adherence to ongoing progressive policies will help to change this dangerous course.

## Vaccines

### *Vaccine Diplomacy and Spheres of Influence*

Soft power and humanitarian assistance strive to make countries and regions more rather than less secure. In the Indo-Pacific region, the efforts of technologically advanced powers, e.g., US, China, India, Britain and Sweden, have contributed to a wave of vaccine availability throughout 2021. By reducing the severe effects of the virus these efforts have actively improved stability. The only threat to stability and security in the region through vaccine diplomacy may result from expectations of quid pro quos. If that is to be the case, tensions and therefore security threats may arise in the post-pandemic period if hastily-agreed aid agreements are not clarified during vaccine roll-out.

Within the vaccine diplomacy realm, many sub-considerations are in play. It is highly likely that those countries that achieve the fastest and highest rates of vaccination with the best available vaccines will, for example, be best positioned from a security context going forward. Conversely, it is equally likely that host countries that experience high rates of vaccine hesitancy, poor quality vaccines, or reopen their economies and societies at a stage before it is safe to do so, will suffer negative security consequences. Nonetheless, vaccine diplomacy remains a key opportunity for competing powers in the region and the results of such operations may have key implications for regional and national allegiances in the years to come. Conversely, a badly managed vaccine diplomacy program could be harmful to such allegiances in the longer term.

Notwithstanding all of these considerations, it is highly likely that a rapid and effective and equitable vaccine roll-out will result in significant security benefits to the region. This includes greater domestic stability (e.g., decreases in civil unrest inspired by lockdowns); improved trade patterns; a return to in-person regional dialogues and conferences; and careful attention to future health security protocols which will, in turn, enhance

equality-countering-the-regressive-effects

12 Global Health 50/50 (2022). The Sex, Gender and COVID-19 Project. <https://global-health5050.org/the-sex-gender-and-covid-19-project/>

regional security. Depending on how the US, China, and India – along with other global powers – choose to involve themselves in this sphere (preferably via cooperation or at a minimum benign, altruistic and enlightened competition), significant and lasting security benefits could result.

### *Improving Security*

Without question, the most pivotal potential security dividend from the pandemic will hinge on the efficacy, efficiency, and duration of the donations and distribution of vaccines by the US and other countries to less affluent regional economies. With support from China, the European Union, and many other regional powers, the US can help to lead this staggering global public health effort, spearheaded by the COVAX effort, to a successful conclusion. Without doubt, also, this is a case of enlightened self-interest: vaccine programs operating under the aegis of USAID or other development institutions will unquestionably help to protect the donors themselves, both in terms of regional stability and also by preventing the development of new mutations and strains.

Conversely, in both the national, regional, and health security contexts, the greatest threat to stability in the region in the post-pandemic environment lies with vaccine failure and/or the triumph of anti-vaccine activists. Under the influence of online influencers, regional opinion leaders, political and social factions that oppose vaccines may ultimately hold the key to regional stability. Should the region develop high levels of vaccine hesitancy or skepticism, there is a significant risk that lockdowns will continue; economic decline will last into 2022; and international travel (and therefore relations) will be severely curtailed.

### **Conclusions**

It is difficult, at the present time, to envisage the post-pandemic regional security environment. The rapid shift to cyber and virtual business and commerce in the region, for example, has rendered many countries vulnerable to cyber-attacks and hacking. Conversely, the heightened regional attention to health security, which in turn contributes to national and regional security, may help to balance this negative trend. In either case, much will depend on which scenario evolves – eradication,

elimination, cohabitation, or conflagration. For each of these possible situations, different regional security landscapes result.<sup>13</sup>

A key conclusion for the region is the dynamic nexus between broader public security and health security. “If partnerships between public health and public security were more critically examined for potential synergies, responses to incidents affecting health and disease outbreaks could be immensely improved.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, public health should be elevated to a construct within national security; likewise, national security must be viewed as a construct pivoting around public health. This involves increased collaboration between actors existing at the intersection of national security and health security, such as non-governmental organizations, border health agencies, public health officials, and military leaders.

This would naturally lead to consideration or the reconfiguration of militaries in the region to increase their capacity for global health engagements in emergency and outbreak situations, perhaps extending even to improved investments in hospital ships and other related resources. Without such cross-sectoral interdepartmental initiatives, the region remains exposed to the recurrence of the events of 2020 and beyond.

Many other questions remain unanswered. Can, or should, the US military be involved in regional vaccination efforts as a combined health security / soft power initiative? Similarly, given lessons learned from 2020 and 2021, what should be the future role of both the US and regional militaries in global health engagement and epidemic control? Should there be greater engagement along the lines of climate change efforts? In retrospect, would this have made a key difference in 2020?

Taken together, the varying security effects of the 2020-21 pandemic on the Indo-Pacific region may mean that while some countries have ‘broken even’ in terms of security, others have been stuck a savage social and economic blow. Though some security threats increased, particularly those related to health and human security, some were eliminated through the suspension of many conflicts and strategic efforts in the region. It is, perhaps, in the post-pandemic period in which many countries will face the greatest security threats, as many previously-suspended conflicts may

13 Kofman A, Kantor R, Adashi EY. Potential COVID-19 Endgame Scenarios: Eradication, Elimination, Cohabitation, or Conflagration? *JAMA*. 2021 Jul 27;326(4):303-304. doi: 10.1001/jama.2021.11042. PMID: 34236382. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34236382/>

14 Australian National University, Crawford School, “Development Bulletin 82.” <https://crawford.anu.edu.au/rmap/devnet/devnet/DB82-final-manuscript-23-02-21.pdf>

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reignite as countries, states, and regions awaken from the lockdown hibernation and seek for new ways to reconfigure their alliances and partnerships.

# Climate Security and the Pacific Island States

*J. Scott Hanger*

“I don’t think it should be acceptable to any person in this world to write off a country.”<sup>1</sup>

-- Tina Stege, Climate Envoy,  
Republic of the Marshall Islands,  
Glasgow, Oct 31, 2021

## Introduction

In 2021, the threat that climate change poses to human and national security is well and broadly known. The first Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was published more than 30 years ago, in 1990. That report underlined the potential global consequences of climate change. It was an important progenitor to the 1994 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the global treaty that provides a framework to address the threat. Subsequent to the failure of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol to the convention, the 2015 Paris Accord cut the Gordian knot of national resistance to a binding global treaty by soliciting Intended Nationally Determined Con-

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Ellen Francis. 2021. “Marshall Islands pleads with world leaders to stop the 60,000-person nation from drowning.” *Washington Post* (Nov 1). <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2021/11/01/marshall-islands-sea-levels-cop26-tina-stege/>

tributions (INDCs) -- non-binding national plans of proposed climate actions -- from the 197 parties to the convention.

In 2021, the first volume of the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report was been published. The parties to UNFCCC have met at the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP 26) in Glasgow to review global progress since the Paris Accord toward managing the threat and to extending their commitments thereunder. Moreover, in the U.S., the Biden administration has emphasized the consideration of climate security in international relations, stating:

“It is the policy of my Administration that climate considerations shall be an essential element of United States foreign policy and national security. The United States will work with other countries and partners, both bilaterally and multilaterally, to put the world on a sustainable climate pathway. The United States will also move quickly to build resilience, both at home and abroad, against the impacts of climate change that are already manifest and will continue to intensify according to current trajectories.”<sup>2</sup>

This chapter considers the security threats to Pacific island countries (PICs) posed by climate change. It then provides a general consideration of approaches to manage the threat, before considering the geopolitical context for international cooperation to reduce the threat of climate change to Oceania. It concludes with a consideration of the prospects for Pacific island countries to manage the emerging threat in its enviro-geopolitical context.

## The Security Threat

It is possible to make some general statements about the threat of climate change to the Pacific islands despite their vast geographic extent and variation and their different political histories. PICs share certain vulnerabilities to climate-related environmental change because they share the geographic fact of comprising small islands in the vast Pacific Ocean and

<sup>2</sup> Joseph R. Biden. Jr. January 27, 2021, Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad , <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/executive-order-on-tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad/>

because they are developing nations with limited resources compared to continental, more-developed nations.

The most salient geographic difference in vulnerability is elevation above sea level. Many PICs, for example, Fiji, the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea have a range of peaks, slopes and coastal plains as well as outlying atolls. However, several -- Kiribati, Tuvalu, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands -- consist completely of coral atolls with elevations no more than a few meters above sea level. Perhaps the most salient political difference in vulnerability is an island state's relations with more developed nations, which may provide access to resources for adaptation or response to climate threats.

The general nature of the climate threat was detailed in the IPCC's 2019 Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate. IPCC reported that the ocean has steadily warmed and its acidity steadily increased over the past 50 years. Based on this trend, it projected a decline in potential fisheries for the rest of the century. It found that a decline in warm-water coral reefs was highly likely to reduce both food security and coastal protection in small island states. It also found that the rate of sea level rise is increasing due not only to thermal expansion of the oceans but increasingly as a result of melting polar ice caps. Cyclonic wind speeds and precipitation have also been increasing. These trends will continue at a pace dependent on the future rate of global carbon emissions.<sup>3</sup>

Considering the challenges of these environmental impacts to governance, the IPCC noted that:

“Impacts of climate-related changes in the ocean and cryosphere increasingly challenge current governance efforts to develop and implement adaptation responses from local to global scales, and in some cases pushing them to their limits. People with the highest exposure and vulnerability are often those with lowest capacity to respond (high confidence).”<sup>4</sup>

More recently, in its 2021 assessment of the security challenges of climate change, the US National Intelligence Council (NIC) found that,

<sup>3</sup> IPCC, 2019: Summary for Policymakers. In: *IPCC Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate* [H. O. Pörtner, et al., (eds.)],

<sup>4</sup> IPCC 2019, p. 29.

together with the nations of central Africa, the small island states of the Pacific form one of the two most vulnerable areas in the world.<sup>5</sup> In particular,

“Low-lying Pacific Islands are highly vulnerable to climate change because of their minimal adaptive capacity and high exposure to tropical storms and rising sea levels.... Climate change also may hasten the collapse of commercial fisheries that already are under severe strain from overfishing, according to the Pacific Community, which will harm local diets and economies. Regional fish consumption is three-to-five times the global average, foreign fishing licenses make up a large share of government revenue, and onshore processing provides jobs, according to a UN study.”<sup>6</sup>

Moreover,

“Displaced populations—especially from small island nations—will increasingly demand changes to international refugee law to consider their claims and provide protection as climate migrants or refugees, and affected populations will fight for legal payouts for loss and damages resulting from climate effects.”<sup>7</sup>

The climate trends and security impacts projected by IPCC and NIC are expected to continue for the foreseeable future. The NIC report projects:

“The current trajectory of growing global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions would cause global temperatures—at 1.1°C over pre-industrial levels now—to add 0.4°C and cross the 1.5°C threshold by about 2030, according to

<sup>5</sup> U.S. National Intelligence Council. 2021. “Climate Change and International Responses Increasing Challenges to US National Security Through 2040.” NIC-NIE-2021-10030-A, p 11. [https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/NIE\\_Climate\\_Change\\_and\\_National\\_Security.pdf](https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/NIE_Climate_Change_and_National_Security.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> NIE, p 14.

<sup>7</sup> NIE, p,10,

modeling from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and surpass 2°C by around mid-century. Many of the physical effects are projected to increase in intensity, frequency, and speed.”<sup>8</sup>

In summary, science-based knowledge and intelligence assessments project the extended and increasing vulnerability of Pacific island countries to the impacts of climate change.

The immediate pain of climate change is felt at the local level, when Pacific Island communities suffer loss due to extreme weather events such as cyclones, flood or drought, and the resulting loss of life, of homes and livelihood. These events are historically well known to Pacific island people. However, the intensity and frequency of such events are projected to increase, placing greater demands for resources on communities and governments, and for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief from partner nations. More gradual and more permanent losses will result from sea level rise, loss of coral reefs, and ocean acidification.

How can these security threats be managed to maintain or improve quality of life and sustainable development of Pacific island countries?

## **Managing the Threat**

There are three modes of action to manage the security threats of climate change:

- Mitigation includes actions to reduce or reverse the rate of global warming. This in turn means reducing the level of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, such as carbon dioxide and methane, either through emission control or removal through such techniques as reforestation or carbon sequestration and removal.
- Adaptation includes actions to protect infrastructure, food and fresh water supplies, environmental services, and human health with the expectation that global warming will continue for some time, due to the lag time between greenhouse gas reduction and any cooling effect or, pessimistically, under the expectation that mitigation efforts will fall short.
- Response includes all those actions to alleviate the impacts of a climate-related event. It is generally associated with humanitarian

8 NIE, p. 1.

assistance and disaster relief (HADR). The fear and the expectation is that the scope of such response will drastically increase due to an increase in the frequency and intensity of climate-related disasters over time.

Assessing the opportunities and responsibilities for managing the threats is complicated by the uncertainties associated with climate change. Climate change is a complex system where multiple actors make “independent” decisions over time in the face of limited knowledge. There are no isolatable root causes to be identified, characterized and “fixed.” The decisions made by actors can interact in unpredictable ways, and new phenomena may emerge.

Moreover, climate change is a global phenomenon with causes that may be distant in time and space, but whose impacts are felt locally. Yet, the main locus of security governance lies between the local and the global. It is the sovereign nation-state that sets the legal, political, and institutional structure within which security threats must be managed. The nation-state represents its citizens in international organizations. It authorizes and manages domestic and international disaster relief missions. For Pacific island countries, this means that national governments must manage climate security threats whose cause and trajectory is outside their control, and where effective adaptation, and response, may be beyond their internal resources.

This is the complex enviro-geo-political system within which Pacific island countries must manage the emerging security threats to their populations to their governments, and to their neighbors -- both regional and distant. What are the implications?

### *Mitigation*

Pacific Island countries' contribution to greenhouse gas emissions is negligible.<sup>9</sup> Nor do they generally have sufficient land area to make a major contribution to reforestation which can remove carbon dioxide from the air. There are no direct mitigation actions that Pacific island countries can take that will significantly improve their climate security. In the face of a serious or existential security threat, their goal must therefore be to influ-

<sup>9</sup> L. A. Nurse, et al. 2014, “Chapter 29 Small islands,” in: *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part B: Regional Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [V. R. Barros, et al. (eds.)]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 1618.

ence large greenhouse gas emitters to reduce their emissions as rapidly as possible.

The five largest GHG emitters are China, the US, India, Russia and Japan.<sup>10</sup> All these major emitters are seeking political influence in the Oceania region. It becomes a national interest, therefore, for Pacific Island states, acting bilaterally or multilaterally, to negotiate for a power's reduced greenhouse gas emissions in exchange for influence, trade, fishing rights, or bases. In the context of comprehensive security, this environmental quid pro quo for a traditional defense quo represents a serious and sensible norm for negotiation.

To date, Pacific island states and regional organizations have been most influential as advocates for global greenhouse gas mitigation through the UNFCCC system. In particular, it was the initiative of a High Ambition Coalition, led by the Republic of the Marshall Islands and other Pacific island countries, that won the endorsement of the Paris Accords for an aspirational goal of 1.5 degrees maximum global warming and a five-year cycle for updating INDCs.<sup>11</sup> Sustaining that influence will require continuing commitment and sustained leverage. For example, some observers have expressed concerns that COVID-related travel constraints inhibited PIC participation and influence in COP 26.<sup>12</sup> Satyendra Prasad, Fiji's ambassador to the UN, told Reuters, "This is the thinnest representation of Pacific islands at a COP ever." He said that the lack of delegates inevitably meant it was harder for some of the most vulnerable low-lying nations to be heard.<sup>13</sup>

### *Adaptation*

In a recent article, authors from the Nature Conservancy reviewed Pacific island climate adaptation efforts at the local level. They describe

10 Union of Concerned Scientists. 2008. "Each Country's Share of CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions." (Updated August 12, 2020), <https://www.ucsusa.org/resources/each-countrys-share-co2-emissions>

11 For a description of the coalition and its impact, see Nick O'Malley. 2021. "How Australia got blindsided in the great Pacific climate coup," *The Sydney Morning Herald* (October 9), <https://www.smh.com.au/environment/climate-change/how-australia-got-blindsided-in-the-great-pacific-climate-coup-20211008-p58y9d.html>

12 Aniruddha Ghosal. 2021. "'Thin' Pacific Island Teams at COP26 Spark Fears of Inequity," *The Diplomat* (October 28), <https://thediplomat.com/2021/10/thin-pacific-island-teams-at-cop26-spark-fears-of-inequity/>

13 Alister Doyle. 2021. "Pacific islanders struggle at COP26 climate summit as pandemic keeps leaders away," Reuters (November 4), <https://www.reuters.com/business/cop/pacific-islanders-struggle-cop26-climate-summit-pandemic-keeps-leaders-away-2021-11-04/>

a variety of community, eco-system based adaptation projects across the Pacific islands and conclude that:

“By necessity, Pacific Islands have become hubs of innovation, where climate strategies are piloted and refined to inform adaptation efforts globally.... In response [to the threat], communities in the region are leading climate adaptation strategies, often combining traditional practices and cutting-edge science, to build the resilience of their communities and ecosystems in the face of increasing climate risk.”<sup>14</sup>

Adaptation to climate change engages governance at all levels, from community to global. National governments of Pacific island countries have engaged in adaptation planning under the United Nations’ climate framework for more than twenty years. In 2001, COP 7 established a Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) to provide technical support to LDCs’ for the preparation of national adaptation plans of action (NAPAs). Five Pacific island countries completed NAPAs under this program (Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu).<sup>15</sup> COP 7 also established an Adaptation Fund to finance concrete adaptation projects in developing countries. That fund has supported projects in Pacific island countries (FSM, the Cook Islands, Fiji, PNG, and Samoa) totaling \$37 million.<sup>16</sup>

In 2010, COP 16 adopted the Cancun Adaptation Framework, an updated National Adaptation Plan (NAP) process. COP 17 subsequently provided additional modes of technical and financial support for developing NAPs under the Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF).<sup>17</sup> COP 20, in 2014, established a NAP Global Network, which has provided in-country support to five Pacific island countries (Fiji, Kiribati, RMI, Solomon Is-

14 Elizabeth McLeod et al. 2019. “Lessons From the Pacific Islands – Adapting to Climate Change by Supporting Social and Ecological Resilience,” *Frontiers in Marine Science* (June 18), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fmars.2019.00289>

15 United Nations Climate Change. “National Adaptation Plans of Action. Accessed Nov 1, 2021, <https://unfccc.int/topics/resilience/workstreams/national-adaptation-programmes-of-action/introduction>

16 Adaptation Fund. Projects and Programs.” Accessed Nov 1, 2021, <https://www.adaptation-fund.org/projects-programmes/project-information/projects-table-view/>

17 Global Environmental Facility. “Funding.” Accessed Nov 1, 2021, <http://www.thegef.org/about/funding>

lands, and Tuvalu).<sup>18</sup> Since 2015, the Green Climate Fund (GCF), established under UNFCCC and administered by the World Bank, has become the dominant climate fund in the Pacific region.<sup>19</sup>

Donor nations also provide bilateral climate adaptation assistance to Pacific island countries. According to the International Monetary Fund, between 2014 and 2019, Pacific island countries received \$1.5 billion dedicated to climate adaptation and \$0.9 billion for multiple focus activities, including adaptation, with every island country receiving some support. About half has come from multilateral sources of funding and half from bilateral projects. The report notes that Australia, the European Union, Japan, and New Zealand have led the way in bilateral climate support in the Pacific.<sup>20</sup> USAID also manages bilateral programs to assist Pacific island countries in adaptation planning and financing, including the Institutional Strengthening in Pacific Island Countries to Adapt to Climate Change (ISACC) and Climate Ready programs.<sup>21</sup>

Adaptation to climate change poses significant challenges to small island states. As outlined above, Pacific island countries depend on external resources to fund larger-scale adaptation projects, and thus must negotiate a variety of bureaucratic and accountability processes to apply for and manage such projects. Moreover, deciding on an adaptation strategy is an inherently political process because alternate modes of adaptation may be available. Governments must seek to satisfy both citizens and external donors to be able to plan and execute a course of adaptation. The courting of international donors in the context of geostrategic competition for influence in the Pacific region provides yet another political dimension to Pacific island countries' adaptation policies.

A notable example is the political debate in Kiribati over adaption through “migration with dignity,” versus “defense in place.” The former has been championed by President Anote Tong, the latter by his successor and current President, Taneti Maamau. Under President Tong, Kiribati

18 NAP Global Network, “In-country NAP support programs.” Accessed Nov 1, 2021, <https://napglobalnetwork.org/in-country-support-programs/>

19 Manal Fuad et al. 2021. “Unlocking Access to Climate Finance for Pacific Island Countries,” International Monetary Fund eLibrary (Sep 24), Fig. 7, <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/087/2021/020/article-A001-en.xml>

20 Fuad et al., Fig. 6.

21 USAID. Pacific Islands: Environment. Accessed Nov 2, 2021, <https://www.usaid.gov/pacific-islands/environment-and-global-climate-change>

bought 22 square km of land in Fiji to serve as a potential new home for climate migrants. In 2021, President Maamau announced that this land would instead be developed, with assistance from China, as a commercial farm providing produce to the people of Kiribati,<sup>22</sup> while the islands pursue adaptation by building up the land to raise key areas an additional two meters above sea level.<sup>23</sup>

### *Response*

Where mitigation and adaptation fail, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) are the available responses to the security threats of climate change. The security sector has historically played a key role in responding to acute disasters such as extreme weather events. HADR operations are generally managed at the national level according to standard operating procedures guiding and coordinating efforts from local to international levels. All Pacific island countries participate in disaster management planning and are experienced in responding to extreme weather events, with international assistance where necessary, and in working to restore the status quo ante.

Global warming puts more energy into the air and the ocean and thus promotes both extreme weather events and sea level rise. Scientists predict consequently more intense storms and new patterns of precipitation, and thus flooding and drought. Yet, because climate is a complex, multi-variable system, they are unable to predict far in advance when and where specific events will occur. Thus, Pacific island countries and their international partners must prepare to respond generally to more complex, more intense, and perhaps more frequent climate-related disasters predicted to occur at uncertain times and places spread over a vast geographic area. Goals and decisions about how best to respond will be complicated because it may not be practical or even possible to restore the status quo ante

22. Christopher Pala. 2021. “Kiribati and China to develop former climate-refugee land in Fiji,” *The Guardian* (Feb 23), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/24/kiribati-and-china-to-develop-former-climate-refugee-land-in-fiji>”

23. See, for example, Ben Walker. 2017. ‘An Island Nation Turns Away from Climate Migration, Despite Rising Seas,’ Inside Climate News (Nov 20), <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/20112017/kiribati-climate-change-refugees-migration-pacific-islands-sea-level-rise-coconuts-tourism/>, and Samantha Goins. 2018, “Sea level Rise and Climate Migration: The Story of Kiribati,” Environmental Law Institute, Vibrant Environmental Blog (July 6), <https://www.eli.org/vibrant-environment-blog/sea-level-rise-and-climate-migration-story-kiribati>

in the face of the ever-increasing impacts of climate change, for example, continuing sea level rise.

Increasing incidence of extreme weather events will challenge national and international planning for HADR response. Other emergent, climate-related phenomena may create new problems for which there is no known response. For example, in a recent scientific review, Heinze et al., argue that, taken together, "...ocean warming, ocean acidification, and ocean deoxygenation, if left unabated, have the potential to trigger a number of abrupt changes -- tipping points in the marine environment, with potentially serious consequences for marine ecosystems and ocean functioning."<sup>24</sup> Among the consequences may be the disappearance of tropical coral reefs and irreversible marine ecosystem regime shifts.<sup>25</sup> It is unclear what responses, if any, could ameliorate such climate-related natural disasters. Perhaps for this reason, the authors stress the need to identify and pursue mitigation pathways to avoid ocean tipping points.<sup>26</sup>

Successful mitigation and adaptation are necessary to reduce future needs for climate-related HADR in Pacific island countries. As with greenhouse gas mitigation, and adaptation, resources adequate for long-term and cumulative response to climate-related disasters are potentially beyond the means of Pacific island countries, individually or collectively. The World Bank, for example, notes that in 2015, impacts from Tropical Cyclone Pam exceeded 60% of Vanuatu's GDP, and in 2016, Tropical Cyclone Winston caused more than \$900 million in estimated damage and losses in Fiji, about 20% of GDP. It note that, "The impacts from disasters extend far beyond communities within 'ground zero' – they can slow or set back socioeconomic progress for an entire country, sometimes for generations."<sup>27</sup> Many Pacific island countries today depend on bilateral

24 Christoph Heinze et al. 2021. "The quiet crossing of ocean tipping points," *PNAS* 118:9, p. 1 <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2008478118>

25 Heinze et al., pp. 2-4.

26 Heinze et al. pp. 5-6.

27 The World Bank. 2018. "Weathering Financial Shocks from Disasters in the Pacific Islands." *News* (November 1) <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2018/11/01/weathering-financial-shocks-from-disasters-in-the-pacific-islands>

aid or funds from international organizations for disaster assistance. That dependency can only increase as climate-related disasters increase.

In summary, it is clear that the environmental impacts of climate change pose significant, even existential security threats to Pacific island countries. Growing investments in mitigation, adaptation and response to climate change will be necessary to manage the threats and, in some cases, to sustain national existence and sovereignty. At the same time, PICs are dependent on the decisions and actions of developed nations for mitigation. They depend on developed nations' resources for adaptation projects that are beyond their means and for external assistance when necessary to respond to climate-related disasters. What is true for all nations is especially true for Pacific island countries: To address the national security impacts of the global phenomenon of climate change requires international cooperation and assistance.

## The Geopolitical Context

Climate change is taking place within and as part of a complex geopolitical system of governance where the principal actors are nation-states. Pacific island countries must meet the challenges and opportunities for managing climate security within that context of competition and cooperation in pursuit of national interests. Two aspects of the geopolitical context are of high importance for Pacific island countries seeking to minimize the threats of climate change. First, the UNFCCC provides a global framework for managing climate change through its annual conferences of the parties and their protocols, accords and agreements. It is the principal forum where Pacific island countries and their regional organizations can present their interests and contribute to global governance of climate change. Second is the context of strategic competition for influence in the Indo-Pacific region by China and the U.S., the two largest greenhouse gas emitters and two nations capable of supporting climate adaptation infrastructure projects in the Pacific islands.

These two topics are salient because of the Pacific islands' relative lack of resources and thus their dependence on other nations to achieve their climate-related goals. Pacific islands' strategies to reduce climate-related security threats depend on persuading larger, more powerful and more highly resourced nations to commit to mitigating greenhouse gas emis-

sions, to fund major adaptation programs and to provide disaster response support when needed.

Pacific island countries have learned that their ability to influence global climate agreements is enhanced when they work together to promote their common interests.<sup>28</sup> That strength was exhibited in Paris in 2015 when Pacific island countries lobbied to modify the Paris Accord to recognize a 1.5 degree aspirational target for global warming.<sup>29</sup> Dame Meg Taylor, Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, later declared, “The Pacific will continue to work together, and the World must continue to work together, to save our vulnerable brothers and sisters, and future generations.”<sup>30</sup>

Cooperation on climate issues through the Pacific Islands Forum continued after COP 21 and the Paris Accord. For example, in 2018, The Forum’s Boe Declaration on Regional Security recognized climate change as “...the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific,” and restated “our commitment to progress the implementation of the Paris Agreement.”<sup>31</sup> In 2020, the Kainaki II Declaration, called for “...all parties to the Paris Agreement to meet or exceed their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in order to pursue global efforts to limit global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this is critical to the security of our Blue Pacific.”<sup>32</sup>

In Glasgow, however, the limits of small island power to influence large nations with competing interests was illustrated by the successful, last-minute move by India and China to dilute the Glasgow Climate Pact’s draft commitment to phase out coal as an energy source. Because UNFCCC decisions are consensual, the parties to the convention were, in

28 In addition to the thirteen Pacific island countries that are members of the General Assembly, the parties to UNFCCC also include the Cook Islands and Niue.

29 See e.g., SPREP press release. 2025. “We the Pacific; amplifying the Pacific voice at COP21?” Scoop Independent News, <https://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/WO1512/S00009/we-the-pacific-amplifying-the-pacific-voice-at-cop21.htm>

30 Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program. 2016. “Six Pacific Islands Ratify The Paris Climate Accord,” (April 26), <https://www.sprep.org/news/six-pacific-islands-ratify-paris-climate-accord>

31 Pacific Islands Forum. 2018. “Boe Declaration on Regional Security,” <https://www.forumsec.org/2018/09/05/boe-declaration-on-regional-security/>

32 Pacific Islands Forum. 2019. “Kainaki II Declaration for Urgent Climate Action Now”(August 15), <https://www.forumsec.org/2020/11/11/kainaki/>

effect, forced to support the change or see the entire agreement fail. As reported by the BBC:

“The Glasgow climate deal has put India and China in the spotlight after they opposed a commitment to ‘phase out’ coal while negotiating the final agreement. Instead, countries agreed to ‘phase down’ coal, causing disappointment and concern over whether the world can limit the average global temperature rise to 1.5C. ‘China and India will have to explain themselves and what they did to the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world,’ said the COP26 president, Alok Sharma.”<sup>33</sup>

This change was of special disappointment to Pacific island delegates. As reported by the Guardian, “Even the presence of Pacific negotiators could not influence the outcomes of the Glasgow summit, which as it stands – even if conditional and unconditional nationally determined contributions for the near-term target of 2030 were met – projected that warming might still spell the end for some Pacific atoll nations.”<sup>34</sup>

The UNFCCC provides a forum for negotiating multilateral agreements to manage the threats of climate change. Strategic competition between China and the US for influence in the Indo-Pacific region provides Pacific island countries with another stage for pursuing their special interests in mitigation, adaptation and response to climate change.

U.S. interests in the region were summarized by Kurt Campbell in a June 8, 2021 speech to the Center for a New American Security. As reported by Reuters:

“The U.S. policy chief for the Indo-Pacific said on Tuesday the United States aims to work with Japan, New Zealand, Australia and others to assist island nations in

33 Navin Singh Khadka. 2021. “COP26: Did India betray vulnerable nations?,” *BBC News* (November 17), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-59286790>

34 Lagipoiva Cherelle Jackson. 2021. “Cop26: Pacific delegates condemn ‘monumental failure’ that leaves islands in peril,” *The Guardia* (November 13), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/15/cop26-pacific-delegates-condemn-monumental-failure-that-leaves-islands-in-peril>

the Pacific, a region of increasing strategic competition with China....

“These are islands which we have enormous historical moral and strategic interests in.... And increasingly, again this is an arena of competition both in terms of values, their role at the United Nations, their health challenges, climate change their potential role militarily, healthy fishing stocks, just down the list....

“He said the region faced enormous challenges dealing with poverty, disease, and climate change and helping to meet those was difficult given their small disparate populations.

“But for the United States, again this is another area where we must step up our game.”<sup>35</sup>

China’s interests were articulated by its Ministry of Foreign Affairs on October 10, 2021, in a Joint Statement of the China-Pacific Island Countries Foreign Ministers’ Meeting. The statement concluded,

“All parties shared the view that climate change is a major challenge facing humanity and are committed to jointly promoting the full and effective implementation of the Paris Agreement and a fair and equitable system of global climate governance for win-win cooperation. China understands the special difficulties of Pacific Island Countries in tackling climate change, and will set up a China-Pacific Island Countries climate action cooperation center and continue to assist Pacific Island Countries as it can in enhancing capacity building to tackle climate change under the framework of South-South cooperation.”<sup>36</sup>

Yet there is complexity in the arena of strategic competition in interplay with the complexity of global climate negotiations. On November

35 David Brunnstrom and Michael Martina. 2021. “U.S. says to work with allies to help Pacific islands amid China rivalry,” *Reuters* (June 8), <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/us-says-work-with-allies-help-pacific-islands-amid-china-rivalry-2021-06-08/>

36 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China. 2021. “Joint Statement of

10, 2021, at COP 26, China and the US announced a turn to strategic cooperation on climate mitigation, issuing the “U.S.-China Joint Glasgow Declaration on Enhancing Climate Action in the 2020s.” Described as a surprise by commentators, the declaration focused on the urgent need to pursue mitigation efforts both internally and internationally. The two nations stated a commitment to work together to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement and, further, to “strengthen and accelerate climate action and cooperation” to close the gap between national commitments under the agreement and emission targets necessary to limit global warming to 1.5 to 2 degrees. In paragraph 13, it also recognizes “...the significance of adaptation in addressing the climate crisis, including further discussion on the global goal on adaptation and promoting its effective implementation, as well as the scaling up of financial and capacity-building support for adaptation in developing countries.”<sup>37</sup>

The geopolitical context for managing climate change is thus both complex and dynamic. The UNFCCC process is targeted at global co-operation to minimize the security impacts of climate change, but other interests of the parties sometimes hinder such cooperation. Competition for geostrategic dominance in the Pacific by China and the US is in tension with national interests in cooperation to address the security impacts of climate change and to influence international perceptions of benign response to a global existential threat. Because of the global nature of climate change and their limited resources for mitigation, adaptation and response, the success of Pacific island countries in addressing the threats of climate change will depend on their ability to promote their interests in this geopolitical context.

## Prospects

The scientific consensus is that global warming will continue until and unless the nations control greenhouse gas emissions. According to a post-COP 26 assessment published in Nature,

“A study for the Climate Action Tracker website, by Niklas Höhne at Wageningen University in the Neth-

China-Pacific Island Countries Foreign Ministers’ Meeting,” (Oct 10), [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1915970.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1915970.shtml)

37 US Department of State. Media Note. 2021. “U.S.-China Joint Glasgow Declaration on Enhancing Climate Action in the 2020s, (November 10), <https://www.state.gov/u-s-china-joint-glasgow-declaration-on-enhancing-climate-action-in-the-2020s/>

erlands and his colleagues, showed that, if pledges announced at the COP meeting are implemented, temperatures are still projected to rise 2.4 °C by 2100, well above the 1.5 °C target agreed at the 2015 Paris climate summit. The effects of this are likely to be catastrophic.”<sup>38</sup>

As we have seen, avoiding such a catastrophe is beyond the direct capabilities of any Pacific island country or of all PICs working together. Working together, however, PICs should be able to exert greater influence on international forums and to leverage mutual assets, such as access to fisheries, in negotiations with developed nations. It is in their interest to work together through their regional organizations to maximize their influence on countries that are large greenhouse gas emitters. Because those larger nations are also vulnerable, if to a lesser extent or on a longer time scale, PICs should find a growing number of political allies therein, who share their priorities for climate security.

Global progress to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions has been slow and fitful, but Pacific island countries with common interests have helped to shape positive advances through the UNFCCC. In spite of setbacks, such as the dilution of commitment to phasing out coal in the final language of the Glasgow Climate Pact, they must continue to champion global greenhouse gas mitigation in order to secure their own environmental security.

Given the predicted trajectory of climate change, the major opportunity for agency for most PICs will be in the area of adaptation. Unlike mitigation, most adaptation activities and impacts are localized, for example, to a particular reef, coastline, floodplain, aquifer, or village. Some actions will be achievable with national resources. Others will require external funding or technical assistance, and individual countries may be in competition with their peers for those resources.

Pacific island countries have been developing national action plans for adaptation to the impacts of climate change since at least 2001, often with support from international organizations and donor nations. It remains incumbent upon island governments to implement and update those plans, drawing upon national and external resources. Regional organizations can be focal points for collaboration to lobby for increased multilateral

38 “COP26 didn’t solve everything — but researchers must stay engaged.” 2021. Editorial, (November 16), *Nature* 599, p. 347, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-03433-2>

funding, for example, through the Global Environment Facility and the Green Climate Fund. Thus, while different countries vie for a larger piece of the pie, working together, they can seek to increase the size of the pie. These activities are not new but an extension of past politics and practices for Pacific island countries.

What is new is the complexity of the emergent climate crisis in its geopolitical system. Optimal planning for the extent of adaptation and the choice of adaptation strategy depends on the global course of mitigation and on the interactive decisions of multiple actors. For example, the success of India and China at diluting the Glasgow Pact's aspirational commitment to phasing out coal may have unquantifiable but real impacts on achieving Pacific Island Countries' goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees. Anticipating those effects will influence thinking about adaptation strategies. The most dramatic example is, for atoll nations, whether to adapt through emigration, or to adapt in place through civil engineering and lifestyle changes. Impacting such decisions will be the internal politics of reaching a national consensus, the international politics of acceptance by and transition to a host nation(s), and the potential impacts on national and regional security of mass migration.

Adding to the uncertainty will be the climate-related decisions of other nations and peoples. For example, rising sea levels that lead to emigration from Pacific island countries will have similar impacts on low-lying continental river deltas, including urban areas in India, China, Indonesia, Vietnam and Bangladesh. In the event of a global failure to mitigate, Pacific island countries will likely be competing with larger nations for resources to adapt to climate change under perilous circumstances. Donor nations will be concerned about addressing the security situation not only in the Pacific islands, but across the region and the globe and at home.

Similar considerations apply to resources for climate-related disaster response. Global and regional structures are in place and have frequently been used to provide HADR support to Pacific island countries. It is the intensity and frequency of need and the possibility of compound disasters that will impact the complex enviro-geo-political system within which disaster response must occur.

Pacific island countries have an opportunity to leverage the nexus of US-Chinese strategic competition and collaboration to advance their own goals and interests. Specifically, Pacific Island countries can collaborate to encourage the two nations to follow through on their Joint Glasgow

Declaration on Enhancing Climate Action in the 2020s. Working together through regional organizations such as the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), they can craft proposals for joint Sino-American support to adaptation projects that may be hard to decline in light of the goals endorsed in the declaration. On the other hand, individual Pacific island countries may decide that it is in their better interest to trade access to ports, bases, or fishing rights, for example, in exchange for concessions on climate mitigation and resources for adaptation or response.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, according to the scientific consensus reported by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Pacific island countries and the world face a security crisis from the emergent, complex phenomenon of climate change. The principal cause of climate change is the historical and continuing emission of greenhouse gases into our shared atmosphere and oceans resulting in global warming and ocean acidification. Pacific island countries, whose greenhouse gas emissions are *de minimis*, are nonetheless especially vulnerable to climate change by virtue of their geography, demography, and limited financial resources. For atoll nations, the vulnerability is existential as rising sea levels and extreme weather events can eventually make them uninhabitable.

The course of the emergent climate crisis will depend on mitigation that is reducing atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations. Pacific island countries have no direct way to contribute to such reduction, only the possibility of influencing major emitters to address the issue. To the extent that mitigation fails to reduce global warming, Pacific island countries must adapt to rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and changes in ocean temperature and chemistry that impact marine life and coral reefs. Where adaptation fails, they must prepare to respond to the impacts of climate change. Here too, in the worst-case scenarios, Pacific island countries will be dependent on accessing the resources of developed countries with their own interests and agendas for the resources to adapt and respond.

There is a post-WWII global framework through which developed countries contribute to adaptation and response to natural disasters in less developed countries. Since 1994 under the UNFCCC, an expanding part of that framework has been targeted at greenhouse gas mitigation and adaptation and response to the impacts of climate change. Pacific island countries are experienced in seeking and receiving support under that

framework. Collaborative approaches to promoting their interests through regional organizations have had some success in the past and also some disappointments. Nonetheless, it must be so that a united voice will be more effective than fragmented voices in influencing the course of global governance of climate change.

Beyond the United Nations framework, Pacific island countries must navigate the dynamic context of great power competition for influence in Oceania. In Glasgow, China and the US vowed to strengthen and accelerate their climate action and cooperation for mitigation and to discuss the effective financing and implementation of adaptation in developing countries. Working together, Pacific island countries have an opportunity to exploit this declaration and to influence nations to compete for pride of place in resourcing climate adaptation and response. By working together through a Pacific island-managed organization such as SPREP, Pacific island nations can increase their joint control over the course of external support.

Sino-American cooperation in the domain of climate change is a tentative exception to the broader environment of strategic competition in Oceania. Within that context of competition, Pacific island countries have an opportunity to trade access to their resources, notably bases, fisheries, and votes in the UN General Assembly, in exchange for resources for climate adaptation and response and pledges for mitigation. It is impossible to predict how regional strategic competition will play out in the face of the global threat of climate change which requires strategic cooperation for its successful resolution. Over the course of the 21st century, the global geopolitics of climate change will be a key indicator of regional security in the enviro-geo-political system of the Indo-Pacific region.

# Security of Water and Food Resources on Small Pacific Islands

*Ethan Allen*

The approximately 10,000 small Pacific islands (i.e., Oceania, exclusive of Australia and the large islands of New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and Hawaii) are home to nearly four million residents. Despite marked cultural, linguistic, and societal differences, the peoples of these tiny protuberances from the vast ocean share common challenges related to their vital food and fresh water resources: small land area, limited groundwater and aquifer capacities, and high dependence on rainfall.

## Water Security

As growing plant-based foods is inherently dependent on the supply of fresh water, we will consider water issues first. Islands vary in their fresh water resources largely related to their elevation above sea level, and are generally classified as either low or high islands.

### *Water issues for low islands*

Low islands, often lined up on roughly circular reefs referred to as atolls, are narrow, low-lying strips of coral rubble and sand. These remnants of rims of long-submerged volcanoes are particularly fresh water stressed. With their highest elevations a few meters above sea level, they possess extremely limited hydrogeological capacities. Their fresh groundwater is constrained to thin, shallow 'lenses,' so called as they are thicker in the center and thinner at their outer edges. These lenses result from the fact that fresh water is less dense than is salt water, and so, especially when confined in small spaces among the grains of sand that inhibit mixing,

floats on top of the seawater that permeates the porous underpinnings of atoll islands.

Fresh water wells on low islands can often be easily created by simply digging a shallow pit in the loose, coarse sand that comprises the surface of low islands. The ‘trick’ is not to dig too deeply; if the pit extends below the bottom of the fresh water lens, salt water will intrude. However, given the shallow position of the lens and the permeability of the sediments in which it sits, the lens is easily contaminated by wastes such as oil drained onto the ground from a car’s crankcase or any other pollutant carelessly discarded.

Equally, and increasingly frequently, the lenses of low islands become salinized from oceanic over-wash. With sea levels rising, king tides and spring tides – high tides that occur when the Earth, Moon, and Sun are in close alignment – may flood across an atoll island from ocean-side to lagoon-side. Likewise, storm surges can inundate low-lying areas with sea-water. Such events have forced evacuation of islands.<sup>1</sup>

Surface freshwater sources are virtually non-existent on low islands. The atoll nation of Kiribati has but a single freshwater lake; similarly, among the 35 atolls and lone islands (~1,100 islands in all) of the Marshall Islands, only a few small freshwater ponds exist. Even when they exist, these limited surface freshwater sources are subject to salinization from storm surges or king tides.

Therefore, low islands are virtually entirely dependent on rain for their fresh water needs. Residents of atoll islands routinely employ rainwater catchment systems (RWCSSs) to meet their needs for potable water, usually on the scale of individual residences, groups of houses, or at community centers such as schools and churches.

Even where infrastructure supports large-scale, centralized RWCSSs to provide potable water, such municipal water sources often are unreliable and/or may be contaminated; leaks and illegal ‘bootlegged’ connections both allow untreated water to mix with treated. Furthermore, water from municipal systems in many places may be available for a few hours per day, a few days per week; the lack of continuous positive pressure in such systems commonly enables contamination, rendering their water

1 Yeo S. 2014, Marshall Islands face evacuations as sea swamps capital. Climate Home News. <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2014/03/04/marshall-islands-face-evacuations-as-sea-swamps-capital/>

unpotable. In general, on Pacific atolls, including urban centers such as Majuro and Tarawa, no resident can count on turning on a tap in their home and receiving water ready to drink.

Many in the region routinely buy bottled water for drinking and food preparation; but for many others, that luxury is not an option due to lack of funds and/or local availability of bottled water, especially on the smaller, more remote islands. Emergency desalinization, and even regular desalination, is becoming more important in places such as Kiribati, Tuvalu, and the Marshall Islands.

Beyond the aforementioned rising sea levels and concomitant more frequent flooding, climate change increasingly wreaks havoc on low islands through drought. While Pacific islands have typically experienced regular shifts between and rainier and less rainy seasons, now much more extended droughts are becoming the norm.<sup>2</sup> While, historically, the residents have adapted to this variation via water conservation methods that are practiced more rigorously during drier times, droughts are now more extended and severe than was the case previously. Recent examples of serious reduction in rainfall - 55%, Aug 2015 – Nov 2016 in Port Vila, Vanuatu; 57%, Nov 1997 - Nov 1998 in Nadi, Samoa; and 60%, Dec 1997 – Jun 1998 in Majuro, RMI - include deficits of more than half of normal rainfall for periods of a year or more.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Water Issues For High Islands*

Residents of high islands – where remnants of a volcanic cone may rise hundreds of meters from the sea – in contrast, often have surface freshwater sources such as ponds, rivers, streams, or springs, in addition to more substantial groundwater in thicker lenses and aquifers. High islands often cause orographic precipitation, where the warm, moist air is forced to rise upon encountering the windward side of the slope; as it rises and cools, water condenses out of the vapor into the liquid state and falls as

<sup>2</sup> Iese V, Kiem AS, Mariner A, Malsale P, Tofaeono T, Kirono DGC, Round V, Heady C, Tigona R, Veisa F, Posanau K, Aiono F, Haruhiru A, Daphne A, Vainikolo V, Iona N. 2021, “Historical and future drought impacts in the Pacific islands and atolls”. Climatic Change volume 166, Article number: 19 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-021-03112-1>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

rain that ultimately collects in aquifers. These aquifers, if above sea level, can feed and replenish high-islands' streams and ponds.

Even in these better-supplied locales, however, fresh water for drinking is a limited resource, as river or stream flow usually varies in synchrony with rainfall, whose patterns are increasingly erratic, with more extensive droughts becoming ever-more common. And, similar to low islands, coastal freshwater lenses are subject to contamination and salinization, and the limited surface water sources easily polluted. On these high islands, residents rely on RWCSs, and/or surface water, and/or groundwater, depending on a number of factors.

Similar to low islands, also, many high island municipal water systems are not well maintained. Leaks from such systems both wastewater and allow microbial (viral, bacterial, fungal, protozoan, etc.) and chemical contaminants degrade water quality.

#### *Water Decontamination*

So for many residents of small Pacific islands, collecting and storing drinking water from rain or local surface sources is an ongoing individual, family, and/or community task. Groundwater, surface water, and rainwater are subject to microbial contamination if in contact with organic debris. Besides salt, such microorganisms are the major contaminants of fresh water in Pacific islands, while metal, mineral, pesticide, or other chemical contamination are generally much less of an issue. Many such microbes can induce illness. Processes for ridding water of such 'bugs,' therefore, are critically important for maintaining the health of residents across the region.

Both geographic isolation and limited technical support capacities constrain the use of reverse osmosis and ultraviolet (UV) light decontamination systems on small remote islands. These technologically sophisticated systems are appropriate only where and when replacement parts can be obtained reasonably quickly, and trained knowledgeable personnel are available; neither circumstance is common across much of the Pacific Ocean expanse.

Various less technologically sophisticated options for decontamination, all coming with certain costs and benefits, are well known. Boiling water, for example, is not particularly technologically challenging but entails investments of time and considerable energy resources, rendering this a somewhat costly method. Simply placing a bottle of water in direct

sunlight throughout a day will, through heating and UV exposure, kill the vast majority of microbes; this method is difficult to scale up, and its efficacy depends heavily on strong, direct sunlight.

The use of iodine crystals, on the other hand, is relatively simple and not time or energy-intensive, but (a) such crystals are not always available, (b) this method is unsuitable for pregnant women due to potential maternal-fetal health issues, and (c) the aftertaste of iodine is unpalatable to many.

Chlorine tends to be more readily available than iodine, but brings with it issues of taste; furthermore, as chlorine volatilizes readily, its protection is transient and thus achieving the proper dosage (enough to kill microbes but not enough to taste) and timing (enough time for it to take effect, but not so much that the antimicrobial effects wane) is problematic.

The antimicrobial use of silver has been long recognized. Recently, however, a broadly practical decontamination process based on silver's lethality to microbes has been developed. MadiDrops™ are silver-infused, porous ceramic cakes that, placed in a five-gallon water dispenser, will knock out virtually all microbes overnight. A single MadiDrop can be used daily for a year, decontaminating more than 1,500 gallons of water.<sup>4</sup> This technology hits a 'sweet spot' for isolated small Pacific islands, inexpensive and requiring neither replacement parts nor technological sophistication nor electrical power.

Filtering is another traditional option for microbial decontamination. The technologies for filtering out microbes are changing rapidly, with rising effectiveness and decreasing costs. Examples of three relatively new simple microbial filters suitable for application on small Pacific islands follow:

- Folia Water makes coffee-filter type filters infused with silver nanoparticles. The Folia system comes with a filter holder that screws onto standard plastic water bottles, enabling simple decontamination and filtering of a half-gallon of water in about 10 minutes. Each filter can provide a week of germ-free water for a family.<sup>5</sup>

4 <https://madidrop.com/>

5 <https://www.foliawater.com/>

- Aquafilters are an inexpensive, multi-layered filter based on progressively finer and finer nanofibers. These small, simple devices can filter up >300 gallons per day and remove bacteria, fungi, and most other microbes, except viruses.<sup>6</sup>
- LifeStraw™ is a thick, plastic straw containing filters, along with decontaminating iodine crystals and carbon. This device enables a single consumer to drink safely, directly from a contaminated source.<sup>7</sup>

### *Desalination*

While small Pacific islands typically have very limited supplies of fresh water, they are all surrounded by a vast ocean of salt water. Emulating the natural water cycle of evaporation to condensation and back, various distillation technologies enable the extraction of fresh water from seawater.

Passive solar distillation to obtain fresh water is a very simple, low technology process. At its most basic, a hole is dug in the substrate, exposing previously buried soil. Freshly cut vegetation is sometimes added to the pit, to increase the amount of water. A sheet of plastic is laid across the hole, with its edges held firmly to the ground. A small weight is placed on the plastic over the hole, with a catchment container directly beneath. Water vapor from the soil and vegetation condenses on the plastic sheet, flows by gravity to the point beneath the weight, and drips into the catchment container.

This process, while useful in an emergency situation is very inefficient. Over the centuries, many improved distillation designs have been developed, but generally these have energy efficiency rates of ~30-40% limiting usefulness. Many other commercial distillation devices, on the other hand, are technologically complex, requiring specific replacement parts, and so are unsuitable for use in remote small islands.

One notable exception is a new company, Sunny Clean Water that has recently developed an extremely efficient process to obtain about five

6 <http://www.aquswater.com/>

7 <https://www.lifestraw.com/>

gallons of fresh water per day from a one-square-meter device.<sup>8</sup> These stills are being field-tested, and show considerable promise for availability in the near future. Their relative simplicity suggests ready application in remote island locales.

#### *Extraction of Water from Air*

Finally, technologies are being developed to extract and condense water vapor directly from the air. A company called Zero Mass Water has already commercialized a system melding state-of-the-art nano-structured materials together with a solar panel to produce a device that extracts and condenses water from the humidity in the air. However, the sophistication and need for special parts makes this option less useful for remote small-island sites.

On the emerging front in this realm, however, a group of researchers at Penn State University have recently developed a “slippery rough surface” whose nano-scaled textured surface is particularly efficient at passively condensing water vapor from air; prototype devices harvest 30 gallons per day per square meter of surface. At some point in the not-too-distant future, this might well lead to a broadly usable simple system requiring little technological sophistication that could meet drinking water needs on small Pacific islands.

Particularly with rising sea levels and the more frequent and extended droughts that accompany climate change, accessing adequate quantities of potable water on small Pacific islands is an increasing challenge. However, appropriate innovative technologies are helping meet this challenge, and are offering new ways for residents of these remote sites to enhance their drinking water security, resiliency, and self-sufficiency.

8 <https://www.sunnycleanwater.com>

## Food Security

Food security is declining worldwide, at least in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>9</sup> While not as prevalent as in Asia and Africa, moderate and severe food insecurity impact 12.9% and 3.4% of Oceania residents<sup>10</sup> respectively; the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) indicator 2.1.1 – prevalence of undernourishment (POU) stands at 6.2% or 2.6M Oceania residents<sup>11</sup> (note that this figure includes citizens of Australia, New Zealand, and Papua New Guinea). This POU stands almost a full percentage point higher than what it was in 2010.<sup>12</sup>

### *Climate Change Impacts*

Climate change is already decreasing food security in Oceania and this trend is accelerating over time. Virtually every aspect of climate change is having, and/or is projected to have, a negative impact on the self-sustainability of Oceania residents in terms of their food supplies.<sup>13</sup> Rising air, ground, and sea temperatures are disrupting traditional growth patterns of food crops and marine resources, triggering declining yields of the former and both reductions and migration of the latter. More extreme weather events, including more prolonged and severe droughts, more irregular and episodically heavier rainfall, and more intense tropical cyclones, are all damaging the subsistence agriculture and agroforestry commonly practiced in the region. Rising sea levels are salinizing freshwater lenses and aquifers and are causing more ocean inundation and flooding. All of these changes will place a heavier reliance on more expensive (and for many residents, unaffordable) and more heavily processed (and thus less healthful) foods, exacerbating the increasing POU noted above.

The severe and prolonged droughts had negative impacts on food security, killing off many of the agricultural staples and forcing residents to

<sup>9</sup> FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2021, The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021. Transforming food systems for food security, improved nutrition and affordable healthy diets for all. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb4474en>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> ibid.

<sup>12</sup> In brief to The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021. <http://www.fao.org/3/cb5409en/cb5409en.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Salem S. 2020, Climate Change and Food Security in the Pacific. <https://www.e-ir.info/2020/02/18/climate-change-and-food-security-in-the-pacific/>

consume less palatable and less nutritious vegetables.<sup>14</sup> Of concern going forward, the duration, frequency, and intensity of droughts, and especially of severe droughts, is projected to increase over coming decades.<sup>15</sup>

Both salt tolerant and drought tolerant food plants exist in the Pacific islands, and new varieties of many of these are being developed through selective breeding and/or genetic engineering<sup>16,17,18</sup>

Beyond plant life, food security is being increasingly threatened by ongoing changes in the marine environment that provides much of the protein in islanders' diets. Warming seas are causing migrations of fish populations away from their traditional ocean habitats, in many cases moving poleward, following their preferred temperatures (or the preferred temperature of their food source). At the same time, and often in concert with warming, increasing acidity of the oceans is causing large-scale die-offs of the coral reefs that support islands' formerly bountiful fish populations.<sup>19</sup>

Fish populations in the Pacific are expected to continue to decline during the upcoming decades, exacerbating food insecurity among island residents.<sup>20</sup>

### *Multiple Drivers and Diverse Impacts*

This regional food insecurity has multiple, interwoven drivers. "Food security issues in the Asia-Pacific Region are often caused by resource constraints, poverty and unfavourable terms of trade for food commodities. The basic causes of under-nutrition and household food insecurity include

14 Iese V, et al, 2021, Historical and future drought impacts in the Pacific islands and atolls. *Climatic Change* 166, 19 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-021-03112-1>

15 ibid.

16 Tables of Salt-tolerant and Drought-tolerant species. Agroforestry in the climate of the Marshall Islands. <http://oos.soest.hawaii.edu/pacific-rcc/Marshalls%20Agroforestry/site/salt-tolerant.php>

17 Ashraf M, Wu L. 1994 Breeding for Salinity Tolerance in Plants, *Critical Reviews in Plant Sciences*, 13:1, 17-42, DOI: 10.1080/07352689409701906

18 Martignago D, Rico-Medina A, Blasco-Escámez D, Fontanet-Manzaneque JB, Caño-Delgado AI. 2018, Drought Resistance by Engineering Plant Tissue-Specific Responses. *Front. Plant Sci.* <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpls.2019.01676>

19 Van Dien K, Stone D, 2018, The Effects of Ocean Acidification on Coral Reefs. *Climate Interpreter* <https://climateinterpreter.org/content/effects-ocean-acidification-coral-reefs>

20 Borton J 2019 South Pacific islanders threatened by climate change and overfishing. *China Dialog, Ocean*. <https://chinadialogueocean.net/9225-pacific-islanders-climate-change-overfishing/>

low production and productivity from primary resources (aggravated by high year-to-year variability), scarcity of employment opportunities, and inadequate and uncertain incomes in both rural and urban areas. These causes are closely inter-related: low productivity from primary resources means insufficient food and income for subsistence use, and inadequate surplus of food to meet the needs of rapidly growing urban populations, both of which may contribute to chronic and deepening food insecurity.”<sup>21</sup>

The results, however, are simple and disturbing – widespread under-nutrition. Across both the Federated States of Micronesia and Nauru, more than 50% of the population consumes less than the minimum level of dietary energy requirements.<sup>22</sup> Oceania states unenviably occupy three out of the top five positions globally of nations most vulnerable to food insecurity from ocean acidification (Table 2.1).

Vulnerability rank	Country	Ocean
1	Cook Islands	South Pacific Ocean
2	New Caledonia	Southwest Pacific Ocean
3	Turks and Caicos Islands	Caribbean
4	Comoros	Indian Ocean
5	Kiribati	Central Tropical Pacific Ocean

**Table 2.1:** Most vulnerable nations to food security threat from ocean acidification<sup>23</sup>

This vulnerability is of particular concern as seafood, particularly fish locally caught — subsistence fishery harvesting generally exceeds commercial harvesting of inshore resources by a factor of four or more — is

21 Gillett, 2000 The Sustainable Contribution of Fisheries to Food Security in the Oceania. Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. <https://www.fao.org/3/x6956e/x6956e09.htm>

22 Food Security in Vulnerable Islands: A regional food security atlas of the Pacific. World Food Program; Pacific Community - [https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000071751/download/?\\_ga=2.41259298.1216997260.1631800070-177339789.1628520123](https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000071751/download/?_ga=2.41259298.1216997260.1631800070-177339789.1628520123)

23 Hulesenbeck M 2012 Ocean-Based Food Security Threatened in a High CO<sub>2</sub> World. *Oceana*. [https://oceana.org/sites/default/files/reports/OceanBased\\_Food\\_Security\\_Threatened\\_in\\_a\\_High\\_CO2\\_World.pdf](https://oceana.org/sites/default/files/reports/OceanBased_Food_Security_Threatened_in_a_High_CO2_World.pdf)

a major source of protein across Oceania, with per capita consumption of fish on some islands as high as 250 kg per year, and eaten in over half of the meals.<sup>24</sup> “In most countries of the Pacific Islands area a large proportion of the subsistence fishery harvest comprises invertebrates and is gathered almost entirely by women. Fisheries development policies tend not to recognize or acknowledge the importance of subsistence fisheries in general, of inshore invertebrate harvests, or of the role of women in these fisheries. Most fishery development and management attention throughout the region continues to focus on the commercial components of the catch.”<sup>25</sup> Given the poverty throughout the region, many lack the capacity to purchase alternative imported sources of protein, even when such are available.

Further, fisheries contribute to employment, estimated at almost 100,000 jobs, enabling many to purchase food. Additionally, “Licensing of foreign fishing vessels to fish in the waters of Pacific Island countries forms an important source of revenue for these countries. This revenue has implications for the purchasing of food as well as a range of programmes which could enhance the food security situation. The World Bank (1995) estimates that in 1993 total access fees for the Pacific Islands region were about US\$ 56 million.”<sup>26</sup>

A further troubling trend is the gradual transformation of subsistence fisheries to commercial or semi-commercial ones. As local fish populations decline, more distant, open-ocean fishing, necessarily done at larger (i.e., commercial) scale becomes increasingly dominant. This trend, in turn, tends to shift islanders’ diets away from the traditional fish base, and towards a reliance on imported food, much of which “... is nutritionally inferior to a diet based on subsistence products, being low in complex carbohydrates and high in salt, sugar and fat. Many lifestyle-related diseases and nutritional disorders, including obesity, diabetes, vitamin A deficiency and, among children, low birth weights, slow growth rates, and anaemia, are directly attributed to a growing dependence on imported, low-quality foodstuffs that, because of their low cost, are progressively replacing local products. The development of commercial fisheries at the expense of

24 Gillett, 2000 Sustainable Contribution <https://www.fao.org/3/x6956e/x6956e09.htm>

25 ibid.

26 ibid.

subsistence fishing may therefore be detrimental to food security, at least at the household level.”<sup>27</sup>

Thus, declining food security across Oceania contributes to islanders’ ill health through diverse mechanisms. In 2019, the World Bank noted that, in large part due to this shift in diets, but exacerbated by poverty and other factors, “small Pacific island countries have one of highest rate of NCD [non-communicable disease] mortality in the world.”<sup>28</sup>

## Conclusions

Both water and food insecurity currently impact many residents of small island nations and are likely to increase in future years. Scientific and technological advances are addressing some of these challenges and may ameliorate certain problems, particularly in regard to decontamination and/or desalination of water. While a myriad of factors contribute to these declines in food and water security, the environmental impacts of climate change are of paramount importance, and must be considered in all endeavors to alleviate these increasing challenges around Oceania.

27 ibid.

28 Chand SS, Singh B Non-Communicable Disease Mortality in Small Pacific Island Countries. [https://devpolicy.org/2019-Pacific-Update/Day\\_1\\_Panel\\_3A\\_Shamal\\_Chand.pdf](https://devpolicy.org/2019-Pacific-Update/Day_1_Panel_3A_Shamal_Chand.pdf)

# Maritime Piracy, Fisheries Crime and Drug Smuggling in Papua New Guinea

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## Introduction

Maritime piracy is a growing issue in Papua New Guinea (PNG) along the coasts of Milne, Bay, Madang and Morobe Provinces. The problem emerged due to the convergence of a lack of government investment, limited employment opportunities, changing demographics, poor maritime security, foreign influence, and foreign exploitation of local fisheries. The most common threats come from armed robbery of goods or fisheries products, and the smuggling of betel-nut, money, drugs and humans.<sup>1</sup>

In an Asian Development Bank assessment of maritime waterway safety in 2012, the only mention of piracy concerned “few incidents of sea piracy, with passengers being held up and robbed.”<sup>2</sup> At that time, the PNG National Maritime Safety Authority (NMSA), with branches in each province, existed under the Department of Transport and Infrastructure to manage maritime safety and the maritime industry. In 2014, the NMSA completed a two-year project that established a coastal monitoring and surveillance system to, in part, mitigate illegal fishing and piracy.<sup>3</sup> It was

1 Magol, Manulizah. 2020. “A Case Study of Sea Piracy in PNG.” MManulizahs Blog (blog). June 19, 2020. <https://mmanulizahs.home.blog/2020/06/19/a-case-study-of-sea-piracy-in-png/?fbclid=IwAR2MU2Tq9ntS0drS7Po-dyZniKUBpL3eqLLUuN4Gle1jGwq0XEzoBtKZsc0>.

2 GHD. 2012. “Papua New Guinea: Preparing the Maritime and Waterways Safety Project.” ADB. Asian Development Bank. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/project-document/74641/44375-012-png-tacr.pdf>

3 “Shipping Bulletin.” Post Courier Online. <https://postcourier.com.pg/shipping/>.

not successful, however, as maritime crimes grew rapidly from then on without commensurate action on the part of the government.

For example, in response to parliamentary concerns regarding the murder of a fisherman in 2016, the Police Minister said that, while plans were in place for sea policing, sea policing did not exist because of a lack of funding.<sup>4</sup> Further, “water police boats had been nonexistent for at least 10 years as the dinghies and boats in maritime provinces were pulled out of service due to lack of maintenance and spare parts.”<sup>5</sup>

The same year saw a series of arrests and charges placed against suspected pirates who were in possession of homemade guns and various melee weapons.<sup>6</sup> In the same year, Morobe Province established a Sea Police Command supplied with two new patrol boats that oversaw the capture of several sea pirates.<sup>7,8</sup>

The recent occurrences of maritime piracy in Milne Bay Provincial waters especially from the Rabaraba and Huhu Local Level Government areas, and along the coastline towards Misima, Goodenough island, Dobu Island, and all the way to Rossel Islands, demonstrates an inability of law enforcement agencies to effectively police, search, rescue, and monitor the maritime environment of PNG.

## Driving Forces of Maritime Piracy

This upsurge in maritime piracy has been attributed to outside forces (Western influences, globalization, media, and Hollywood); an undeveloped economy (unemployment); and poor governance (lack of maritime security, funding, and boats).<sup>9</sup> However, it is always easy to blame others

<sup>4</sup> Ove, Jr., Stanley. 2016. “Sea Piracy Concern Raised in Parliament.” EMTV, August 2, 2016. <https://emtv.com.pg/sea-piracy-concern-raised-in-parliament/>.

<sup>5</sup> Zarriga, Mirriam. 2016. “No Money to Fund Sea Police: Atiyafa”. *Post Courier*, August 25, 2016. <https://postcourier.com.pg/no-money-to-fund-sea-police-atiyafa/>.

<sup>6</sup> Hakalits, Fabian. 2016. “16 Piracy Suspects Caught at Border.” EMTV, September 9, 2016. <https://emtv.com.pg/16-piracy-suspects-caught-at-border/>.

<sup>7</sup> *Post Courier Online*. “Morobe to Have Sea Police Command”. July 13, 2013.

<https://postcourier.com.pg/morobe-to-have-sea-police-command/>

<sup>8</sup> Waide, Scott. 2016. “Morobe Coast Piracy Gang Caught.” EMTV, October 31, 2016.

<https://emtv.com.pg/morobe-coast-piracy-gang-caught/>

<sup>9</sup> Magol, Manulizah. 2020. “A Case Study of Sea Piracy in PNG.” MManulizahs Blog (blog). June 19, 2020. <https://mmanulizahs.home.blog/2020/06/19/a-case-study-of-sea-piracy-in-png>

for one's problems and there are other more important driving forces at play that elevate this threat to the level of national security.

Firstly, fishing has become harder and less economical for local fishing communities due to overfishing and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing by foreign fishing vessels. Secondly, growing international drug and human trafficking networks have infiltrated the Pacific Islands to establish midway distribution nodes between the continents. To facilitate this process, they have engaged local criminal networks and initiated dependency on drug-based income. Thirdly, the ports in PNG are basically unregulated with management of port visits from foreign fishing and carrier vessels receiving the lowest score from the IUU Fishing Index.<sup>10</sup>

Overfishing can result from legal fishing but is often associated with IUU fishing, which significantly contributes to declining global fish stocks and undermines local efforts to manage fisheries sustainability. Unreported fishing is when vessels fail to report, misreport, or under-report a catch. Unregulated fishing is when vessels sail without nationality, or when fishing occurs in areas not covered under existing management plans.

Before we turn to these topics in more detail, it is necessary to examine the impact of conservation on piracy because the most recent spate of piracy is blamed by locals on government efforts at maritime conservation.

## **Maritime Conservation**

Sea cucumber fishing in PNG was extensive and provided up to 30% of the annual income to over 200,000 villagers.<sup>11</sup> In 2004, PNG exported over 400 tons of dried Beche-De-Mer sea cucumbers to China, Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, and South Korea, but the annual catch showed a steady decline. This led to the creation of a National Beche-de-mer Fishery Management Plan to manage the resource sustainably.<sup>12</sup> The harvesting season runs from October to January, but closes early in each province if the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) has been reached. However, due to crashing

?fbclid=IwAR2MU2Tq9ntS0drS7Po-dyZniKUBpL3eqLLUuN4Gle1jGwq0XEzoBtKZsc0.

10 <https://iuufishingindex.net/profile/papua-new-guinea>

11 Hair, Cathy, Jeff Kinch, et. Al . 2018. "Re-Opening of the Sea Cucumber Fishery in Papua New Guinea: A Case Study from the Tigak Islands in the New Ireland Province." *SPC Beche-De-Mer Information Bulletin*, no. 38 (March).

<https://png-data.sprep.org/system/files/Beech-de-mer%20in%202018.pdf>

12 <http://www.fao.org/3/y5501e/y5501e0p.htm#TopOfPage>

populations, a nationwide moratorium on sea cucumber fishing was put in place from 2009 to 2017.

Milne Bay Province is a large maritime province and the local people are heavily reliant on the open Beche-De-Mer season for income. Traditionally, they went out fishing and returned to sell fish at the local markets in Alotau, Padipadi Estates, East Cape, and Divinai. In an average week, local fishermen earned PGK300-400 (US\$85-112). For reference, in 2020, the average monthly wage was PGK 1,593 (US\$460). In Milne Bay, the Beche-De-Mer season is an important life-line for local fishing communities throughout East Cape area with many villagers traveling long distances by dinghy or banana boat to sell their products.

The same holds true for local fishing villagers in the Samarai-Murua Electorate and many other areas where catches are sold at Samarai Island fish market. In the Suau LLG area, local fishing communities and fisherman sell their fish at Fife Bay Local Market.

Eliminating this critical income for nine years created an existential problem exacerbated by food insecurity for the local populations dependent on this resource. Notably, it was when the season restarted in 2018 that seasonal food insecurity was found to persist, and local pirates began to take advantage of the limited harvest opportunity.<sup>13</sup> A growing number of youth armed with guns began to orchestrate maritime holdups and conduct shootouts in Milne Bay Provincial waters.

## **Overfishing and IUU Fishing**

The Eastern Maritime Approaches in Milne Bay's Provincial waters from the border near Oro Bay along the coastline from Mariawarte to Margarida and Mailu in the Central Province are home to some of the finest quality fish stocks in the world. They abound in Bluefin tuna, Yellow-fin tuna, Red Emperor, Sweet-Lips, Barramundi, Goldfish, and many others.

The challenge is that while PNG has a large Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), it does a poor job at authorizing foreign fishing vessels that operate in its EEZ, and it has few vessels and fuel for vessels to monitor the EEZ. Thus it is exposed and widely vulnerable to fisheries crime by

<sup>13</sup> Barclay, Kate, Michael Fabinyi, Jeff Kinch, and Simon Foale. 2019. "Governability of High-Value Fisheries in Low-Income Contexts: A Case Study of the Sea Cucumber Fishery in Papua New Guinea." *Human Ecology* 47 (3): 381–96. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10745-019-00078-8>.

foreign entities. PNG is a major stakeholder in the Pacific Island Forum Fisheries Association (FFA), which claimed that US\$616 million is lost to IUU tuna fishing in Pacific Island EEZs each year despite a strategy for regional monitoring, control and surveillance.

For example, in 2018, a Vietnamese fishing vessel with a hold full of illegally harvested Beche-De-Mar was taken into custody by the Samarai Police. Ironically, the impounded vessel was pirated by a crew from a vessel owned by a former high-ranking PNG politician. In what could be perceived as high-level corruption, the media, the Prime Minister, and a follow-up newspaper article all failed to reflect on the foreign fishing vessel committing fisheries crimes, but focused instead on how bad piracy was getting in Milne Bay.

In 2014, the government of PNG was given a “yellow card” warning by the European Commission for being non-cooperative in the fight against IUU fishing.<sup>14</sup> It was asked to make rapid “legal and regulatory changes that will send fishing operators a clear message that they cannot continue to degrade fish stocks, the wider marine environment and the livelihoods of coastal communities.” While advances have been made in some areas, these have largely been ineffective. For instance, PNG has the condition in all foreign access documents that at least 10% of every catch must be landed for processing onshore; however, ‘not one fish has ever been landed for processing’<sup>15</sup>

The issue here is that overfishing and IUU fishing by foreign vessels are likely major factors in the decline of sea cucumbers and other marine organisms. The gross lack of regulation and enforcement has resulted in fishing vessels being engaged not only by foreign entities, but by entrepreneurs from other Provinces, and even local private business owners to exploit vulnerable and limited maritime resources. The surges in piracy by locals experiencing economic and food insecurity can be directly tied to

14 “EC Warns PNG, Philippines over IUU Fishing,” 2014. Seafood Source (blog). June 10, 2014. <https://www.seafoodsource.com/news/environment-sustainability/ec-warns-png-philippines-over-iuu-fishing>

15 <http://www.fisheries.gov.pg/Portals/0/NFA%20Public%20Notice.pdf>

their communities experiencing declining fish captures as their traditional fishing grounds are increasingly exploited by foreign fishing vessels.

## **Maritime Smuggling Zones**

The potential for maritime piracy throughout PNG and especially in the southern region is high because of inadequate and unsupported law enforcement capacity to monitor, search, evaluate, and report on illegal activities that go beyond fisheries to include illegal immigration and illegal smuggling of banned substances such as cocaine and heroin.

The PNG border in the north is open to a variety of maritime traffic. This includes bulk cargo ships, liners and small boats that pass through PNG's waters on route to other destinations in the Pacific region. General cargo ships and passenger ships typically berth in Port Moresby or Lae awaiting clearance from NMSA. However, ships travelling up and down the coast between these cities remain unmonitored and port facilities conduct little to no searching and monitoring of ships for smuggling. The situation was so bad in 2018 that in preparation for the upcoming Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit, the PNG government authorized the US Coast Guard to enforce security zones in Port Moresby's harbor during the summit.

Importantly, the smuggling of IUU fishing captures in northern waters has remained a major problem for PNG since independence in 1975. Compounding this are PNG's own corrupt law enforcement agencies that have been found to smuggle guns and drugs.<sup>16</sup> There is thus little effort being made to effectively and efficiently search all fishing boats, bulk cargo boats, yachts, and passenger ships despite public awareness of a high degree of illegal smuggling taking place on the wharves of Papua New Guinea.

Maritime traffic in the east is especially high from September to December with as many as 50 ships cruising between 20 to 28 knots out at sea, scheduled to arrive at Sanderson Bay in Alotau, Milne Bay Province with an expected Port Traffic Response turn-around time of one day before departure to Lae in the Morobe Province. Given a lack of resources and capacity due to inadequate funding from the Milne Bay Provincial

<sup>16</sup> "Papua New Guinea Police Accused of Gun Running and Drug Smuggling by Own Minister." 2020. *The Guardian*. September 18, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/18/papua-new-guinea-police-accused-of-gun-running-and-drug-smuggling-by-own-minister>.

Administration and the national government, the Milne Bay Provincial Transportation Authority (MBTA) has not been effective in searching all ships, boats, and bulk carrier cargo ships in Provincial waters. The administrative and financial powers of the MBTA are held by the Milne Bay Provincial Administration, which should shift from a budget-support to a sector-wide approach.

## **Weak Seaport Security**

There are a considerable number of sea ports used for both domestic and international traffic. However, different agencies approve these ports for different purposes and the total picture is difficult to establish. The two largest ports are Lae and Port Moresby, attracting the bulk of cargo entering the country. The Motukea International Port Facility in Port Moresby has helped to ease maritime traffic congestion and greatly improved berthing response turn-around time for all shipping vessels transitioning through Port Moresby on route to other international destinations. Additionally, a number of resource ports provide space for bulk cargo.

All ports, particularly the resource ports, provide opportunities for the smuggling of arms, drugs, and people and are widely believed to be used for these purposes. Like many Pacific Islands, PNG has been more of a transit site for the movement of illegal goods and trafficked persons to Australia and other countries. However, as appetites for illegal activities grow locally, transit sites in the Pacific are turning into destinations in their own right.<sup>17</sup>

Port management is basically unregulated. The Department of Transport is the flagship agency for the Transport and Infrastructure sector in PNG. Since the launching of the Transport Sector Plan Volumes 1 and 2, the Transport Sector has undergone little to no significant change since independence. Importantly, the Maritime Subsector comes under the overall jurisdiction of the Department of Transport.

In fact, the Australian Aid Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade funded Transport Sector Support Program (TSSP) has provided support to various agencies within the Transport Sector including the Department of Works and Implementation, the Department of

<sup>17</sup> Butler, Gavin. 2019. Review of A South Pacific Drug Highway Is Causing Big Problems for Island Communities. Vice.com, July 2, 2019. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/3k3wjv/south-pacific-drug-cocaine-methamphetamine-trafficking-smuggling-highway-causing-big-problems-island-communities-fiji-tonga-vanuatu-new-caledonia>.

Transport and Infrastructure, NMSA, the PNG Harbors' Limited, the National Road Safety Authority, PNG Civil Aviation Authority, and PNG Ports Corporation.<sup>18</sup> TSSP was designed to ensure that PNG met obligations under the PNG Medium Term Development Plan 3, PNG Development Strategic Plan 2010 – 2030, and the PNG Vision 2050.

International maritime assistance, however, does not go far and is not sustainable when the Department of Transport and Infrastructure, especially the Maritime Subsector Division, does not apply a regulatory framework for PNG Harbors Limited, and the government is widely known to have an endemic culture of corruption.<sup>19</sup>

## **Relocation of Urban Criminals**

Compounding these criminal activities is the relocation of urban criminals to rural and remote locations as they flee the law or when they have done their time in prison. This is a common problem throughout the Pacific Islands that has strengthened local criminal networks.<sup>20</sup> While this relocation process has detrimental implications for the receiving towns, it also impacts the criminals and ex-criminals who are stigmatized, have difficulty finding work, and struggle to reintegrate into village communities and social networks.

Recently in PNG, Mr. Tommy Maeva Baker escaped from lawful custody in Bomana Maximum Security Prison which resulted in a wave of shootouts with the PNG police. As the wave of inequitable distribution of the benefits of the exploitation of natural resources throughout Milne Bay Province has grown, the Tommy Maeva Baker Gang, a criminal social clique with no clear purpose or objective, has become a popular platform for the expression of youthful resentment.

## **Response of the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary**

In preparation for the 2018 APEC Summit, the Milne Bay Provincial Government and the PNG National Government took a broad govern-

<sup>18</sup> "TSSP - Transport Sector Support Program, Papua New Guinea." Accessed June 8, 2022. <https://www.pngtssp.com/>

<sup>19</sup> "Will Papua New Guinea Get Serious About Corruption?" 2020. Transparency International (blog). February 10, 2020. <https://www.transparency.org/en/blog/will-papua-new-guinea-get-serious-about-corruption>.

<sup>20</sup> Pereira, Natalia. 2014. "Pacific Island Nations, Criminal Deportees, and Reintegration Challenges." Migrationpolicy.org. November 6, 2014. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/pacific-island-nations-criminal-deportees-and-reintegration-challenges>.

ment approach as they requested assistance from the Australian Federal Police through the PNG-Australia Policing Partnership Agreement between the two Governments. The request was for the establishment and bolstering of the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary Water Police Division.<sup>21</sup>

While this development has the appearance of a long-term solution to maritime crime, the Water Police Division requires considerable ongoing funding for personnel, maintenance of equipment, and upkeep of the facility. To act as a credible deterrence, an ongoing commitment is essential to fund training and exercises to build general maritime capacity, anti-piracy capabilities, and lethal weapons proficiency. The Water Police Division also needs to build credible battlefield experience, which it currently lacks.

## **Response of the Milne Bay Provincial Government**

In response to the increase in maritime piracy, the Milne Bay Provincial Government activated the Provincial Law and Order Committee with support from leaders from within Milne Bay Province. The PNG Commissioner of Police, Minister for Police and Member for Madang visited Milne Bay to assist the Provincial Government figure out how to manage escalating criminal activities. This led to a National Executive Council Confidential Brief Submission for the 60 days capture or kill of wanted criminal, Tommy Maeva Baker, and establishment of a police Water Station base in Alotau, Milne Bay Province.

The Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary, following their internal deliberation, requested the assistance of the Milne Bay Provincial Government for the full and voluntary repatriation of all citizens currently residing in squatter settlements in and around Alotau Town back to their villages in the outer islands. This decision was taken to avoid collateral damage in the event of a shootout between police and the Tommy Maiva Baker Gang.

It remains to be seen if this series of provincial-wide decisions provides a lasting solution to the escalating law and order problems within

21 “Royal PNG Constabulary Launch Water Police Support Equipment.” [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Yf9x9nFf4k). August 22, 2017 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Yf9x9nFf4k>.

Milne Bay Province and to a larger extent, how the lessons learnt are disseminated to other provinces that experience these challenges.

## Foreign engagement and assistance

After independence, the Somare government visited China in 1976 to establish diplomatic relations and welcomed the first Chinese ambassador the following year. In 1981, the Chan government considered China a friend, and PNG became a special observer in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and began to adjust its foreign policy to open up selective engagement with other international parties. Given the nation's slow rate of development, the Wingti government initiated the strategic Look North policy in 1994 to limit dependence on Australia and explore more profitable economic engagements with China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong.<sup>22</sup>

In a move to expand influence and address corruption in PNG, Australia launched the Enhancement Cooperation Package I in 2004 and ECP II in 2006.<sup>23</sup> This involved the placement of 300 Australian public servants in advisory and line positions in the PNG government and security sector. This evolved into the 2017 Strongim Gavman Program (SGP), which is a whole-of-government engagement program in which executive-level Australian officials are placed in agencies for two to three years.<sup>24</sup> The SGP then changed as the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade began to bring the then AUSAID program under its Ministerial Portfolio jurisdiction. The SGP is now under one overarching umbrella known as the PNG-Australia Governance Precinct that does not appear to be related any longer to security.<sup>25</sup>

It is important to note that PNG has been a strong regional player in Oceania and has supported the Aitutaki, Biketawa, and Boe Declaration

22 Mamadeni, Cameron. 2020. "Significance of the PNG Look North Policy." THE VOICE from the EAST (blog). October 1, 2020. <https://yapunenet.wordpress.com/2020/10/01/significance-of-the-png-look-north-policy/>.

23 Sugden, Craig. 2004. "Putting the Enhanced Cooperation Package to the Test." *Pacific Economic Bulletin* 19 (1). [https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/157707/1/191\\_putting\\_Sugden.pdf](https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/157707/1/191_putting_Sugden.pdf).

24 *Strongim Gavman Program: Management Framework*. 2019. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Australia. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/strongav-manage-frame.pdf>

25 *Pacific Leadership and Governance Precinct Strategic Review*. 2019. Quality and Technical Assurance Group. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/pacific-leadership-and-governance-precinct-strategic-review.pdf>.

agreements made collectively by the Pacific Islands Forum and its members on security issues of concern throughout the Pacific region. However, there have always been concerns about how these regional agreements can be used by regional powers such as Australia, France, and the United States of America to influence future activity in the Pacific region.

From 2007 to 2019, Chinese investment and interest in the Pacific grew quite rapidly, catching traditional partners off-guard. After the Australian government announced its “Pacific Step-Up” policy to re-balance China’s growing influence in Pacific Islands states, PNG signed up to the Belt and Road initiative in June 2018. The Pacific Step-up was highlighted in Australia’s 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper and 2016 Defense White Paper as of fundamental importance to Australia.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to assisting the establishment of the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary Water Police Division, Australia recently built on its long-term commitment to maritime security in the Pacific by gifting 21 Guardian-class Patrol Boats to 12 Pacific Island countries and Timor-Leste.<sup>27</sup> In 2018, the first of four patrol boats, HMPNGS Ted Diro, was delivered to PNG, followed by HMPNGS Rochus Lokinap in 2021. The other two remain under construction. These boats are supported by a regional surveillance capability and infrastructure upgrades. They came unarmed, but in 2021, Australia agreed to arm them so that they are more effective in protecting the maritime environment, resources and security.<sup>28</sup>

In 2019, PNG’s Deputy Prime Minister proposed that Australia use its coastguard assets to assist PNG in border and coastal surveillance to reduce maritime piracy and drug and arms smuggling that are now frequent in the once peaceful Milne Bay provincial waters.<sup>29</sup> A search for “piracy” and “Papua New Guinea” on the Australian government website for foreign affairs produced no results, which corroborates a statement that the

26 “Stepping-up Australia’s Engagement with Our Pacific Family.” Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/pacific/engagement/stepping-up-australias-pacific-engagement>.

27 “Shared Security in the Pacific.” Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. [https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/pacific/shared-security-in-the-pacific#Pacific\\_Maritime\\_Security](https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/pacific/shared-security-in-the-pacific#Pacific_Maritime_Security).

28 <https://www.australiandefense.com.au/defense/sea/australia-to-arm-png-patrol-boats>

29 Nicholas, Isaac. 2019. Review of Abel: Coast Guard to Curb Sea Piracy. Post Courier Online, January 10, 2019. <https://postcourier.com.pg/abel-coast-guard-to-curb-sea-piracy/>.

Step-Up has thus far “failed to be a positive enabler of regional security.”<sup>30</sup> Ignoring international security assistance is detrimental to Pacific Island countries in Oceania that are a easy target for maritime criminals. Japan stepped in to fill this gap in a small way by agreeing to provide maritime assistance during a 2020 meeting between defense ministers.<sup>31</sup> A grant of US\$9.3 million pays for three speedboats and telecommunications equipment to be used by PNG’s NMSA. The boats will likely be lodged at NMSA branches in the coastal cities of Alotau, Kokopo and Madang.

## Way Forward

Maritime piracy in Milne Bay Provincial waters was a relatively new phenomenon that reared its ugly head in 2019 following the closure of the Beche-De-Mer Season. The National Fisheries Authority exacerbated the situation by allowing foreign fishing vessels to continue operating in the same traditional fishing grounds that were closed to the local fishing villages throughout the area. This double standard of advising local communities not to fish but allowing foreigners to fish was either the result of incompetent fisheries conservation management or the outcome of corruption and bribery.

In PNG, traditional fishing grounds are reserved for use by local fishing villages, however, the national and provincial governments have failed to protect that right by allowing foreign exploitation and not providing adequate protection from criminal activities. As this problem grows and the region becomes less stable, PNG must face this maritime challenge even as it faced land-based criminal escalation 30 years ago. This emerging security dilemma has grown to the point where it will certainly impact the national economy and the 2022 National General Elections.

Policymakers must understand that maritime piracy is typically “threat-based” rather than “capability-based” and is not restricted to any particular

30 Shoebridge, Michael. 2021. “Australia’s Pacific Step-up Needs to Aim Higher.” *The Strategist*, ASPI, May 6, 2021. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australias-pacific-step-up-needs-to-aim-higher/>.

31 Abke, Tom. “Japan, PNG Team up on Maritime Security, Pandemic Fight” *Indo-Pacific Defense Forum*. July 20, 2020. <https://ipdefenseforum.com/2020/07/japan-png-team-up-on-maritime-security-pandemic-fight/>.

region or country. A regional response to maritime piracy should thus have the following preconditions:

- Be invited by the national government with supporting legislation
- Employ a whole-of-government effort with a multi-level approach
- Have support of the security sector including police and defense
- Have support of local people and village communities
- Contain long-term sustainable solutions

Without these basic provisions, maritime piracy in PNG has the potential to spiral out of control in a similar manner to land-based crime, and even lead to another resource-based succession crisis in the same vain as the Bougainville War.

The national government has yet to learn the lessons of the Enhancement Cooperation Package and the positive gains it may have had to offer at that time in the history of the new nation. Similarly, the government has yet to learn and fully understand the lessons of the Bougainville crisis despite a growing body of literature on the topic since the signing of the Bougainville Peace Agreement. Failing to understand the undercurrent and cross-current lessons from the surge in maritime piracy is compounded by an inability to interpret the myriad of urban to rural developmental challenges that are unique to each province throughout Papua New Guinea.

The inability of PNG's national government to reconcile equitable distribution of the benefits of resource exploitation with the preservation of cultural customary land in accordance with the Customary Land Registration Act of 2000 continues to pose an abject lesson for all citizens. The Eight Point Plan and Directive Principles of the Constitution of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea state that: "Equitable distribution of the benefits of the revenue generated from exploitation of the resources shall be equitably shared to all regions of Papua New Guinea," and yet, the Provinces that generated the income are deprived of an equitable share. This fundamental issue must be understood and remedied from the very beginning if sustainable and equitable development is to occur on any given piece of land throughout Papua New Guinea.

The Milne Bay Provincial Government continues to learn this lesson albeit the hard way given its escalating law and order problems, the growing youth bulge, and the inability of leaders to work together to respond to the concerns of the people in light of the growing new normal environment of compliance to COVID-19 epidemic protocols and procedures. In fact,

the COVID-19 epidemic has increased tensions throughout the southern region particularly in terms of customary landownership, customary land grabbing, customary land mediation that have resulted in dislocation for the customary landowners.

## Policy Recommendations

1. Given that the Provinces are inadequately supported by the central government and are unable to make use of income derived from their own natural resources, one solution is for the national government to decentralize by granting greater autonomy and a higher level of self-funding to the Provinces. This would go some way to preventing other states from seceding from the state in the footsteps of Bougainville.
2. A more autonomous Milne Bay Provincial Government would be able to pursue security sector development by overhauling the Milne Bay Provincial Police Command to become the Eastern Papua Policing Command Headquarters under the overall command of the Assistant Commissioner of Police – Eastern Policing Command, covering Eastern Papua Island Region, Eastern Papua mainland, and Eastern Papua Maritime Piracy Administrative Region. Importantly, the Assistant Commissioner of Police – Eastern Papua Policing Command, would have overall oversight of the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary in the Province.
3. The national PNG government must provide adequate oversight to ensure that resource management strategies are fair and equitable and do not harm locals while benefiting foreigners.
4. The National Fisheries Authority must prioritize local access to fisheries over foreign access to fisheries to preserve the stability of local economics.
5. The National Fisheries Authority must involve local communities by getting them to play important roles in conservation activities to increase their understanding and ownership of the challenges and solutions.
6. The National Fisheries Authority must cease allowing foreign fishing vessels to operate in the traditional fishing grounds of local fishing villages.
7. Invite the Coast Guard of a “northern” neighbor, such as the United States, to establish a forward operations base on Dioni

Island in the Milne Bay Province to build local capacity to fight maritime piracy.

Sustainable, long-term solutions to maritime piracy in Milne Bay Province of Papua New Guinea must originate with legislation from the Government of Papua New Guinea following a whole-of-society consultation and a multi-agency approach. Such legislation must have the full and complete support of all security forces including the PNG Defense Force and the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary, and the support of all fishing village communities.

## 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

<sup>1</sup> 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 a 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

<sup>7</sup> 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=WB9tGDcrHzDVAdaFVcFlUw>.

<sup>8</sup> 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 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 Manasseh 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/.](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,of%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.>

25 Priyanka 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 communique 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

<sup>26</sup> 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>.

<sup>27</sup> 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 Communiqué 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-debt 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 Communiqué 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 communiqué'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 Communiqué 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 prepositioning of supplies would look like.

Fifth, the communiqué 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

<sup>28</sup> 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.samoaobserver.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.lowyinstitute.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 Remengensau (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.lowyinstitute.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.samoaobserver.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-0a665de31ba3fcf2b1ba>

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 Nasonimi 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.

## Maritime Challenges and Opportunities of the Pacific Island Countries

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USN (retired), and CAPT Kimberley McCann, USN*

*Recognizing the ties of shared history and sacrifice, we  
will reinforce our partnership with Pacific Island states.*

~ United States Interim National Security  
Strategic Guidance, March 2021

The Indo-Pacific region covers approximately half the Earth's surface. It stretches across two oceans and multiple continents – the Pacific and Indian Oceans, the western coasts of the Americas, all of Australia, and much of Asia. There are few regions in the world as culturally, socially, economically, and geopolitically diverse as the Indo-Pacific. It is home to 36 nations with more than half of the world's population, an estimated 3,000 languages, many of the world's largest militaries, the most populous nation on Earth, the largest democracy, and the largest Muslim-majority nation.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, more than a third of the Indo-Pacific region is comprised of small island nations, which include the smallest republic in the world and the smallest nation in Asia.<sup>2</sup>

The Pacific Islands states have substantial natural resources. However, they also have diminutive island geography, small populations, and

<sup>1</sup> US INDOPACOM Area of Responsibility, accessed December 18, 2021, <https://www.pacom.mil/About-USINDOPACOM/USPACOM-Area-of-Responsibility/>.

<sup>2</sup> US INDOPACOM Area of Responsibility, accessed December 18, 2021, <https://www.pacom.mil/About-USINDOPACOM/USPACOM-Area-of-Responsibility/>.

limited economic diversity which makes them particularly vulnerable to natural disasters and health security challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors have recently led to increased poverty and economic volatility.<sup>3</sup> The United States has a significant interest in the Pacific Islands. These interests include the security and protection of US citizens and nationals, US sovereign territory comprising a state, US territories, and those persons and citizens that have aligned with the United States through free association. Moreover, the Pacific Islands have become part of the geopolitical space affected by strategic competition between China and the United States. China sees the Pacific Islands not just for its resources, but as an opportunity to diplomatically isolate Taiwan and to expand its maritime geopolitical dominion. The United States has an opportunity to solidify its positive relationship with the islands, which sit geographically and geopolitically between great powers, for the long term. But this must be done carefully, without overwhelming the small populations or resources of the islands, and with the right tools.

Oceania, or Pacific Islands, region is growing in its strategic importance as part of the greater Indo-Pacific region. The United States must redouble its efforts to support its interests in Oceania and select the right lead US government agency to focus on Oceania. Because of the United States Coast Guard's (USCG) unique maritime mission focus, structure, and posture, it is the right principle, along with many in support, to lead this endeavor. This chapter focuses on the significant maritime challenges and opportunities of the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) in Oceania, a unique area of the Indo-Pacific and an emerging geostrategic flashpoint. It begins with a background of Oceania, followed by an overview of substantial maritime challenges facing the PICs, and concludes with discussing opportunities and recommendations for American engagement and how the USCG, in partnership with others, is uniquely positioned to effectually interact with these island nations in support of a free, open, and resilient Indo-Pacific. The National Defense Strategy of the United States notes that: "A free and open Indo-Pacific region provides prosperity and security for all. We will strengthen our alliances and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific to a networked security architecture capable of deterring aggression,

[pacom.mil/About-USINDOPACOM/USPACOM-Area-of-Responsibility/](http://pacom.mil/About-USINDOPACOM/USPACOM-Area-of-Responsibility/).

<sup>3</sup> "The World Bank in the Pacific Islands," The World Bank, accessed February 1, 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/pacificislands/overview#1>.

maintaining stability, and ensuring free access to common domains.”<sup>4</sup> The USCG is the US agency best equipped to operationalize this assertion.

## Background

Oceania is a sprawling and diverse region of the Indo-Pacific with an estimated population of 43 million people with most of its countries being small island nations.<sup>5</sup> Oceania is generally considered as four geopolitical subregions: Australasia, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia. The island nations located in Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia are often collectively referred to as the PICs.

**Australasia:** Comprised of Australia and New Zealand with both countries having extensive knowledge of the region to include decades of experience engaging with the PICs and well-established relationships with the island nations’ policymakers and peoples.

**Melanesia:** Consists of the Republic of Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, the Republic of Vanuatu, and the French territory of New Caledonia.

**Micronesia:** This subregion comprises the island nations of the Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of Kiribati, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Republic of Nauru, and Palau. This subregion also includes three US territories: Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and Wake Island.

The Compacts of Free Association (COFA) are agreements of political association between the United States and three PICs: Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), and Palau. There are two separate COFA agreements, one between the United States, FSM, and RMI, and one between the United States and Palau. These agreements support the self-determination and economic self-sufficiency of FSM, RMI, and Palau while facilitating U.S. strategic influence in the region.<sup>6</sup>

**Polynesia:** The eastern most subregion of Oceania containing the Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa, Tonga, and Tuvalu. Polynesia also encom-

<sup>4</sup> Jim Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, (2018: US Department of Defense, Washington DC), 9.

<sup>5</sup> Jason Shvili, “What is Oceania?”, April 12, 2021, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-is-oceania.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Erin Thomas, *Compacts of Free Association in FSM, RMI, and Palau: Implications for the 2023-*

passes the French territories of French Polynesia and Wallis and Futuna, and contains the US territory American Samoa and the State of Hawaii, the British territory Pitcairn Islands, the New Zealand territory Tokelau, and the Chilean territory Easter Islands.

The Pacific Islands Forum is an influential political and economic policy organization in Oceania. Founded in 1971, its 18 members, which include the PICs, are: Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.<sup>7</sup> The PIF is currently fracturing with Nauru, Palau, Kiribati, FSM, and RMI leaving the PIF ostensibly due to the forum's failure to honor a long-standing agreement allowing Micronesia to rotationally head the forum's Secretariat. This fracture in the PIF is an opening exploitable by the PRC that enables it to expand its geopolitical influence.

China and Taiwan are in fierce competition for diplomatic recognition in Oceania. In fact, four of Taiwan's 14 remaining diplomatic allies are the PICs: Nauru, Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and Tuvalu.<sup>8</sup> China is increasing pressure on these PICs to abandon diplomatic recognition of Taiwan through the use of economic leverage and incentives such as infrastructure grants and public-private loans, predatory financing, and economic and tourism embargoes. China in 2019 persuaded Kiribati and Solomon Islands to switch diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China. Furthermore, in 2021, China announced plans to build an airstrip on Kiribati's remote island of Kanton, which lies astride the sea lanes connecting Hawaii with Australia and New Zealand.<sup>9</sup> The United States is concerned this airstrip could be dual-use and ultimately used by the PRC to directly range US military facilities in Hawaii. Because most PIC economies are underdeveloped, geographically distant from markets, and depend

2024 *Renewal Negotiations* (March 2019):1.

7 “The Pacific Islands Forum,” Pacific Islands Forum, access December 14, 2021, <https://www.forumsec.org/who-we-are/pacific-islands-forum/>.

8 “Countries That Recognize Taiwan,” World Population Review, accessed January 4, 2022, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/countries-that-recognize-taiwan>.

9 Johnathon Barrett, “Kiribati says China-backed Pacific airstrip project for civilian use,” last modified May 12, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/kiribati-says-china-backed-pacific-airstrip-project-civilian-use-2021-05-13/>.

significantly on foreign aid, they are vulnerable to China's use of such economic leverages and incentives.

## Maritime Challenges

### *Natural Disasters*

The PICs are vulnerable to maritime natural disasters, with five on the 2021 Ruhr University Bochum – Institute for International Law of Peace and Armed Conflict's World Risk Index list of the top fifteen nations having the highest risk of experiencing disasters.<sup>10</sup> These PICs and their respective rankings are: Vanuatu (1), Solomon Islands (2), Tonga (3), Papua New Guinea (9), and Fiji (14).<sup>11</sup> The PICs' susceptibility to natural disasters is intuitive when considering their geography and topography, which leaves them exposed to the effects of tropical cyclones, tsunamis, and sea level rise. For example, tropical cyclone Gita in 2018 left a trail of destruction from American Samoa to Tonga; destroying Tonga's Parliament building, displacing thousands of residents around the region, and prompting an emergency declaration in American Samoa.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, tropical storm Harold in 2020 barreled into Vanuatu as a Category 5 system, killing 27 people and causing millions of dollars in damage.<sup>13</sup> In January 2022, the Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai underwater volcano near Tonga erupted with the resulting ash and tsunami, leaving Tonga's entire population of 105,000 without reliable access to food and water.<sup>14</sup> Many of the island nations lack substantive and durable emergency management capabilities to adequately prepare for and respond to natural disasters, which compounds their vulnerability to natural disasters and results in the

10 "World Risk Report 2021," Ruhr University Bochum – Institute for International Law of Peace and Armed Conflict, 2021, 43-46, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2021-world-risk-report.pdf>.

11 "World Risk Report 2021,43-46," Ruhr University Bochum – Institute for International Law of Peace and Armed Conflict, 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2021-world-risk-report.pdf>.

12 "Review of the 2016/2017 and 2017/2018 Cyclone Seasons," World Meteorological Organization, accessed December 15, 2021, <https://public.wmo.int/en>.

13 "Review of the 2016/2017 and 2017/2018 Cyclone Seasons," World Meteorological Organization, accessed December 15, 2021, <https://public.wmo.int/en>.

14 "Tonga: Volcanic Eruption and Tsunami - Jan 2022," OCHA Service – Relief Web, last modified February 4, 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/disaster/vo-2022-000005-ton>.

PICs often requiring significant foreign humanitarian and disaster-relief assistance.

### *Climate Change*

The Pacific Island Forum's Boe Declaration Action Plan of 2018 asserted that climate change is the single greatest threat to its members' livelihood, security, and well-being.<sup>15</sup> However, compared to the PICs, climate change and its effects may not necessarily be as significant a threat or align with the priorities of other larger nations and great powers in the region. For example, the PICs' geography, topography, and limited emergency response capabilities will likely cause them to bear the brunt of climate change effects and therefore view this issue as more of an existential threat when compared to Australia, New Zealand, the PRC, or the United States, for whom climate change is viewed as an impending threat and will be insulated from its most acute consequences due to greater land mass and larger and more diverse economic base.

The Thwaites Glacier illustrates how the PICs are susceptible to the effects of climate change, specifically sea level rising. This glacier is part of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet and is the largest glacier on Earth with dimensions approximately equal to the subcontinent of India.<sup>16</sup> The Thwaites Glacier has an annual net loss of an estimated 50 tons of ice and since 2000, experienced a net loss of more than 1,000 billion tons of ice with the loss doubling over the last 30 years.<sup>17</sup> If this glacier melts completely, which at its current rate would take an estimated 100 years, it will raise sea levels approximately 10 feet.<sup>18</sup> This sea level rise would inundate most of the PICs.

In addition to climate change, the Boe Declaration's other strategic focus areas include Human Security and Humanitarian Assistance and

15 "Boe Declaration Action Plan," Pacific Islands Forum, accessed November 12, 2021, <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/BOE-document-Action-Plan.pdf>.

16 "Thwaites Glacier," The International Thwaites Glacier Collaboration, accessed December 28, 2021, <https://thwaitesglacier.org/index.php/about/facts>.

17 "Thwaites Glacier," The International Thwaites Glacier Collaboration, accessed December 28, 2021, <https://thwaitesglacier.org/index.php/about/facts>.

18 "Thwaites Glacier," The International Thwaites Glacier Collaboration, accessed December 28, 2021, <https://thwaitesglacier.org/index.php/about/facts>.

Environmental and Resource Security. Although independent issues, these areas can also be causatively linked to climate change.

### *Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing (IUU-F)*

IUU-F erodes both regional and national security, undermines maritime rules-based order, jeopardizes food security and availability, is harmful to the environment, and destroys legitimate economies. Recognizing the effect climate change can have on fish stocks and food security, coupled with the PICs' dependency on fisheries for most of their dietary requirement, the Boe Declaration's Action Plan includes strengthening efforts to protect fisheries by combating IUU-F through enhanced monitoring and surveillance capabilities. However, most PICs currently lack the capability to fully patrol their EEZs and enforce their fisheries, making each especially vulnerable to IUU-F.

### *Transnational Crime and Human Trafficking*

Transnational crime networks are more likely to operate in the PICs because of these nations' low levels of development, poverty, and instability. The illicit drug industry is the most significant crime threat in the region.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the PICs are used as transit points for trafficking of people to other target nations to include the PICs themselves, where they are exploited primarily by the sex and construction industries.<sup>20</sup> There are several PICs listed as Tier two countries in the US Department of State's 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report. Per the US Department of State, Tier 2 governments do not fully meet the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 minimum standards but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards.<sup>21</sup>

## **Opportunities**

During the Pacific Campaign of the Second World War, the PICs were a high priority for the United States due to their strategic location. However, except for American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and the COFAs, the United States has paid

<sup>19</sup> Roderick Broadhurst, Mark Lauchs, Sally Lohrisch, "Transnational and Organized Crime in Oceania," SRN Electronic Journal (2000): 8.

<sup>20</sup> Roderick Broadhurst, Mark Lauchs, Sally Lohrisch, "Transnational and Organized Crime in Oceania," SRN Electronic Journal (2000): 11.

<sup>21</sup> "2021 Trafficking in Persons Report," US Department of State, accessed February 2, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

relatively modest attention to these island nations when compared to other regions of the world. This is despite PIC proximity to important sea and air routes linking the United States with the rest of the Indo-Pacific, routes that account for a significant portion of our foreign trade. In fact, until recently, the United States viewed the southern PICs as primarily the responsibility of its allies whose countries are either located in Oceania or have territories in the region.<sup>22</sup>

Reflecting on China's militarization of land features in the South China Sea, and recent security agreements, such as the one with Solomon Islands, the emergence of PRC engagements in Oceania are of particular concern to US policymakers. In 2021, the PRC was the third-largest aid donor to Oceania, behind Australia and New Zealand with its involvement factoring into its policymakers' strategic thinking in at least two ways: as a means of furthering the One China principle and as part of an effort to challenge the United States for primacy in the Pacific region.<sup>23</sup>

With the emergence of the PRC's growing engagements and investments in the PICs, the United States recently took several important steps to underscore the importance of Oceania to its national security interests. Specifically, it pressed for action on further funding for the COFAs, created a new Director for Oceania position on the National Security Council staff, announced more than \$300 million in additional spending for the region in 2019 and 2020, emphasized steps to address climate change, and is providing COVID-19 vaccines.<sup>24</sup>

USCG's missions which include protecting marine resources, safeguarding the environment, ensuring port security, the search and rescue of persons at sea, emergency management and response to natural disasters, are especially relatable to the PICs because they are activities and skills with which the PICs are typically involved. Moreover, the USCG's small footprint relative to larger US agencies, emphasis on human-to-human interactions and partnerships, and ability to work well within the interagency enterprise underscores its ideal fit for effective and substantive small island

22 Oceania and the United States, Dorrance.

23 Jennifer D.P. Moroney and Alan Tidwell, America's Strategy In Oceania, Time For A Better Approach, July 19, 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/07/americas-strategy-in-oceania-time-for-a-better-approach/>.

24 Jennifer D.P. Moroney and Alan Tidwell, America's Strategy In Oceania, Time For A Better Approach, July 19, 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/07/americas-strategy-in-oceania-time-for-a-better-approach/>.

nation engagements. In other words, the USCG is ideally suited to meet PICs requirement for small, frequent engagements, not large-scale more infrequent activities, which in many ways is the Department of Defense model.

The USCG is a recognized leader in emergency management within the maritime domain with demonstrated proficiency in managing incidents and crises, whether as the lead federal agency or in a supporting role. Recent examples include the USCG being the first federal agency on-scene in less than 24 hours supporting Joint Task Force Haiti, rescuing people, and providing humanitarian assistance following the devastating 7.2 magnitude earthquake that ravaged Haiti in August 2021.<sup>25</sup> And when Hurricane Ida made landfall that same month in 2021 as the second-most damaging and intense hurricane to hit Louisiana, the USCG had an integral role in the interagency response efforts leading, coordinating, supporting, and executing search and rescue, pollution response, and ports and waterways preparation and restoration missions, among many other actions.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, the US National Incident Management System-Incident Command System (NIMS-ICS) is a comprehensive, systematic, standardized approach to emergency and incident management that guides departments and agencies at all levels of government, NGOs, and the private sector. Maritime contingency response operations continue to be a hallmark of Coast Guard expertise, with their proficiency and agility operating within the NIMS-ICS arena as the backbone of its members' ability to be an effective part of any coordinated response under the National Response Framework. With increased funding and personnel, the USCG could expand its NIMS-ICS exportable training capabilities to include the PICs, supporting their ability to become more proficient and resilient emergency managers during the preparation, response, and recovery phases of natural disasters.

Many PICs, including the US island territories, lack the capability and capacity to fully police their sovereign waters, making them vulnerable to IUU-F and other illicit activities. The USCG recognizes a global approach

25 “Coast Guard, partner agencies continue to support Haiti,” Coast Guard News, August 25, 2021, <https://coastguardnews.com/coast-guard-partner-agencies-continue-to-support-haiti-3/2021/08/25/>.

26 “Coast Guard continue to support Hurricane Ida recovery efforts,” Coast Guard News, September 26, 2021, <https://coastguardnews.com/coast-guard-continues-to-support-hurricane-ida-recovery-efforts-5/2021/09/26/>.

is needed to effectively combat IUU-F and is currently a leader in an assemblage of international counter-IUU-F and illicit trafficking operations and partnerships in Oceania, which include:

*Pacific Quadrilateral Defense Coordinating Group (Pacific QUAD)*

The USCG serves as the US Indo-Pacific Command representative to the Pacific QUAD, a collaborative effort with Australia, France, and New Zealand aimed at coordinating and strengthening maritime security in the South Pacific. Pacific QUAD efforts to combat overfishing include joint patrols to ensure compliance with international fisheries agreements.

*Shiprider Agreements*

The USCG partners with the PICs through bilateral Shiprider Agreements that allow partners nations to enforce their own domestic laws by having their law enforcement officials aboard a USCG vessel. Furthermore, most Shiprider Agreements also authorize a PIC law enforcement official to embark on a US Navy vessel with a USCG law enforcement detachment in order to observe, board, and search vessels suspected of violating that PIC's maritime laws or regulations, which include transnational crime organizations, human trafficking, and other illicit activities.

*Oceania Maritime Security Initiative (OMSI)*

A Department of Defense program leveraging military assets transiting Oceania to strengthen maritime security, raise maritime domain awareness, and support regional stability and partnerships in Oceania by enabling USCG law enforcement personnel to conduct maritime law enforcement operations from US Navy assets in coordination with the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission.

*USCG International Port Security (IPS) Program*

In partnership with our maritime trading partners, the IPS Program seeks to reduce risk to US maritime interests, including US ports and ships, and to facilitate secure maritime trade globally. Through reciprocal port visits, the discussion and sharing of port security best practices and the development of mutual interests in securing ships transiting to the United

States and elsewhere, the PICs and other states can enhance the security of the global maritime transport system.<sup>27</sup>

#### *USCG and Defense Institute of International Legal Studies (DIILS)*

The USCG, in partnership with DIILS, has been working to bolster the PICs' legal capacity to prosecute IUU-F and trafficking cases.

In July 2021, the USCG retitled its Guam unit to "Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam" to reflect its expanding presence in the Western Pacific. This includes the addition of three new Fast Response Cutters (FRCs) possessing advanced capabilities in endurance, communications, and surveillance systems to replace the aging 110-foot patrol boats previously homeported in Guam. These FRCs bring new expeditionary capabilities to Oceania to conduct maritime security missions such as fisheries patrols, enhance maritime domain awareness, and enforcement efforts with partners in the Western Pacific that have limited offshore surveillance and enforcement capacity.

### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

The Pacific Islands region, largely forgotten by the United States during the Cold War and post-Cold War era, has again become a geopolitically contested region and part of the great power competition between the PRC and the United States. The United States has the opportunity and desire to sustain and enhance its interests in the region and can best do so through a whole-of-society approach to the opportunities noted in this chapter.

The United States should reaffirm its commitment to the COFA states to maintain strategic influence in the region while supporting the self-determination and economic self-sufficiency of our COFA partners.

The United States should maintain its positive relationship with all of the PICs even through the current tumultuous redefining of multi-lateral relationships as the Pacific Islands Forum faces an uncertain future. Though the PICs are diverse and disparate, sustaining a positive

<sup>27</sup> "IPS Program FAQ," United States Coast Guard Atlantic Area, accessed February 1, 2022, <https://www.atlanticarea.uscg.mil/Our-Organization/Area-Units/Activities-Europe/Maritime-Security/IPS-Program-FAQ/>.

relationship with the region as a whole will prevent it from being dismantled piecemeal.

The United States should assist the Pacific Islands states with their most pressing challenges, many of which involve maritime security to include climate change, IUU-F, and transnational crime and human trafficking. Beyond monetary support and even more important than investment, the United States should renew its efforts to establish a lasting and reliable presence focusing on enduring relationships. Part of this effort can be through partnerships such as those through the Maritime Security Initiative. An extremely important Department of Defense tool is the resilient capacity, shared understanding, and networked relationships built through time by the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies and other similar institutions.

The great asymmetric advantage that the United States has is its alliances and partnerships. The United States should redouble its efforts to approach the Pacific Islands collectively and proactively with its treaty allies, partners, and other like-minded states. Australia and New Zealand are central to the effort, but Japan, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, and European Union are also key to the effort and have demonstrated an interest in the region.

Issues the PICs consider of top importance include climate change that can affect resource and food security, predacious taking of resources through IUU-F, illicit traffickers, and natural disaster response. These are issues and missions the USCG regularly engages with, many times in concert with PICs and other like-minded partners in the Indo-Pacific region. With the goal of a free, open, and resilient Indo-Pacific, the Coast Guard's operations, activities, and investments in the region are helping ensure unrestricted, lawful access to the region's maritime commons. Ultimately, the United States' focus on this region will be central to multiple similar efforts to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific.

# Acronyms

ANASE – Association des Nations d'Asie du Sud-Est ( French version of ASEAN)

ANZUS – Australia, New Zealand, United States (agreement)

AOSIS – Alliance of Small Island States

ASEAN – Association of Southeast Asian Nations

APG – Asia-Pacific Group

APICC – Asia-Pacific Intelligence Chiefs Conference

ARF – ASEAN Regional Forum

AUKUS – Australia, United Kingdom, United States (agreement)

CEP – (French) - Pacific Experiment Center

CHOD – Chiefs of Defense (meeting)

COFA – Compact of Free Association

COP – Conference of the Parties (Climate Change)

COVAX – COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access

DIILS – Defense Institute of International Legal Studies

DKI APCSS – Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies

EEZ – Exclusive Economic Zone

EFO – French Establishments of Oceania

EU – European Union

FANC – Les Forces Armées de Nouvelle-Calédonie [French: - New Caledonian Armed Forces]

FAPF – Forces Armées en Polynésie Française (French: Armed Forces in French Polynesia)

FAS - Freely Associated States

FFA – (Pacific Island) Forum Fisheries Association

FIC – Forum Island Countries

FLNKS – Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (French:

Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front)

FRC – Fast Response Cutters

FRSC – The Forum Regional Security Committee (FRSC) is a sub-forum under the Pacific Islands Forum.

FSM – Federated States of Micronesia

GCF – Green Climate Fund

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

GHG – Greenhouse Gas

HADR – Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Response

HACGAM – Heads of Asian Coast Guard Agencies Meeting

IAA - Interagency Agreement

INDC - Intended Nationally Determined Contribution

INDOPACOM – (US) Indo-Pacific Command

IOC – Indian Ocean Commission

IONS – Indian Ocean Naval Symposium

IPCC – (UN) Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

IPFC – Indo-Pacific Fisheries Council

IPS – USCG International Port Security

ISACC – Institutional Strengthening in Pacific Islands Countries to Adapt to Climate Change.

IUU – Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing

LDCF – Least Developed Countries Fund

MFAT – Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade

MPS – Micronesian Presidents' Summit

MSG – Melanesian Spearhead Group

NAP – National Adaption Plan

NAPA – National Adaptation Plan of Action

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NDC – Nationally Determined Contribution

NIC – (US) National Intelligence Council

## Acronyms

- NMSA – National Maritime Safety Authority
- NOAA – National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- NSP – National Security Policy
- NSS – National Security Strategy
- NZ – New Zealand
- NZDF – New Zealand Defense Forces
- OCO – Oceania Customs Organizations
- OMSI – Oceania Maritime Security Initiative
- PACER Plus – Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations
- PHP – Pacific Humanitarian Pathway
- PIC – Pacific Island Countries
- PIDF – Pacific Island Development Forum
- PIF – Pacific Island Forum
- PICP – Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police
- PIPP – Pacific Island Prevention Programme
- PLG – Polynesian Leaders Group
- PNA – Parties to the Nauru Agreement
- PNG – Papua New Guinea
- POM – Prevention Operating Model
- POU – Prevalence of Undernourishment
- PRC – People's Republic of China
- PSIDS – Pacific Small Island Developing States
- RAMSI – Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands
- RHCC – Regional HADR Coordination Center
- RMIFC – Regional Maritime Information Fusion Center
- RWCS – Rainwater Catchment System
- RMI – Republic of Marshall Islands
- RSS – Regional Security System
- SCCF – Special Climate Change Fund
- SEAC – Southeast Asian Command (1943)

SDG – Sustainable Development Goals (UN)

SIFCIO – Security Information Fusion Center Indian Ocean Region

SPC – Secretariat of the Pacific Community

SPDMM – South Pacific Defense Minister's Meeting

SPREP – Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environmental Programme

SWPA – South-West Pacific (1942)

TAAF – (French) – Southern Lands and Antarctic Territories

UN – United Nations

UNFCCC – United National Framework Convention on Climate Change

USAID – United States Agency for International Development

USCG – US Coast Guard

UV – Ultraviolet

WPNS – Western Pacific Naval Symposium