

**PACIFIC ISLAND MICROSTATES AND U.S. SECURITY**

**COOPERATION: A STRATEGIC REASSESSMENT**

Kevin D. Stringer and Madison Urban

*The Pacific is the most dynamic region of the world, and what happens here will shape the future for generations to come.*

— Henry Kissinger, *World Order*, 2014

**Abstract**

Pacific Island microstates are crucial in the U.S.-China strategic competition due to their diplomatic influence, strategic location, and valuable maritime resources. The United States has re-engaged these nations with diplomatic initiatives and partnerships. This chapter proposes a comprehensive U.S. security cooperation strategy focused on four key pillars: U.S. Coast Guard and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration-led maritime security cooperation, strategic collaboration with the European Union, expansion of U.S. Civic Action Teams, and regular deployment of U.S. Army Reserve Civil Affairs units. These actions will enhance maritime security, bolster crisis preparedness, and foster resilient partnerships, countering Chinese influence and promoting regional stability.

**Introduction**

The Pacific microstates stretch like pearls across the aquamarine carpet of Oceania. From Palau in the west to the Cook Islands in the east, this collection of sovereign countries plays a significant geopolitical role in the broader Pacific Rim security arena. In fact, these microstates represent key terrain and partners in the ongoing

© 2025 Kevin D. Stringer and Madison Urban

<https://doi.org/10.71236/AXJT2495>

strategic competition between the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC or China) in the Pacific theater.

However, competition in Oceania is not merely limited to the United States and China. Still, it is also central to other contests in the Indo-Pacific, including the longstanding conflict between Taiwan and China for diplomatic recognition and legitimacy. Furthermore, Oceania is also home to key U.S. allies and partners, namely Australia, New Zealand, and Papua New Guinea. To achieve a competitive advantage over China and support its allies and partners in this contested space, the United States will need to invest in long-term, tailored, and relationship-oriented security cooperation activities with these small states while avoiding the policy neglect and indifference it has displayed in recent decades.

Superficial measures or outsourcing foreign policy to regional allies are not sustainable strategies for long-term effectiveness in Oceania. This chapter argues for a strategic reevaluation of U.S. engagement with these microstates, advocating for a shift from historical neglect to proactive, tailored, and relationship-oriented security cooperation. It will delve into the unique strategic importance of these states within U.S.-PRC dynamics, outline the challenges and opportunities of engaging with them, and propose tailored strategies to enhance U.S. influence while addressing the microstates' core concerns.

This analysis adopts the United Nations (UN) Secretary General's 1967 definition of microstates as exceptionally small in area, population, and resources yet sovereign and significant on the geopolitical chessboard.<sup>1</sup>

The focus on the 13 Pacific microstates recognized by the United States as independent countries with populations under one million—including Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, the Cook Islands, Niue, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau—is strategic. These states are at the confluence of significant global

challenges and opportunities, from climate resilience to maritime security, making them indispensable in crafting a forward-looking U.S. strategy in the Pacific.

To navigate the complexities of the Indo-Pacific's geopolitical environment and secure a strategic edge over China, the United States must transcend past oversights by investing in long-term, genuine partnerships with Pacific microstates. This step requires a nuanced approach that appreciates each state's unique context and prioritizes sustainable cooperation over transactional engagements.

The proposed strategies for engagement include a partnership between the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to lead projects on fisheries, law enforcement, and climate resilience in the Pacific microstates; collaboration with the European Union (EU) to strengthen maritime security; extending U.S. Civic Action Teams (CAT) to all 13 microstates; and regularly assigning U.S. Army Reserve Civil Affairs units to these countries. This multifaceted approach addresses the immediate security and environmental challenges. It lays the foundation for a partnership that respects the sovereignty and developmental aspirations of Pacific microstates, ensuring a collaborative future marked by mutual respect and shared prosperity.

### **Strategic Importance of Pacific Microstates in the U.S.-China Rivalry**

Amidst the vast blue expanses of the Pacific Ocean, the microstates emerge not just as sovereign entities but as pivotal actors in the grand strategic competition between global powers. Their unique blend of diplomatic agility, geostrategic position, and stewardship over crucial natural resources places them at the heart of the contest for influence between the United States and China. Despite their small size, Pacific microstates possess rights and privileges on the international stage equal to much larger nations, allowing them to

exert influence in global forums and contribute to shaping international norms and policies. Their strategic location amidst major sea routes and near vital U.S. military installations underscores their importance in geopolitical dynamics, particularly in U.S.-PRC competition. While small, these states could have an outsized impact on future conflicts.

In this intricate contest of power, the Pacific microstates leverage their UN membership and strategic autonomy to make impactful decisions that resonate far beyond their shores. As guardians of the Pacific's vast maritime domains, these microstates not only find themselves in the crosshairs of strategic interests but also as custodians of the international norms and policies that govern pressing global issues.

### *Diplomatic Influence and UN Engagement of Pacific Microstates*

Despite their modest size, Pacific microstates wield influence in international decision-making. Holding equal membership in the UN as any other state, these states use their voting rights to shape global governance and norms. A recent instance of their influence was observed in the UN General Assembly vote on October 27, 2023, concerning a ceasefire in Gaza. The resolution, which passed with 121 states in favor, saw opposition from the United States alongside a small but significant coalition that included five Pacific microstates: Fiji, Tonga, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, and Nauru.<sup>2</sup> While UN General Assembly resolutions are not binding, the voting outcomes send signals to the larger world community and can shape perceptions of legitimacy. Building international coalitions in a forum that counts each vote equally illustrates their capacity to influence major international decisions and underscores their strategic importance.

### *Participation in International Forums*

The status of being a UN member state not only equates to a seat at the table in global discussions but also opens doors to impactful participation in various UN committees and forums, magnifying the impact of Pacific microstates on the international stage. The involvement of the Solomon Islands in the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) exemplifies how small states can meaningfully engage in global dialogue on critical issues. ECOSOC, a platform for policy coordination and review of economic and social challenges, offers a space for these states to voice their perspectives and influence the implementation of international development goals.<sup>3</sup> While ECOSOC recommendations may not be binding, the council's focus on pivotal issues often steers the broader UN agenda, amplifying the reach of smaller states' contributions.<sup>4</sup> Beyond the confines of the UN, Pacific microstates actively participate in other international groupings, such as the Commonwealth and Pacific Island Forum, where they continue to shape regional policies and assert their global presence.<sup>5</sup>

### *Taiwan's Recognition and Sovereignty*

Moreover, the strategic autonomy exercised by Pacific microstates in diplomatic recognition, especially regarding Taiwan's international standing, underscores their relevant role in global diplomacy. Despite China's extensive economic outreach to isolate Taiwan, a few Pacific microstates maintain diplomatic and economic ties with Taipei, reflecting their sovereign decision-making and strategic balancing in international relations.<sup>6</sup> This steadfast recognition is not merely a diplomatic stance but an assertion of their agency in the face of global power dynamics, challenging the economic inducements with principled support for Taiwan.

Figure 23.1 visually summarizes the participation of Pacific microstates in key international forums and their diplomatic recognition of Taiwan, highlighting their active engagement in global affairs and independent foreign policy stances.

Country	UN Member	The Commonwealth	Pacific Island Forum	Diplomatic Recognition
Federated States of Micronesia	X		X	PRC
Fiji	X	X	X	PRC
Kiribati	X	X	X	PRC
Marshall Islands	X		X	Taiwan
Nauru	X	X	X	PRC
Niue			X	PRC
Palau	X		X	Taiwan
Samoa	X	X	X	PRC
Solomon Islands	X	X	X	PRC
The Cook Islands			X	PRC
Tonga	X	X	X	PRC
Tuvalu	X	X	X	Taiwan
Vanuatu	X	X	X	PRC

FIGURE 23.1: PACIFIC MICROSTATE PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL FORUMS AND DIPLOMATIC RECOGNITION OF TAIWAN

Source: Kevin D. Stringer and Madison Urban, created for this publication

### *Geopolitical Positioning and Strategic Routes*

The concept of the first and second island chains, pivotal to Cold War defense strategies in the Indo-Pacific, underscores the enduring geopolitical significance of these maritime corridors. Initially devised as a bulwark against Soviet and Chinese expansionism, these chains—from Japan through the South China Sea to the Malayan Peninsula and northern Japan through Guam to Indonesia—continue serving as linchpins in contemporary security architectures.<sup>7</sup> The potential for Chinese presence in Pacific microstates, bypassing these strategic defenses, raises profound implications for regional and global security dynamics.

### **Strategic Military Installations**

The strategic importance of Hawaii and Guam as cornerstones to the U.S. Indo-Pacific defense strategy is paramount. Hosting critical military installations, these territories are proximate to Pacific

microstates, linking their security postures. The recent attention to Kanton Island in Kiribati, just 3,000 km from Hawaii and historically a vital World War II-era refueling point, exemplifies the deepening geopolitical contest in these distant locales. China's announcement in March 2023 that it sent a team to assess the feasibility of renovating the former U.S. military airstrip raised security concerns, given the lack of an obvious commercially viable rationale for the project.<sup>8</sup> Since Hawaii is a significant part of the U.S. forward defense posture, it would be a central logistical hub in a military confrontation in the Pacific. If China is granted physical access to this Kiribatian island, it would be well positioned to severely interdict or hinder U.S. naval operations in the Pacific. This development underscores the intricate geopolitical contest unfolding in these remote locations.

The Compacts of Free Association (COFA) are foundational treaties delineating the security and economic relationships between the United States and the Freely Associated States—the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and Palau. These compacts grant the United States exclusive military access and strategic privileges within these nations' territories in exchange for economic aid, defense, and other services.<sup>9</sup> This unique arrangement allows the United States to project power and maintain a significant security presence across the Pacific, contributing to regional stability and safeguarding vital interests in the Indo-Pacific Theater.

The COFA agreements underscore a mutual commitment, ensuring that while the Freely Associated States retain sovereignty and can conduct their internal affairs, they align closely with U.S. strategic imperatives. Key installations, such as the missile defense base on Kwajalein Atoll and recent advancements like the Tactical Mobile Over-the-Horizon Radar (OTHR) system in Palau, highlight the military and strategic benefits accruing to the United States, making these compact agreements pivotal to American defense strategy in the region.<sup>10</sup> According to a recent report, “this modern

OTHR on Palau will be able to support space-based and terrestrial-based sensor and weapon systems for the potential cueing and early warning of incoming hypersonic weapons, cruise missiles, ballistic missiles, enemy aircraft, and ships.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Submarine Cables and Communication Security**

Beyond their military significance, the Pacific region’s strategic importance is further underscored by its vast network of submarine cables, essential for global communications. Key communication lines, such as those connecting Japan and Guam and another linking Australia with Hawaii, underscore the reliance of U.S. allies and partners on these undersea pathways that crisscross the Pacific, many threading through the Pacific microstates’ exclusive economic zones (EEZ)—a sea territory that extends 200 nautical miles from a state’s coast where it maintains exclusive rights for research and economic exploitation.

Figure 23.2 illustrates the intricate network of submarine cables that traverse the Pacific, many passing through the EEZs of Pacific microstates, underscoring the region’s strategic importance for global communication and the potential vulnerability of these vital links. Historically, Chinese research and survey vessels have undertaken activities around these cables that raise alarms of espionage and possible sabotage. Notably, in Palau’s EEZ, Chinese research vessels conduct reconnaissance and potentially the mapping of submarine cable infrastructure.<sup>12</sup> Such actions challenge the principles of free navigation by not adhering to the norms of “continuous and expeditious transit” as mandated by international law, underscoring the strategic vulnerability of these undersea cables.<sup>13</sup>



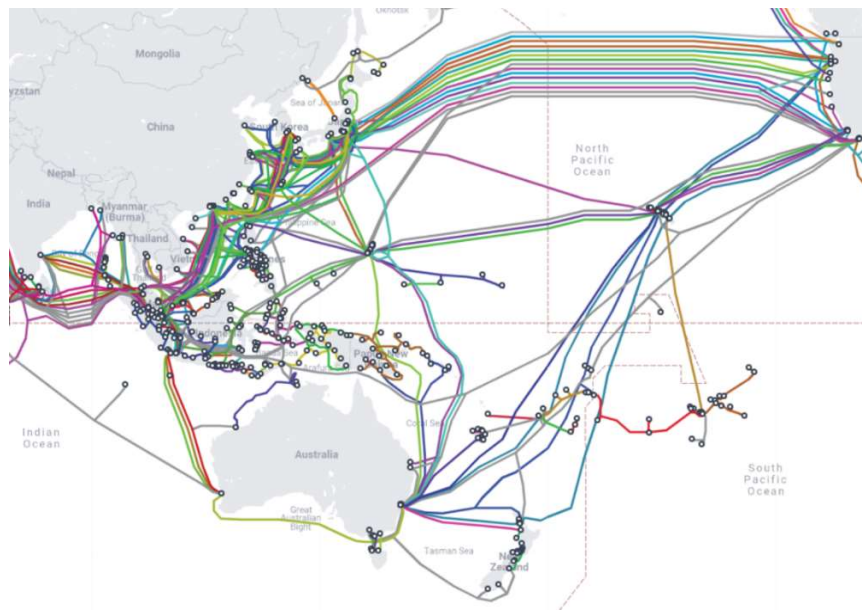


FIGURE 23.2: MAP OF SUBMARINE CABLES

Source: TeleGeography

The sabotage of undersea cables is not without precedent, as evidenced by actions during the Russia-Ukraine War, where Russia reportedly targeted undersea cables to disrupt communications and financial transactions.<sup>14</sup> Such strategies echo Cold War tactics, highlighting the enduring strategic value and vulnerability of undersea communications in modern conflict.<sup>15</sup> In response to these emerging threats, Australia, the United States, India, and Japan launched a notable international initiative—the Quad Partnership for Cable Connectivity and Resilience. This collaborative effort seeks to share best practices and develop comprehensive legal and regulatory frameworks to bolster the resilience of this critical infrastructure in the microstates.<sup>16</sup> Such proactive measures are vital for safeguarding the arteries of global communication against the backdrop of increasing geopolitical tensions.

This focus on submarine cable security illustrates the critical nature of these assets for economic and strategic stability and emphasizes the imperative for concerted international efforts to protect them. Through initiatives like the Quad Partnership for Cable Connectivity and Resilience and by adhering to the laws governing EEZs, the international community strives to ensure the security and reliability of these undersea links, which are pivotal for maintaining global connectivity.

### **Economic Significance and Resource Control in Pacific Microstates**

Despite their modest dimensions, Pacific microstates wield potential influence over global economic currents thanks to their geographical positioning and vast sovereign territories. These nations command expansive EEZs, attributed to their widespread islands and atolls dotting the ocean. Take Kiribati, for instance: its land mass encompasses merely 811 square kilometers—smaller than Hong Kong—yet it boasts one of the globe’s most extensive EEZs, covering an impressive 3.55 million square kilometers.<sup>17</sup> This sprawling maritime domain thrusts Pacific microstates into the forefront of pivotal areas such as global fisheries, the pursuit of essential minerals for the green energy transition, and the intricate web of maritime trade connecting Northeast Asia and Oceania.

#### *Fisheries and Maritime Trade*

The Pacific’s EEZs are vital to the global fishing industry, particularly for tuna, which significantly bolsters these nations’ economies and is a crucial component of global food supplies.<sup>18</sup> One-third of the world’s tuna catch emerges annually from these waters, including those of Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and Tokelau, a territory of New Zealand.<sup>19</sup> Between 2015 and 2018, fishing licenses and access fees generated over 45% of government revenue for the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, and Tuvalu.<sup>20</sup> The South Pacific Tuna

Treaty, a collaborative effort among the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and the 13 Pacific microstates, underscores the significance of fishing rights and economic assistance while also addressing the challenges posed by illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, which threatens both fish stocks and the economic sovereignty of these nations, escalating geopolitical tensions.<sup>21</sup>

### *Mineral Resources and Deep-Sea Mining*

Beneath and on the Pacific seafloor lies a treasure trove of natural resources, especially critical minerals like cobalt, indispensable for battery technology and the transition to green energy. While deep-sea mining remains in its infancy and regulatory frameworks are still being formulated, the potential for resource extraction ignites considerable interest and anticipates increased regional activity.<sup>22</sup> Exploratory deep-sea mining efforts have spanned a significant portion of the South Pacific, with samples collected from diverse locations, including Fiji, the Cook Islands, the Solomon Islands, Samoa, Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.<sup>23</sup> Notably, the region stretching between Hawaii and Guam, particularly within the Marshall Islands' EEZ, has emerged as a promising site for cobalt extraction.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, potential cobalt-rich areas exist within the EEZs of Micronesia, Tuvalu, Kiribati, the Cook Islands, Samoa, and Niue, highlighting the strategic importance of these areas in diversifying supply chains for essential green energy components.<sup>25</sup>

Enhancing the range of sources for these essential minerals is critical for diversification, especially considering the Democratic Republic of Congo's significant monopoly, which accounts for 70% of the world's cobalt production amidst its instability and corruption.<sup>26</sup> Such strategic diversification is essential for reinforcing global supply chains and encouraging new economic growth opportunities. The International Seabed Authority's issuance of exploration contracts near Guam highlights the growing

global interest in deep-sea mining from various stakeholders, including the China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association (COMRA) and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation.<sup>27</sup> This development represents a significant stride toward tapping these underexplored resources. Yet, the venture in deep-sea mining is not without its environmental concerns, from the potential harm to marine ecosystems to the regulatory uncertainties impacting ecological and economic outcomes.<sup>28</sup> The global pursuit of seabed minerals necessitates a reasonable balance between financial gain and environmental stewardship, necessitating international collaboration to navigate these uncharted waters responsibly.

Beyond their extractable resources, Pacific microstates sit astride key trade pathways, with their territorial waters encompassing crucial sea lanes of communication (SLOCs), maritime commercial trade routes, and strategic chokepoints within the first and second island chains. Regional SLOCs vital for Australia and New Zealand, for instance, traverse the territorial waters of these microstates, notably around the Solomon Islands.<sup>29</sup> Maritime routes connecting Japan or South Korea with Australia or New Zealand frequently navigate these waters.<sup>30</sup> With Japan ranking as Australia's second-largest trading partner and export market as of 2021, the imperative of maintaining unfettered navigation through these channels cannot be overstated.<sup>31</sup> While not directly affecting the United States, these trade dynamics are of paramount importance to its regional allies, highlighting the interconnected nature of global commerce and underscoring the strategic value Pacific microstates hold in facilitating or potentially disrupting the free flow of goods across these pivotal maritime corridors.

### **U.S. Policy Neglect and Recent Recalibration**

In the post-Cold War era, the U.S. attention toward the Pacific microstates waned, creating a vacuum that China's expanding

influence began to fill.<sup>32</sup> The pivotal moment came in 2019 when the Solomon Islands and Kiribati shifted their diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China, signaling that the United States needed to reassess and reinforce its position in the region.<sup>33</sup> This change led to a significant recalibration of U.S. policy aimed at countering China's sway and reaffirming America's role as an indispensable partner in Pacific geopolitics.

### *Shifts in Diplomatic Recognition*

The announcement of a security pact between the Solomon Islands and China in 2022 was a stark reminder of the shifting dynamics in the Pacific, necessitating a strategy for consistent U.S. engagement. This development, set against the Solomon Islands' complex historical backdrop of internal strife and external efforts toward stabilization, underscores the pivotal moments shaping the region's strategic landscape.

From 2003 to 2017, the Pacific Islands Forum—led by Australia and New Zealand, with participation or contribution from eight of the Pacific microstates (the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu)—spearheaded the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), a comprehensive intervention designed to restore order and rebuild governance structures amid escalating violence and political instability.<sup>34</sup> Initiated at the request of the Solomon Islands' government, RAMSI's multifaceted approach encompassed enhancing security, promoting legal and judicial reforms, and fostering economic recovery.

Two years after RAMSI disbanded, protests again erupted in the Solomon Islands over the government's decision to shift its recognition to China in September 2019, highlighting the deep-seated tensions within the country. A local premier's denouncement of the federal government's decision and subsequent ban on PRC investment on the island he governed underscored deepening

divisions.<sup>35</sup> By November 2021, the discontent had escalated into violence in Honiara, the capital city, notably affecting Chinatown, amidst a pandemic-induced economic downturn that exacerbated inequalities.<sup>36</sup> Despite the disbandment of RAMSI, a coalition of security forces from Australia, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, and New Zealand intervened at the Prime Minister's request.<sup>37</sup>

Shortly afterward, in April 2022, China and the Solomon Islands signed a security-cooperation agreement, the terms of which have not been officially publicized. However, a leaked copy of a draft troubled Washington and Canberra as the agreement set the conditions for a PRC military presence on the Solomon Islands, granting the PRC military the right “to protect the safety of Chinese personnel and major projects.”<sup>38</sup> Given the history of conflict, as well as differing foreign policy perspectives pertaining to diplomatic recognition and relations with Taiwan, a PRC invasion of Taiwan, coupled with protests in the Solomon Islands, could lead to a legal PRC military presence on the Solomon Islands. While the purpose of such a presence would ostensibly be “to protect the safety of Chinese personnel and major projects” in accordance with the treaty, it would also greatly expand China's ability to subjugate dissent in the Solomon Islands and project power into the South Pacific.

#### *Renewed U.S. Engagement Strategies*

In response to these developments and the broader challenges posed by China's growing influence, the United States embarked on a comprehensive strategy to enhance its engagement with the Pacific microstates. High-profile gestures, such as President Biden's landmark address at the Pacific Islands Forum in August 2021 and Secretary Blinken's visit to Fiji, marking the first such visit by a Secretary of State in nearly four decades, marked the beginning of this renewed focus.<sup>39</sup>

Initiatives to reopen the U.S. embassy in Honiara and establish new embassies in Tonga and Kiribati, the appointment of an envoy

to the Pacific Islands Forum, and an increase in the presence of the United States Agency for International Aid (USAID) in Oceania further bolstered diplomatic ties.<sup>40</sup>

### *High-Profile Diplomatic Initiatives*

The U.S. intensified engagement culminated in the launch of the inaugural U.S.-Pacific Island Country Summit and the unveiling of the Pacific Partnership Strategy, signaling a shift toward more sustainable and meaningful partnerships in the Pacific.<sup>41</sup> This approach is characterized by efforts to enhance regional cooperation in critical areas such as fishing regulation and environmental response, as demonstrated by the 2023 establishment of the USCG Marine Environmental Response Regional Activities Center (MER RAC) and the Illegal Unreported Unregulated Fisheries Center of Expertise (IUU-F COE) in Hawaii.<sup>42</sup> Together, these efforts underscore the U.S. intention to build sustainable, rather than transactional, relationships with Pacific nations by addressing key areas of mutual concern and reinforcing the U.S. position as a committed partner in the Pacific's future development and security.

Commenting on the U.S. decision to re-engage over the last years, Dr. Anne-Marie Schleich, a retired German ambassador to multiple Pacific microstates, put it succinctly:

The US re-engagement with Pacific Island countries will not be judged by high-ranking visits or new embassies but by its willingness to address the Pacific Islands' major concern, i.e., climate crisis, to contribute towards sustainable development and to increase trade with the region. China will focus its diplomacy on a few selected countries, further increase its trade with the whole region and use some soft power. The geopolitical tug of war in its courtyard is an opportunity for Pacific Island nations. They will pragmatically pick the best development offers. Competition for influence in Oceania will increase.<sup>43</sup>

As the U.S.-China geopolitical competition intensifies, Pacific microstates stand at a crossroads. They have the opportunity to utilize rivalry to secure improved political, security, and economic arrangements, especially given their reliance on foreign aid. However, for these partnerships to be enduring and impactful, they must transcend diplomatic overtures and focus on delivering tangible benefits that resonate with the island nations' core interests and aspirations.

In essence, the U.S. strategic recalibration in the Pacific represents a critical step toward building a resilient and mutually beneficial relationship with the microstates of Oceania, grounded in shared values and long-term cooperation rather than short-term transactions. This nuanced approach to security cooperation is essential for maintaining influence and stability in a region that is increasingly becoming a focal point of global strategic competition. The following section sketches the contours of a potential U.S. security cooperation approach that aims to build a sustainable rather than transactional relationship with the nations of Oceania.

### **Security Cooperation Recommendations for the United States**

The strategic dynamics of the Pacific, marked by the intricate interplay of global powers, underscore the pivotal role of Pacific microstates in the geopolitical landscape. These small yet sovereign islands are at the heart of diplomatic maneuvering, geopolitical positioning, and the guardianship of critical natural resources. This central position makes them indispensable in the strategic competition between the United States and China. This section delves into recommendations for enhancing U.S. security cooperation, tailored to bolster resilience, advance economic opportunities, and protect these nations' environmental and maritime assets. It aligns with the vision outlined in the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and the 2023 Pacific Islands Forum communique, advocating for an approach that underscores climate change mitigation, economic development, and fisheries



protection. In doing so, it proposes a cost-effective engagement focused on maritime security and disaster preparedness—areas where the existential threats to these island nations intersect with opportunities for meaningful partnership.

However, while the following recommendations are broad in scope, it should be noted that the Pacific Island microstates are by no means homogeneous. Each state has unique priorities, cultures, politics, and history that ought to be considered when approaching security cooperation. For example, the three states that recognize Taipei over Beijing lack access to many of the PRC's infrastructure and development financing programs. Furthermore, the Solomon Islands' security agreement with China and Tuvalu's recent security pact with Australia in 2023 highlight that there is no one preferred partner within the Pacific.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, the longstanding relationship between the Freely Associated States and the United States, exemplified by high rates of islander service in the U.S. armed forces, offers a rich foundation for deepening mutual commitments.<sup>45</sup> A one-size-fits-all approach that ignores these contours will likely be ineffective in building trust and advancing mutual priorities.

*Pillar One:*

*USCG and NOAA-led Maritime Security Cooperation*

Under the rubric of maritime security cooperation, the USCG and NOAA should lead a collaborative initiative to confront maritime security and environmental challenges. This effort aims to bolster fisheries management, law enforcement, and climate resilience, employing a civilian-led approach to counteract climate change-induced threats. Both agencies are well-suited for this role, with the USCG operating under the Department of Homeland Security and NOAA under the Department of Commerce, offering a civilian-oriented approach to addressing Oceania's security challenges.

This initiative is particularly critical in addressing the exacerbated threats to fisheries, including the interception of IUU fishing activities that climate change aggravates. Collaborating with Pacific nations on this issue promises to achieve multiple political, economic, and social objectives, such as helping to safeguard vital natural resources and income sources for Pacific microstates and fostering deeper U.S.-Oceanic ties.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, this approach actively supports maritime law enforcement, countering efforts by actors like China to weaken it.

The recent establishment of the previously mentioned USCG MER RAC and IUU-F COE are important first steps in this comprehensive strategy. Furthermore, in April 2024, the United States Coast Guard and Samoa signed an agreement that expands integrated operations and allows Samoa to authorize a USCG vessel to conduct law enforcement activities on its behalf (e.g., inspect maritime vessels, enforce Samoa's EEZ) to counter illicit transnational maritime activity.<sup>47</sup> This agreement is one example of how such partnerships could be structured and is evidence of the importance of this line of effort. Additionally, NOAA's specialized skills in weather forecasting, climate monitoring, fisheries management, coastal restoration, and support for marine commerce are ideally suited for engaging with and benefiting the Pacific microstates.<sup>48</sup> This multifaceted initiative addresses immediate environmental and security concerns and lays the groundwork for sustainable, resilient Pacific communities.

A second area of concentration under maritime security cooperation is the extension of international collaboration efforts to focus on shared responsibilities in fisheries, law enforcement, and climate action. While maintaining its policy sovereignty in Oceania, the United States benefits significantly from engaging a broader alliance of partners. Australia and New Zealand are natural allies in this domain, offering deep-rooted regional collaboration.

*Pillar Two:*

*Strategic EU Collaboration on Maritime Security*

To further enhance this cooperative framework, the United States should deepen ties with the European Union in maritime security, leveraging its considerable capacity-building expertise and resources. The European Union has extensive experience in maritime domain awareness, fisheries management, and maritime law enforcement, honed through decades of managing its vast maritime borders and participating in international missions. Its advanced technologies, such as satellite surveillance and vessel tracking systems, could significantly enhance monitoring and enforcement efforts in the Pacific.

The EU's capacity-building programs, focused on training and equipping coast guards and maritime law enforcement agencies, can be tailored to the specific needs of Pacific microstates, empowering them to better protect their resources and enforce their laws. A prime example is the EU's Critical Maritime Routes program, which has successfully strengthened maritime security in the Indian Ocean by providing training and equipment to regional partners.<sup>49</sup> A similar initiative, adapted for the Pacific and focusing on combating illegal fishing, piracy, and other maritime crimes, could prove highly beneficial.

Collaboration with the EU could also involve joint patrols, information sharing, and coordinated responses to maritime incidents. The EU's *Atalanta* operation in the Horn of Africa, which effectively deterred piracy and protected shipping through multinational naval forces, is a potential model for the Pacific.<sup>50</sup> In this scenario, the European Union could contribute vessels, aircraft, and personnel to joint patrols with the USCG and Pacific Island nations.

France and Germany, key EU members with significant interests in the Indo-Pacific, can play pivotal roles in fostering this collaboration.<sup>51</sup> France's overseas territories in the Pacific, such as

New Caledonia and French Polynesia, give it a unique understanding of the region's challenges and opportunities. Germany's commitment to the Pacific, demonstrated through its participation in the Partners in the Blue Pacific (PBP) ministerial, underscores its potential contribution to the region. Initiated in June 2022 and comprising Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, the United Kingdom, and the United States, the PBP aims "to drive resources, improve coordination, and close gaps with the goal of supporting Pacific priorities."<sup>52</sup> Germany's establishment of an embassy in Suva, Fiji, in August 2023 further signifies its support for Pacific Island nations.<sup>53</sup> The combined Franco-German diplomatic, economic, and military resources would significantly bolster U.S.-EU efforts to support Pacific microstates.

This strategic U.S.-EU partnership would address immediate security challenges and contribute to long-term regional stability and sustainable development. By pooling resources, expertise, and capabilities, the United States and the European Union can offer a more comprehensive and effective response to the complex maritime issues facing Pacific microstates, ensuring a unified front in safeguarding this vital region.

*Pillar Three:*

*Civic Action Teams (CAT) Expansion*

Given the escalating threat of climate change-induced extreme weather in Oceania, U.S. involvement in enhancing crisis preparedness is crucial. This commitment, through combined efforts in medical training and humanitarian assistance, aims to bolster resiliency and alleviate the impact of climate volatility. USAID recognizes Pacific Islands as particularly susceptible to climate change, facing hazards such as cyclones, floods, droughts, earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, unprecedented climate variations introduce new challenges, like altered rainfall patterns, intensifying storm severity, and rising sea

levels. The heightened vulnerability is exacerbated by the limited availability of accessible, quality healthcare in many islands, a situation that becomes direr during emergencies.<sup>55</sup>

Enhancing the islands' preparedness and response capabilities to these evolving environmental threats necessitates a comprehensive approach, leveraging U.S. resources and expertise to support the development of robust, adaptable systems for healthcare and disaster response, ensuring communities can withstand and recover from climate change and natural disasters. To further bolster crisis preparedness in response to climate change, the authors propose the implementation of expanded U.S. joint force civic action teams (CAT) in each country. Civic action involves using military forces to execute projects that directly support the local populace at all levels in education, training, public works, agriculture, transportation, communications, and health sanitation.<sup>56</sup> These activities aid societal development and enhance the relationship between military forces and the community.

The United States has a history of engaging its military in civic action roles abroad, providing a wealth of experience and resources for such missions. Drawing inspiration from the Civic Action Team-Palau (CAT-Palau) model, these initiatives aim to leverage the unique capabilities of U.S. military personnel in supporting local development and resilience efforts. The CAT-Palau, operational for over 50 years, exemplifies the positive impacts of such engagements. Comprising a versatile team of U.S. Navy, Army, and Air Force personnel with expertise in engineering, healthcare, and more, CAT-Palau has significantly contributed to development in Palau.<sup>57</sup> From construction projects to educational programs and medical outreach, the team's efforts have fostered a strong bond with the local population and government, showcasing the potential for mutual growth and understanding.<sup>58</sup> Extending this successful model to other Pacific microstates would ensure a sustained U.S. presence that enhances disaster response capabilities and

strengthens community ties. Such an approach underscores the U.S. long-term commitment to supporting the Pacific islands' resilience, showcasing a collaborative strategy to address the multifaceted challenges of climate change and natural disasters.

*Pillar Four:*

*USAR Civil Affairs Deployment*

Enhancing the strategic deployment of U.S. Army Reserve (USAR) civil affairs units to Pacific microstates would complement the established CAT programs, further bolstering disaster preparedness and crisis management capabilities across Oceania. Civil Affairs units specialize in conducting operations that address and mitigate sources of instability within societies. Organized, trained, and equipped for civil affairs operations, these Reserve Component forces are adept at working within communities to foster security, stability, and development.<sup>59</sup> Their expertise spans six critical areas highly relevant to the Pacific microstates: the rule of law, economic stability, infrastructure development, governance enhancement, public education and information dissemination, and public health and welfare improvement.<sup>60</sup> Among these, enhancing local health systems and capacities is especially vital, considering the escalating threats posed by climate change and natural disasters.

By prioritizing health engagement, Civil Affairs units can substantially strengthen healthcare infrastructure and better prepare island nations to manage and recover from emergencies.<sup>61</sup> This comprehensive approach addresses immediate needs and contributes to long-term sustainable development and improved health outcomes for the island communities.

It begins with thorough assessments of existing healthcare infrastructure, identifying vulnerabilities, and developing tailored plans for improvement in collaboration with local stakeholders. Capacity building is another critical component, providing training and mentorship to local healthcare professionals, focusing on

emergency medicine, disaster response, and public health interventions. Infrastructure enhancement involves assisting in constructing or renovating healthcare facilities, ensuring they are resilient to natural disasters and equipped to handle a surge in patients during emergencies. Facilitating the procurement and distribution of essential medical supplies, medications, and equipment ensures adequate resources during crises. Public health education campaigns educate communities about disaster preparedness, hygiene practices, and disease prevention, empowering them to take proactive measures to protect their health. Finally, establishing strong partnerships with local governments, healthcare providers, and international organizations ensures a coordinated and effective response to health emergencies.

### **Conclusion**

Despite their diminutive size and geographical remoteness, Pacific microstates wield diplomatic influence, occupy a strategic position, and control essential maritime and seabed resources. These attributes place them in the middle of geopolitical rivalry between the United States and China. To gain a competitive advantage over China and establish enduring, meaningful relationships with these key nations, the United States must transcend superficial or transactional interactions that overlook the fundamental national interests of these states.

The United States should adopt a comprehensive and nuanced strategy for security cooperation anchored on four main pillars. This strategy should include (1) a proactive, multiyear campaign spearheaded by the USCG and NOAA to focus on fisheries, law enforcement, and climate resilience; (2) strategic collaboration with the European Union to harness its significant maritime security and capacity-building expertise; (3) the expansion of U.S. joint force Civic Action Teams (CAT) to all 13 microstates for enhancing community resilience and disaster response capabilities; and (4) the

regular deployment of USAR Civil Affairs units to each country to bolster crisis management and civil support frameworks.

These strategic initiatives represent a reasonable and impactful investment in securing and enhancing cooperation within a region vital to global maritime interests. Neglecting to advance these specialized security strategies could result in ceding critical maritime territories to China, thereby relinquishing significant leverage in the global strategic competition. By recalibrating its security cooperation approach and intensifying engagement with the Pacific microstates, the United States not only counters Chinese influence but also solidifies its role as a committed ally, supporting the sovereignty, development, and security of these pivotal partners in the Pacific.

## **Endnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> United Nations Secretary-General, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Work of the Organization*, A/6701/Add.1 (1967), 20, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/713725?ln=en>.
- <sup>2</sup> Patrick Wintour, “US Looks Isolated after Opposing UN Resolution on Gaza Truce,” *The Guardian*, October 28, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/28/gaza-israel-truce-un-resolution-us>.
- <sup>3</sup> “Main Bodies,” United Nations, accessed November 2, 2023, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/main-bodies>.
- <sup>4</sup> United Nations, “Frequently Asked Questions,” accessed November 15, 2023, <https://ecosoc.un.org/en/about-us/faq>.
- <sup>5</sup> The Commonwealth, “Member Countries,” accessed November 1, 2023, <https://thecommonwealth.org/our-member-countries>; and Pacific Islands Forum, “The Pacific Islands Forum,” accessed November 1, 2023, <https://www.forumsec.org/who-we-arepacific-islands-forum/>.
- <sup>6</sup> Ryan Woo, “Former Taiwan ally Nauru Re-establishes Diplomatic Ties With China,” *Reuters*, January 24, 2024,



<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/china-nauru-re-establish-diplomatic-ties-state-media-2024-01-24/>.

- <sup>7</sup> Joshua Espena and Chelsea Bompig, “The Taiwan Frontier and the Chinese Dominance for the Second Island Chain,” *Australian Institute for International Affairs*, August 13, 2020, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/taiwan-frontier-chinese-dominance-for-second-island-chain/>.
- <sup>8</sup> Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Republic of Kiribati, “Remarks by H.E. Ambassador Tang Songgen at the Farewell Reception,” March 30, 2023, [http://ki.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/sghd/202304/t20230404\\_11054238.htm](http://ki.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/sghd/202304/t20230404_11054238.htm); Dominic Giannini, “Fresh Concern Over Chinese Interest in Pacific Airstrip,” *The West Australian*, March 22, 2023, <https://thewest.com.au/politics/fresh-concern-over-chinese-interest-in-pacific-airstrip-c-10123842>.
- <sup>9</sup> USIP China-Freely Associated States Senior Study Group, “China’s Influence on the Freely Associated States of the Northern Pacific,” *United States Institute of Peace*, September 20, 2022, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/09/chinas-influence-freely-associated-states-northern-pacific>.
- <sup>10</sup> Stephen Wright, “US Plans Over-the-Horizon Radar Facility in Palau,” *Benar News*, January 11, 2023, <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/pacific/us-palau-radar-01112023014042.html>; U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command, “Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site at Kwajalein Atoll (RTS),” accessed December 12, 2023, [https://www.smdc.army.mil/Portals/38/Documents/Publications/Fact\\_Sheets/RTS.pdf](https://www.smdc.army.mil/Portals/38/Documents/Publications/Fact_Sheets/RTS.pdf).
- <sup>11</sup> Emma Helfrich and Tyler Rogoway, “US Building Advanced Over-the Horizon Radar on Palau,” *The Warzone*, December 30, 2022, <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/u-s-building-advanced-over-the-horizon-radar-on-palau>.
- <sup>12</sup> L.N. Reklai, “Palau Says Chinese Vessel Slowed Over Undersea Cable During Incursion Into Waters,” *Radio Free Asia*, May 31, 2023, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/pacific/palau-china-cable-05312023014251.html>.

- <sup>13</sup> UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Law of the Sea*, December 10, 1982, [https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention\\_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos\\_e.pdf](https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf).
- <sup>14</sup> Sabine Siebold, “NATO Says Moscow May Sabotage Undersea Cables as Part of War on Ukraine,” *Reuters*, May 3, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/moscow-may-sabotage-undersea-cables-part-its-war-ukraine-nato-2023-05-03/>.
- <sup>15</sup> Sam J. Tangredi, “Disadvantages Ashore—Constraints on Achieving Integrated All-Domain Naval Power,” *Naval War College Review* 76, no. 3 (2023): 9, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol76/iss3/5/>.
- <sup>16</sup> Asha Hemrajani, “The Quad Partnership for Cable Connectivity and Resilience,” *RSIS Commentary*, no. 166, November 17, 2023, <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/CO23166.pdf>.
- <sup>17</sup> Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, “EU and Kiribati Agree on a New Fisheries Protocol to Their Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement,” *European Commission*, October 3, 2023, [https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-and-kiribati-agree-new-fisheries-protocol-their-sustainable-fisheries-partnership-agreement-2023-10-03\\_en](https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-and-kiribati-agree-new-fisheries-protocol-their-sustainable-fisheries-partnership-agreement-2023-10-03_en); Central Intelligence Agency, “Country Comparisons — Area,” *The World Factbook*, accessed December 20, 2023, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/area/country-comparison>.
- <sup>18</sup> Jonathan Baldoza and Ruivaldo Freitas Viana, “What are the Pacific Islands Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs)?,” *Asia Matters for America Matters for Asia*, accessed November 7, 2023, <https://asiamattersforamerica.org/the-pacific/the-pacific-islands-exclusive-economic-zones-eezs>.
- <sup>19</sup> Pacific Island Forum Fisheries Agency, “Sustainable Tuna Management and Policy,” accessed December 14, 2023, <https://www.ffa.int/what-we-do/sustainable-tuna-management-and-policy/>.
- <sup>20</sup> Johann D. Bell et al., “Pathways to Sustaining Tuna-Dependent Pacific Island Economies During Climate Change,” *Nature Sustainability* 4, no. 900-910 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-021-00745-z>.

- 21 NOAA Fisheries, “South Pacific Tuna Treaty,” accessed November 8, 2023, <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/pacific-islands/international-affairs/south-pacific-tuna-treaty>; NOAA Fisheries, “Report on IUU Fishing, Bycatch, and Shark Catch,” accessed January 23, 2024, <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/international/international-affairs/report-iuu-fishing-bycatch-and-shark-catch#>.
- 22 Olive Heffernan, “Deep-Sea Mining Could Begin Soon, Regulated or Not,” *Scientific American*, September 1, 2023, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/deep-sea-mining-could-begin-soon-regulated-or-not/>; Allen L. Clark, “A ‘Golden Era’ for Mining in the Pacific Ocean? Perhaps Not Just Yet,” *East-West Center*, April 6, 2018, <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/news/east-west-wire/%E2%80%9Cgolden-era%E2%80%9D-mining-in-the-pacific-ocean-perhaps-not-just-yet>.
- 23 “Mineral Resources in the South Pacific Ocean,” International Seabed Authority, accessed December 19, 2023, <https://www.isa.org.jm/maps/mineral-resources-in-the-south-pacific-ocean/>.
- 24 “Cobalt-Rich Crusts – Ore Treasure on the Slope of Seamounts,” *GEOMAR*, accessed December 18, 2023, <https://www.geomar.de/en/discover/marine-resources/cobalt-rich-crusts>; “Cobalt-Rich Ferromanganese Crusts,” International Seabed Authority, accessed August 3, 2024, <https://www.geomar.de/en/research/marine-resources/mmr/mineral-resources-2-1-2>; Christopher Kelley and Diva Amon, “Deep-Sea Mining Interests and Activities in the Western Pacific,” *Ocean Exploration*, accessed December 18, 2023, <https://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/oceanos/explorations/ex1606/background/mining/welcome.html>.
- 25 “Cobalt-Rich Ferromanganese Crusts,” *GEOMAR*, accessed August 3, 2024, <https://www.geomar.de/en/research/marine-resources/mmr/mineral-resources-2-1-2>; “Cobalt-Rich Crusts,” *GEOMAR*; Kelley and Amon, “Deep-Sea Mining Interests.”
- 26 Satyendra Prasad and Emily Hardy, “Why Pacific Island States are Concerned About Deep-Sea Mining,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, November 27, 2023, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/11/27/why-pacific-island-states-are-concerned-about-deep-sea-mining-pub-91051>; U.S.

- Department of State, “U.S. Relations With Democratic Republic of the Congo,” October 23, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-democratic-republic-of-the-congo/#>.
- <sup>27</sup> Kelley and Amon, “Deep-Sea Mining Interests”; “Cobalt-Rich Crusts,” *GEOMAR*; “Minerals: Cobalt-rich Ferromanganese Crusts,” International Seabed Authority.
- <sup>28</sup> Prasad and Hardy, “Why Pacific Island States.”
- <sup>29</sup> Michael O’Keefe, “Countering Unwelcome Strategic Competitors in the South Pacific: Canberra’s Perspective on the Role of Island States in the Indian and Pacific Islands in Realizing Australia’s Indo-Pacific Interests,” *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* (November-December 2022), 26, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/3237831/countering-unwelcome-strategic-competitors-in-the-south-pacific-canerras-persp/>; David Uren, “The Trade Routes Vital to Australia’s Economic Security,” *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*, March 28, 2024, <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/trade-routes-vital-australias-economic-security>.
- <sup>30</sup> O’Keefe, “Countering Unwelcome Strategic Competitors.”
- <sup>31</sup> Australian Embassy in Japan, “Australia and Japan,” accessed December 19, 2023, <https://japan.embassy.gov.au/tkyo/bilateral-relations.html>; Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, “Republic of Korea Country Brief,” accessed December 19, 2023, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/republic-of-korea/republic-of-korea-country-brief>; World Integrated Trade Solution, “New Zealand,” December 19, 2023, <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountrySnapshot/en/NZL/textview>.
- <sup>32</sup> Kevin D. Stringer, “The Pacific Microstates and U.S. Security,” *Foreign Service Journal*, November 2006, 40, 42-43, [https://afsa.org/sites/default/files/flipping\\_book/1106/38/index.html](https://afsa.org/sites/default/files/flipping_book/1106/38/index.html).
- <sup>33</sup> Kate Lyons, “Taiwan Loses Second Ally in a Week as Kiribati Switches to China,” *The Guardian*, September 20, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/20/taiwan-loses-second-ally-in-a-week-as-kiribati-switches-to-china>.
- <sup>34</sup> Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, “About RAMSI,” accessed October 16, 2023, <https://www.ramsi.org/about/>.

- <sup>35</sup> Camilla Pohle and Jennifer Staats, “Pro-Taiwan Pacific Island Leaders Show Cracks in China’s Appeal,” *United States Institute of Peace*, May 18, 2023, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/05/pro-taiwan-pacific-island-leaders-show-cracks-chinas-appeal/>; Patricia O’Brien, “The Deep Roots of the Solomon Islands’ Ongoing Political Crisis,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, December 10, 2021, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/deep-roots-solomon-islands-ongoing-political-crisis>; Graeme Smith and Joseph D. Foukona, “Rumblings Along the Federal Fault Line in Solomon Islands,” *The Interpreter*, October 21, 2019, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/rumblings-along-federal-fault-line-solomon-islands>.
- <sup>36</sup> O’Brien, “The Deep Roots of the Solomon Islands.”
- <sup>37</sup> O’Brien, “The Deep Roots of the Solomon Islands”; Elizabeth Osifelo, Helen Regan, and Teele Rebane “Australia Defense Personnel Dispatched to Solomon Islands as Violent Protests Continue for Second Day,” *CNN*, November 25, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/24/asia/solomon-islands-protest-lockdown-intl-hnk/index.html>.
- <sup>38</sup> Anna Powles, “The draft security cooperation agreement between China and Solomon Islands has been linked on social media and raises a lot of questions (and concerns). (photos of agreement in this and below tweet) 1/6,” Twitter, March 24, 2022, 12:10 a.m., <https://twitter.com/AnnaPowles/status/1506845794728837120/photo/2>.
- <sup>39</sup> Brian Harding and Jennifer Staats, “Climate, COVID and China Drive U.S.-Pacific Islands Engagement,” *United States Institute of Peace*, August 9, 2021, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/08/climate-covid-and-china-drive-us-pacific-islands-engagement>; U.S. Department of State, “Secretary Antony J. Blinken and Acting Fijian Prime Minister Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum at a Joint Press Availability,” February 12, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-and-acting-fijian-prime-minister-aiyaz-sayed-khaiyum-at-a-joint-press-availability/>.
- <sup>40</sup> US to Reopen Solomon Islands Embassy in Push Against China,” *BBC*, February 12, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-60359869>; The White House, “Remarks by Vice President Harris at the Pacific Islands Forum,” July 12, 2022,

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/07/12/remarks-by-vice-president-harris-at-the-pacific-islands-forum/>.

- 41 U.S. Department of State, “U.S.-Pacific Island Country Summit,” accessed November 13, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-pacific-islands-country-summit/>; The White House, “FACT SHEET: President Biden Unveils First-Ever Pacific Partnership Strategy,” September 29, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/09/29/fact-sheet-president-biden-unveils-first-ever-pacific-partnership-strategy/>.
- 42 The White House, “FACT SHEET: Energizing the U.S.-Pacific Islands Forum Partnership,” November 10, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/11/10/fact-sheet-energizing-the-u-s-pacific-islands-forum-partnership/>.
- 43 Anne-Marie Schleich, “Pacific Island Countries, China and the US: Recent Geopolitical Trends,” *RSIS*, November 27, 2023, <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/pacific-island-countries-china-and-the-us-recent-geopolitical-trends/>.
- 44 Kirsty Needham, “Australia Signs Security, Migration Pact With Pacific’s Tuvalu,” *Reuters*, November 9, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australia-offer-climate-refuge-all-residents-tuvalu-report-2023-11-10/#>.
- 45 U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Relations With Marshall Islands,” December 9, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-marshall-islands/>; U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Relations With Palau,” August 24, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-palau/#>; U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Relations With the Federated States of Micronesia,” October 19, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-the-federated-states-of-micronesia/>.
- 46 U.S. Department of Defense, *Climate Adaptation Plan 2022 Progress Report*, October 6 (2022), 7, <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/06/2003092213/-1/-1/0/2022-DOD-CAP-PROGRESS-REPORT.PDF>.
- 47 United States Coast Guard, “U.S. and Independent State of Samoa Sign Addendum to Existing Maritime Law Enforcement Agreement

in the Pacific,” April 5, 2024, <https://www.news.uscg.mil/Press-Releases/Article/3733046/us-and-independent-state-of-samoa-sign-addendum-to-existing-maritime-law-enforc/>.

- <sup>48</sup> National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, “About Our Agency,” accessed January 12, 2024, <https://www.noaa.gov/about-our-agency>.
- <sup>49</sup> “CRIMARIO II – Critical Maritime Routes in the Indo-Pacific Project,” accessed July 25, 2024, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2024/CRI-MARIO%20Factsheet.pdf>.
- <sup>50</sup> “EU Naval Force Operation ATLANTA,” accessed July 25, 2024, <https://eunavfor.eu/mission>.
- <sup>51</sup> Christian Bueger and Timothy Edmunds, “The European Union’s Quest to Become a Global Maritime-Security Provider,” *Naval War College Review* 76 no. 2 (Spring 2023), <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol76/iss2/6>.
- <sup>52</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Readout of the Partners in the Blue Pacific (PBP) Ministerial,” September 22, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/briefings-foreign-press-centers/readout-of-pbp-ministerial#>; U.S. Department of State, “Joint Statement on the Partners in the Blue Pacific Foreign Ministers Meeting,” September 22, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-the-partners-in-the-blue-pacific-foreign-ministers-meeting/>.
- <sup>53</sup> German Federal Foreign Office, “Progress Report on the Implementation of the Federal Government’s Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific in 2023,” September 22, 2023, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2617992/61051683e7e1521583b3067fb3200ad8/230922-leitlinien-indo-pazifik-3-fortschrittsbericht-data.pdf>.
- <sup>54</sup> U.S. Agency for International Aid, “Disaster Risk Reduction,” accessed December 20, 2023, <https://www.usaid.gov/pacific-islands/disaster-risk-reduction>.
- <sup>55</sup> Jordanne Porter, “ADF Global Health Engagement: A Chance to Step up in the Pacific,” *The Cove*, March 6, 2022, <https://cove.army.gov.au/article/adf-global-health-engagement-chance-step-pacific>.

- <sup>56</sup> Defense Security Cooperation Agency, “Military Civic Action,” accessed December 21, 2021, <https://samm.dsca.mil/glossary/military-civic-action>.
- <sup>57</sup> “Rear Adm. Gregory Huffman Visits the Civic Action Team in Palau,” *DVIDS*, August 8, 2023, <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/8009097/rear-adm-gregory-huffman-visits-civic-action-team-palau>; Helena Owens, “CAT- Palau Maintains a Long Standing Partnership for Over 50 Years,” *Andersen Air Force Base*, January 18, 2022, <https://www.andersen.af.mil/News/Features/Article/2903216/cat-palau-maintains-a-long-standing-partnership-for-over-50-years/>.
- <sup>58</sup> John Wagner, “Civic Action Team Palau Conducts Transfer of Authority,” USINDOPACOM, August 19, 2019, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/1937925/civic-action-team-palau-conducts-transfer-of-authority/>; Angela Smith, “2015 Civic Action Team in Palau Starts With the ABCs—Access Roads, Bus Stops, and Challenging Obstacles,” *Engineer: Professional Bulletin of Army Engineers*, May-August 2015, 40-41, <https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?p=EAIM&u=anon~4a96fd6&id=GALE|A422625687&v=2.1&it=r&sid=sitemap&asid=5b65c979>.
- <sup>59</sup> Joint Staff, *Joint Publication 3-57, Civil-Military Operations*, GL-6, [https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3\\_57.pdf?ver=2018-09-13-134111-460](https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_57.pdf?ver=2018-09-13-134111-460).
- <sup>60</sup> Joint Staff, *Joint Publication 3-57*, I-17.
- <sup>61</sup> Porter, “ADF Global Health Engagement.”