

Oceans Apart?

Considering the Indo-Pacific and the Blue Pacific

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As maritime democracies in the Indian and Pacific Oceans look to balance a rising China, Pacific Island states increasingly find themselves understood as a subset of a broader 'Indo-Pacific' region. However, Pacific Island states have unique security concerns, particularly in relation to climate change, and are working together to tackle them as one ocean continent: the 'Blue Pacific'. This article considers both Australia's recent step up in the Pacific, and the collective action strategies of Pacific Island states themselves. The article concludes that a more determined response to the security concerns of island states is crucial for any alignment between the Indo-Pacific and the Blue Pacific.

As China becomes more powerful, it is challenging American regional military predominance in Asia, but also in the western Pacific and increasingly in the Indian Ocean. In response to this challenge, the United States and its allies are investing in offshore balancing strategies, which entail greater security cooperation amongst maritime democracies in both the Indian and Pacific Oceans.¹ As a corollary to these strategies, new mental maps of the region have been drawn up. Increasingly, America and its allies are replacing the concept of Asia-Pacific with that of the Indo-Pacific. More than a simple change in nomenclature, this shift is part of an intensifying hearts and minds contest for influence, the likes of which has not been seen since the end of the Cold War. This paper is concerned with the implications of this shift in strategic thinking for Pacific Island states.

Renewed geostrategic competition means Pacific Island states find themselves drawn into the designs of others, as they clamber to cement existing security relations or to develop new ones. Australia, for example, has launched a Pacific step up, a new policy of engagement intended to consolidate Canberra's influence in the region, while limiting the influence of others. However, Pacific Island states are not without agency of their own. Together they are asserting a shared identity as an oceanic continent—the 'Blue Pacific'—and are pursuing collective action to tackle the Pacific's own security concerns, particularly regarding climate change. Renewed interest in the Pacific represents an historic opportunity for Pacific Rim states, and other powers, to engage with Pacific Island states on their own terms. Failure to do so will likely prevent closer alignment between the Blue Pacific and any broader vision for the Indo-Pacific.

1 For discussion of 'offshore balancing' in Asia, see Christopher Layne, 'From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing, America's Future Grand Strategy', *International Security*, vol. 22, no. 1 (1997), pp. 86-124. See also John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, 'The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior US Grand Strategy', *Foreign Affairs*, July 2016, pp. 70-83.

Part one of this article discusses changing geopolitical conditions in the Pacific Ocean, with a focus on the implications of a more powerful China, and reactions of other regional players. Part two considers how changes in the broader Indo-Pacific region have raised geostrategic anxieties in Canberra which have, in turn, shaped a step up in Australia's engagement with Pacific Island countries. Part three considers the ways that Pacific islanders are looking to assert their own interests, and pursue collective action strategies, in the context of a return to geostrategic competition in the Pacific Ocean.

Part One: A Shifting Balance of Power in the Pacific Ocean

For seventy years, the overarching balance of power across the Pacific Ocean has been a settled matter. At the end of World War Two, strategic planners viewed the whole of the ocean as a maritime domain shaped by American power. In 1949, US General Douglas MacArthur explained the Pacific had “become an Anglo-Saxon lake”.² Today, however, there is growing strategic anxiety among countries on the Pacific Rim. As the locus of power in the world begins to shift, there is uncertainty about prospects for the existing regional order.

Considering the Rise of China

At the core of growing unease is a rising China. Rapid economic growth in that country, and corresponding investment in military technologies and naval capabilities, has begun to tip the balance of power from the eastern rim of the Pacific to its western edge. The Australian Treasury estimates that by 2030, China's economy will be nearly twice the size of that of the United States, at US\$42.4 trillion and US\$24 trillion respectively.³ With economic growth comes an enhanced capacity to influence regional affairs. For Pacific Island countries, China is an increasingly significant donor and lender, contributing over the decade 2006–16 nearly US\$1.8 billion to the region.⁴ During that time, China overtook Japan and New Zealand to become the second-largest aid donor, after Australia, to independent island nations.⁵ Trading relations also intensified dramatically. Between 2000 and 2017, Chinese exports to Pacific Island countries increased twelve-fold, and while Chinese imports from island states increased from a low starting point, they did so by a similar magnitude.⁶

The most significant of China's recent foreign policy initiatives is an ambitious multi-trillion dollar program intended to reshape economic geography in its near abroad, the so-called ‘Belt and Road Initiative’. Encompassing significant investment in infrastructure projects—including ports, roads, railways and energy—the Belt and

2 Cited in David Scott, ‘US Strategy in the Pacific—Geopolitical Positioning for the Twenty-First Century’, *Geopolitics*, vol. 17, no. 3 (2012), pp. 607-28.

3 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper: Opportunity, Security, Strength* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2017), pp. 26.

4 See Chengxin Pan, Matthew Clarke and Sophie Loy-Wilson, ‘Local Agency and Complex Power Shifts in the Era of Belt and Road: Perceptions of Chinese Aid in the South Pacific’, *Journal of Contemporary China* (online) (November 2018), pp. 2-4.

5 Lowy Institute, ‘Pacific Aid Map’, 2018, <pacificaidmap.lowyinstitute.org/> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

6 See Matthew Dornan and Sachini Muller, ‘The China Shift in Pacific Trade’, *DevPol Centre Blog*, Development Policy Centre, Australian National University, Canberra, 15 November 2018.

Road Initiative reaches into the Pacific Ocean, as part of a geographically amorphous '21st Century Maritime Silk Road'. Chinese maps issued in 2015 extended the reach of the Maritime Silk Road to include parts of the South Pacific.⁷

China is also investing in military capacity, particularly in naval technology, and has begun to modernise its navy and develop an ocean-going, 'blue water' fleet. In addition, China has developed 'Anti-Access Area Denial' (A2AD) capabilities that would "make it difficult for the US and its allies to operate close to China".⁸ Since 2015, China has also built artificial islands on disputed reefs and shoals in the South China Sea, and fortified some of them with anti-ship cruise missiles, surface-to-air missiles and equipment designed to jam military communications.⁹ These developments have 'pushed' US naval predominance further away from mainland China—from what both US and Chinese military planners refer to as the 'first island chain' out to the 'second island chain', located further into the Pacific and Indian Oceans.¹⁰

As China Rises, the United States Responds

Even as China presents a challenge, the United States has signalled that it intends to remain a force in Asia. In 2011, US President Barack Obama announced a rebalance of US forces to the broader region and declared "the US is a Pacific power, and we are here to stay".¹¹ Furthermore, the United States has become increasingly overt about geostrategic competition with China. The 2018 US National Defence Strategy labelled China a "strategic competitor"—one that is looking to "coerce neighbouring countries to reorder the Indo-Pacific region to their advantage".¹² Pursuing a strategy of outright competition with China represents a shift from a decades-long period marked both by engagement—encouraging China to play by the 'rules' of the US-led international order, and containment—attempts to 'manage' China's rise and encourage cooperative behavior.¹³

7 For discussion, see Jean-Marc F. Blanchard and Colin Flint, 'The Geopolitics of China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative', *Geopolitics*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2017), pp. 226-27.

8 Sam Roggeveen, 'China's New Navy: A Short Guide for Australian Policy-Makers', *Centre of Gravity series*, no. 41 (Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, May 2018).

9 Ankit Panda, 'South China Sea: China Deploys Jamming Equipment', *The Diplomat*, 2018, <thediplomat.com/2018/04/south-china-sea-china-deploys-jamming-equipment/> [Accessed 20 December 2018]. See also Ankit Panda, 'US Calls on China to Remove Missiles from South China Sea Artificial Islands', *The Diplomat*, 10 November 2018, <thediplomat.com/2018/11/us-calls-on-china-to-remove-missiles-from-south-china-sea-artificial-islands/> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

10 As Wesley explains: "China's raising of risks for US forces in the western Pacific has motivated the dispersal of these forces so that now the US and its allies have developed a dispersed defense perimeter in places such as Guam, Diego Garcia—and Australia". Michael Wesley, 'Australia's Grand Strategy and the 2016 Defence White Paper', *Security Challenges*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2016), p. 26. For detailed discussion of Chinese and American conceptions of the 'island chains' of the Western Pacific, see Andrew Erickson and Joel Wuthnow, 'Barriers, Springboards and Benchmarks: China Conceptualises the Pacific "Island Chains"', *The China Quarterly* (online), January 2016, pp. 1-22.

11 Barack Obama, 'Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament', The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 17 November 2011, <obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

12 US Department of Defense, *Summary of the National Defense Strategy of The United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge*, (Washington DC: United States Department of Defense, 2018).

13 For discussion, see Ian Hall, 'The Case for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific', *The Wire*, 25 July 2018, <thewire.in/diplomacy/free-and-open-indo-pacific-donald-trump-foreign-policy> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

Intensifying competition with China has seen a build-up of US forces in the western Pacific, particularly in Guam.¹⁴ In 2011 Australia also agreed to host regular rotations of US marines and military aircraft at a US base in Darwin. In 2016, naval cooperation between the United States and India also intensified when New Delhi agreed to allow the United States access to Indian military bases in return for weapons technology “to help narrow the gap with China”.¹⁵ Despite these developments, it is clear that maintaining geostrategic supremacy in Asia will come at an increasingly high cost to the US. Some suggest that in the medium-term American core interests will not be sufficiently engaged to meet those costs.¹⁶ For its part, China plans to dramatically increase investment in a ‘blue water’ navy. Australia’s Department of Defence suggests that, by 2035, China’s overall defence spending will match that of the US, with much of this increase directed toward a modern, ocean-going, navy.¹⁷ Indeed, some argue that China may be building a “post-American navy”; one designed “not to confront US naval predominance in the Pacific, but to peacefully inherit this predominance as the US baulks at the increasing cost of continued regional leadership”.¹⁸ Of course others contend the US is not likely to cede naval predominance in the western Pacific without putting up a serious challenge.¹⁹

The election of Donald Trump, and his assertion of an ‘America First’ approach to foreign policy, has added to uncertainty about US intentions in the western Pacific, and America’s broader commitment to the rules-based multilateral order.²⁰ Taken together, developments on both the east and west of the Pacific Ocean have seen US allies in Asia and the Pacific devise strategies of their own that are intended to anchor a US presence in the region and to *shape* the region’s balance of power in ways that constrain China; a state that is profoundly undemocratic at home and potentially revisionist abroad. There is little doubt these developments have significantly influenced strategic thinking in Canberra. As former secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Peter Varghese explained in 2017, Australia wants to work with others to “shape a balance of power which finds room for China but which also favours the region’s democracies”.²¹

Increasingly key to strategies intended to shape the regional balance of power is the concept of the ‘Indo-Pacific’. Used in place of the term ‘Asia-Pacific’, this label alludes to a recast role for maritime democracies in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.²² In this framing,

14 Scott, ‘US Strategy in the Pacific’, p. 620.

15 See Sanjeev Miglani and Greg Torode, ‘Wary of China’s Indian Ocean Activities, U.S., India Discuss Anti-submarine Warfare’, Reuters, 2 May 2016, <www.msn.com/en-in/news/newsindia/wary-of-chinas-indian-ocean-activities-us-india-discuss-anti-submarine-warfare/ar-BBsvgJc> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

16 See for example Hugh White, ‘Without America: Australia in the New Asia’, *Quarterly Essay*, issue 68 (Melbourne: Black Inc. Books, 2017).

17 Australian Government, *2016 Defence White Paper* (Canberra: Department of Defence, 2016), p. 49.

18 See Roggeveen, *China’s New Navy*, p. 2.

19 See for example John Mearsheimer, ‘The Gathering Storm: China’s Challenge to US Power in Asia’, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, vol. 3 (2010), pp. 381-96.

20 For discussion, see Christopher Layne, ‘The US-Chinese Power Shift and the End of the Pax Americana’, *International Affairs*, vol. 94, no. 1 (January 2018).

21 Varghese explained further: “If the alternative to US strategic predominance is Chinese strategic predominance then it is not an attractive one for Australia, for as long as China remains an authoritarian state”. See Peter Varghese, ‘A Contested Asia: What Comes after US Strategic Dominance?’, *2017 Griffith Asia Lecture*, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, 6 September 2017.

22 See Rory Medcalf, ‘Mapping Our Indo-Pacific Future’, Speech delivered by head of Australian National University National Security College, Canberra, 21 May 2018. See also Rory Medcalf, ‘Reimagining Asia: From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific’, *The Asan Forum*, 26 June 2015; David Scott, ‘US Strategy in the Pacific—Geopolitical Positioning for the Twenty-First Century’, *Geopolitics*, vol. 17, no. 3 (2012), pp. 607-28.

maritime democracies—particularly the United States, Australia, Japan, and India—will increasingly work together to maintain balance in the regional order and bed down the principles and values on which the regional order should be based.²³ This cooperation will entail combined naval power projection, and emphasises maritime security cooperation. To underscore the point that the ‘Indo-Pacific’ is about maritime naval cooperation, in May 2018 the US ‘Pacific Command’, based in Hawai‘i, was renamed the ‘Indo-Pacific Command’.

For some, the normative dimensions of the ‘Indo-Pacific’ construct are intended as an explicit contrast to China’s Belt and Road Initiative.²⁴ At the 2018 APEC summit in Port Moresby, US Vice President Mike Pence argued the United States and its allies were a better source of infrastructure finance for countries in the region, explaining: “we don’t drown our partners in a sea of debt, we don’t coerce or compromise your independence ... we do not offer a constricting belt or a one-way road”.²⁵ As concern about a more assertive China grows, the ‘Indo-Pacific’ has increasingly been adopted as a descriptor of the broader region by policymakers in Australia, Japan and the US. For its part, Australia emphasised the Indo-Pacific in Defence White Papers released in 2013 and 2016,²⁶ while Japan launched a ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ strategy in 2016. In 2017, the Trump Administration adopted the same language, developing its own ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ strategy. More recently, Indonesia and ASEAN developed distinct articulations of the Indo-Pacific construct, emphasising the need to mitigate tension in the region. From 2017, Jakarta promoted an ‘Indo-Pacific Cooperation Concept’.²⁷ In June 2019 ASEAN leaders issued a statement which similarly envisaged “an Indo-Pacific region of dialogue and cooperation instead of rivalry”, and sought to reaffirm “ASEAN centrality as the underlying principle for promoting cooperation in the Indo-Pacific”.²⁸

The renewed contest for influence in the Indo-Pacific has seen a frenzy of diplomatic activity in Pacific Island countries, the likes of which has not been seen since the end of the Cold War. New Zealand increased its aid budget by 30 per cent (an increase of more than NZ\$700 million over four years) as part of a ‘Pacific re-set’.²⁹ Wellington also

23 See Hall, ‘The Case for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific’. See also John Hemmings (ed.), *Infrastructure, Ideas and Strategy in the Indo-Pacific* (London: Henry Jackson Society, 2019).

24 Rory Medcalf, for example, argues: “Today we are seeing the great contest of ideas in the mental maps of Asia can be simplified to the big two: China’s Belt and Road versus the Indo-Pacific, championed by Japan, India, Australia and gradually, as it gathers its wits, the United States”. Rory Medcalf, ‘China and the Indo-Pacific: Multipolarity, Solidarity and Strategic Patience’, Paper delivered for ‘Grands enjeux stratégiques contemporains’, Sorbonne University, Paris, 12 March 2018.

25 Charissa Yong, ‘APEC Summit: Pence Warns Indo-Pacific Region Against China’s “Debt Diplomacy”, Says US Offers “Better Option”’, *The Straits Times* (Singapore), 17 November 2018, <www.straitstimes.com/world/united-states/pence-slams-china-says-us-offers-countries-better-option> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

26 The 2013 Australian Defence White Paper, for example, explained that “a new Indo-Pacific strategic arc is beginning to emerge, connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans through Southeast Asia”. Department of Defence, *2013 Defence White Paper* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2013), p. 7.

27 See Donald Weatherbee, ‘Indonesia, ASEAN, and the Indo-Pacific Cooperation Concept’, *Perspective*, issue 2019, no. 47 (Singapore: Yusof Ishak Institute, 7 June 2019).

28 ASEAN, ‘ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific’, 23 June 2019, <asean.org/storage/2019/06/ASEAN-Outlook-on-the-Indo-Pacific_FINAL_22062019.pdf> [Accessed 16 September 2019].

29 Craig McCulloch, ‘\$714m to be Pumped into Govt’s “Pacific Reset” Plan’, *Radio New Zealand*, 8 May 2018, <www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/356903/714m-to-be-pumped-into-govt-s-pacific-reset-plan> [Accessed 10 September 2019].

announced fourteen new diplomatic positions across seven Pacific Island countries.³⁰ Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe hosted island leaders and tried to win support for his ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ strategy.³¹ From further afield, French President Emmanuel Macron travelled to the region to declare support for the Indo-Pacific, and explicitly highlighted the need to balance a rising China and to avoid “any hegemony in the region”.³² Even the United Kingdom announced it was diving back into the Pacific, with three new diplomatic posts to be opened in island countries as part of a new ‘Pacific Uplift’ strategy.³³ For its part, Australia announced new diplomatic missions in five island states (the Cook Islands, Marshall Islands, Niue, Palau and Tuvalu) and in French Polynesia. In late 2017 Australia also launched a ‘Pacific step up’, intended to reinforce Australian influence amongst Pacific Island countries.³⁴ Australia’s Pacific step up is considered in greater detail below.

Part 2: A Return to Strategic Denial? Australia’s Pacific Step Up

A renewed contest for influence among the Pacific Island states reveals a truism of international affairs in the region: Pacific islands matter most to powers on the Pacific Rim as a source of potential threat. Australia in particular has long held, but only periodically implemented, a policy of strategic denial—sometimes referred to as Australia’s Monroe Doctrine—aimed at limiting access to islands in the Pacific (particularly in the south-west Pacific) by other, potentially hostile, states.³⁵ Before turning to Australia’s current Pacific step up, it is worth briefly considering the history of Australian strategic priorities in the Pacific Islands.

30 Radio New Zealand, ‘New Zealand Ups Its Diplomatic Presence in Pacific’, 4 December 2018, <www.radionz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/377458/nz-ups-its-diplomatic-presence-in-pacific> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

31 A summit between the Japanese Prime Minister and Pacific Island counterparts is held every three years. At the 2018 PALM Summit, Abe attempted to win support from the Island states for Japan’s ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ Strategy but was not entirely successful. The ‘overview of results’ from the summit reads: “Japan declared its intention to commit more deeply to the stability and prosperity of the region based on the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy” and the Pacific island countries shared the importance of the basic principles of the strategy and welcomed the strengthening of Japan’s commitment in the Pacific region under the strategy”. Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), *The 8th Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM8), Overview of Results* (Tokyo: MOFA, 2018).

32 Jamie Smyth, ‘Macron Pledges to Counter China Power in the Pacific: France to Work with Australia and Allies in Revived “Quad” Project’, *Financial Times*, 2 May 2018, <www.ft.com/content/9b1947be-4de0-11e8-8a8e-22951a2d8493> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

33 Tess Newton-Cain and Anna Powles, ‘A Pivotal Moment? The UK Signals Re-engagement with the Pacific’, *Incline*, 22 April 2018, <www.incline.org.nz/home/a-pivotal-moment-the-uk-signals-re-engagement-with-the-pacific> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

34 Australian Government, *Australian Foreign Policy White Paper: Opportunity, Security, Strength* (Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2017), p. 25; see also James Batley, ‘Keep Calm and Step Up: The White Paper’s Message on the Pacific’, *The Interpreter*, Lowy Institute, 27 November 2017, <www.loyyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/keep-calm-and-step-white-paper-message-pacific>.

35 See Merze Tate, ‘The Australasian Monroe Doctrine’, *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 76, no. 2 (June 1961), pp. 264–84; see also Richard Herr, ‘Regionalism, Strategic Denial and South Pacific Security’, *The Journal of Pacific History*, vol. 21, no. 4 (1986), pp. 170–82.

Limiting Access to the Pacific: A Long Preoccupation

Australia has long had a preoccupation with limiting access to Pacific islands. Driven by a defence imperative, Australian officials have sought to limit potential threats in the maritime approaches to the continent. In the late nineteenth century for example, concerned about German and French designs in the region, Australian politicians implored British authorities to assume control of islands which subsequently became British New Guinea, the British Solomon Islands Protectorate and the New Hebrides (jointly administered with France).³⁶

After World War One, Australia took more direct control of Pacific Island territories, as both Nauru and German New Guinea were transferred to Australian administration. During postwar negotiations held in Paris, Australian Prime Minister Billy Hughes suggested that “strategically the Pacific Islands [like New Guinea] encompassed Australia like fortresses ... the islands were as necessary to Australia as water to a city ... If they were in the hands of a superior power there would be no peace for Australia”.³⁷ Of course during World War Two, a hostile power *did* threaten Australia when Japan invaded islands to the north and east, and from there launched air raids against the Australian mainland.

Following World War Two, it was an Australian strategic priority to shape a stable regional order in the Pacific Islands working closely with other states, particularly the United States and New Zealand. In 1947 Australia convened a meeting of Pacific colonial powers in Canberra which established the South Pacific Commission (SPC); intended to promote cooperation in administering their dependent territories and to provide for the welfare of Pacific islanders. Then, in 1951 Australia signed the ANZUS treaty with the United States and New Zealand, which anchored security cooperation between all three states in the broader Pacific region. A separate naval cooperation arrangement—signed by senior officers from Australia and the United States and known as the 1951 ‘Radford-Collins’ agreement—set out areas of responsibility for protecting maritime trade (with Australia deemed responsible for the south-west Pacific).³⁸ This agreement became in effect an ancillary arrangement to the ANZUS treaty.

The postwar establishment of the United Nations saw a wave of decolonisation the world over. During the 1950s and 1960s, however, successive Australian governments tried to ‘hold back the tide’ of decolonisation in the South Pacific, worried that island territories would not make viable nation-states and that independence may present a security

36 Of course, other great powers were interested in Pacific islands. For its part, Germany took control of Samoa, German New Guinea and the Micronesian islands to the north of New Guinea. France annexed New Caledonia and the island groups that make up French Polynesia (and with Britain jointly administered New Hebrides). By the close of the nineteenth century, the United States had also become a Pacific power, after annexing Hawaii and gaining control over Guam and the Philippines during the 1898 war with Spain. United States’ interest in the Pacific Ocean was significantly influenced by the naval strategist Alfred Mahan, who argued the United States ought to annex Hawaii in order to exercise control over the central Pacific Ocean, and to mitigate against the possibility that China may at some point “burst her barriers eastward”. See: Alfred Thayer Mahan, ‘Needed as a Barrier; To Protect the World from an Invasion of Chinese Barbarism’, *New York Times*, 1 February 1893, p. 5.

37 Cited in Norman Harper, *A Great and Powerful Friend: A Study of Australian American Relations between 1900 and 1975* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1987), p. 30.

38 See Andrew Brown, ‘The History of the Radford-Collins Agreement’, *Semaphore*, issue 15, November 2007, Sea Power Centre—Australia, Canberra. See also Dan Halvorson, ‘Reputation and Responsibility in Australia’s 2003 Intervention in the Solomon Islands’, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 67, no. 4 (2013), pp. 439–55.

threat to Australia.³⁹ Cabinet ministers seriously debated assuming responsibility for nearby British territories and fusing them into an Australian-administered 'Melanesian Federation'.⁴⁰ A desire for continuing control was clearly driven by Australia's own security concerns. In 1954, a senior official at the Department of External Affairs described Australian policy in the islands as being: "to exert dominant political influence in the area with a view to maintaining Australian security behind a peripheral screen of islands".⁴¹

During the 1960s and 1970s Australia considered moves toward decolonisation in the South Pacific firmly in the context of the Cold War. Again it was clear that "great power politics, not concern for the welfare of local peoples, drove this renewed interest".⁴² In 1962 US Secretary of State Dean Rusk explained to counterparts in Canberra that "not one wave of the Pacific should fall under Communist influence".⁴³ In 1963 an ANZUS study group—comprising officials from Australia, Britain, New Zealand and the United States—concluded that full independence was not likely to be viable for smaller Pacific territories, and for larger islands "where independence is the final solution the greatest care should be taken to ensure that the maintenance of security in the area will not be placed in jeopardy after the transfer of power".⁴⁴ Thus ANZUS powers sought to maintain control over the Pacific's regional security order into the post-independence era.

During the 1970s and '80s, as a growing number of Pacific Island states did gain independence, ANZUS states provided financial support for regional institutions in order to maintain privileged relationships with newly-formed island governments. Australia and New Zealand were, for example, the only metropolitan powers admitted to join the South Pacific Forum when it was formed in 1971 (now the Pacific Islands Forum). In lieu of formal defence pacts, Australian policymakers argued that funding regional cooperation in the Pacific was a means of maintaining "a favourable strategic posture in the face of Soviet and Chinese approaches to the new states of the region".⁴⁵ During the late 1970s a coherent policy emerged of funding regional aid programs, complemented by bilateral aid, as a means of "ensuring that the Soviets could not 'buy' their way into the South Pacific".⁴⁶ This policy was dubbed 'strategic denial', and constituted Australia's South Pacific contribution to the United States' broader containment policy toward the USSR.⁴⁷

39 Christopher Waters, 'Against the Tide: Australian Government Attitudes to Decolonisation in the South Pacific, 1962-1972', *The Journal of Pacific History*, vol. 48, no. 2 (2013), pp. 194-208.

40 See David Goldsworthy, 'British Territories and Australian Mini-Imperialism in the 1950s', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 41, no. 3 (1995), pp. 356-72.

41 Ibid., cited p. 356.

42 See Waters, 'Against the Tide', p. 197.

43 Ibid., cited p. 197.

44 Ibid., study group report cited p. 199.

45 Greg Fry, 'Regionalism and International Politics of the South Pacific', *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 54, no. 3 (1981), pp. 455-84.

46 Herr, 'Regionalism, Strategic Denial and South Pacific Security', pp. 170-82.

47 Funding regional cooperation in order to mitigate the influence of external powers was put to the test during a so-called 'Russian scare' of 1976. When Australia rejected a request from Tonga for finance to expand the country's international airport, Tonga proceeded to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Reports also surfaced that Tonga was considering offering the Soviet Union a fisheries fleet base in return for support to expand the airport. This provoked an immediate response from Canberra. Not only did Australia agree to finance construction works at the international airport, but Australia increased its overall aid to the Pacific Islands "by a factor of four"; see *ibid.*, p. 175. See also John Dorrance, 'The Soviet Union and the Pacific Islands: A Current Assessment', *Asian Survey*, vol. 30, no. 9 (1990), pp. 908-25.

This version of strategic denial in the Pacific lasted until the end of hostilities between the US and the USSR in the late 1980s.

The close of the Cold War saw something of an interregnum as, for a period, major powers neglected to pay close attention to the Pacific Islands. Indeed in the early 1990s there was significant concern that, in the absence of strategic interest in the Pacific, aid to the region would stall, and Pacific islands would ‘fall off the map’. As it was, the United States *did* close its aid offices in the South Pacific in the 1990s. To be sure, during this time Pacific islands were still afflicted by significant conflict—including a civil war in Bougainville and major unrest in the Solomon Islands—but these security threats were in the main seen as local struggles. While Australia and New Zealand both remained concerned that ‘fragile’ or ‘unstable’ states in the region may be a concern for their national interests (and maintained aid to the region), during this period security issues in the Pacific tended not to be seen through the prism of global geopolitics. A possible exception is the 2003 Australian-led military intervention in Solomon Islands, which some would characterise as a contribution—in Australia’s ‘area of responsibility’—to the United States’ global ‘War on Terror’.⁴⁸

Shoring up Australian Influence in the Pacific, and Limiting China’s

Early in the twenty-first century, even while Pacific islands figured relatively less in global security affairs, Australia’s security goals in the region remained similar to what they always had been.⁴⁹ Australia’s 2016 Defence White Paper, for example, committed Australia to work “to limit the influence of any actor from outside the [Pacific] region with interests inimical to our own”.⁵⁰ This was a continuation of a long-held “quasi-Monroe Doctrine in the Pacific”.⁵¹ Australia’s 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper explained that China was challenging US predominance in the Indo-Pacific, and surmised that China would “seek to influence the region to suit its own interests”.⁵² While not explicitly linking Australian policy in the Pacific Islands with the rise of China, the White Paper indicated that Australia would ‘step up’ and “engage with the Pacific with greater intensity and ambition”.⁵³ By this time Australia was facing pressure from the United States to help counter the influence of China in the South Pacific.⁵⁴ Analysts in Canberra were also

48 For discussion, see Joanne Wallis and Michael Wesley, ‘Unipolar Anxieties: Australia’s Melanesia Policy after the Age of Intervention’, *Asia and the Pacific Policy Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2016), p. 29. For pertinent discussion on Australia’s ‘area of responsibility’ in the South Pacific, see Halvorson, ‘Reputation and Responsibility in Australia’s 2003 Intervention in the Solomon Islands’, pp. 439-55.

49 As Australia’s 2013 Defence White Paper explained: “Australia seeks to ensure that our neighbourhood does not become a source of threat to Australia and that no major power with hostile intentions establishes bases in our immediate neighbourhood from which it could project force against us”. Australian Government, 2013 *Defence White Paper*, pp. 25.

50 Australian Government, 2016 *Defence White Paper*.

51 James Batley, ‘Review: Safeguarding Australia’s Interests through Closer Pacific Ties’, *The Interpreter*, Lowy Institute, 27 April 2018, <www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/review-safeguarding-australia-s-security-interests-through-closer-pacific-ties>.

52 Australian Government, 2017 *Australian Foreign Policy White Paper: Opportunity, Security, Strength* (Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2017), p. 26.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 101.

54 Australia had “for some time tried to calm US anxieties about China in the Pacific ... [a] region where Chinese attention seems still rather distracted and uncoordinated”, nonetheless the United States remained suspicious that “any decline in Canberra’s influence in the South Pacific constitutes a direct gain for China”, See Wallis and Wesley, ‘Unipolar Anxieties’, p. 35.

worried that Chinese aid could undermine Australia's long-held status as pre-eminent aid donor to island states.⁵⁵ Even more pointedly, they were concerned that Chinese infrastructure projects—ports, airports and telecommunications—might constitute 'dual use' investments which might serve as the "bridgehead for a threatening presence in years to come".⁵⁶

During 2018, Australian politicians expressed growing concern about Chinese aid to the South Pacific, particularly for infrastructure projects, arguing it might not meet 'appropriate standards' and concessional loans to island governments might constitute 'debt-traps' that could undermine Pacific Island sovereignty, or worse, serve as a pretext for China to establish a military base in the region.⁵⁷ Throughout the year Australian journalists wrote a series of reports that China was 'considering' a military base in the South Pacific—including potentially in Papua New Guinea,⁵⁸ Solomon Islands,⁵⁹ Vanuatu,⁶⁰ Fiji,⁶¹ Samoa⁶² and even French Polynesia.⁶³ Not surprisingly, the possibility of Chinese military base anywhere in the region was pre-emptively opposed by the Australian government. At the 2019 Shangri-La Dialogue—an annual Asia security summit held in Singapore—Frances Adamson, Australia's secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade and former ambassador to China, explained that "any foreign base in our region would not be welcome ... it would have an obvious negative impact on Australia's strategic situation".⁶⁴

55 As Michael Wesley explains, China's engagement in the South Pacific "calls into question Australia's traditional deterrent posture in its northern approaches and the South Pacific: that of being the primary provider of outside support to these often-fragile states"; Wesley, 'Australia's Grand Strategy and the 2016 Defence White Paper', p. 27.

56 Ibid.

57 Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop said Chinese loans to island nations could undermine their sovereignty if they struggled to repay their debts, and suggested Chinese-funded projects "in our sphere of influence" ought to meet "appropriate standards". David Wroe, 'Australia Will Compete with China to Protect Pacific Sovereignty, Bishop Says', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 June 2018. <www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/australia-will-compete-with-china-to-save-pacific-sovereignty-says-bishop-20180617-p4zm1h.html> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

58 Paul Maley and Primrose Riordan, 'PNG Port Plan Stokes Fears of China Military Build-Up', *The Australian*, 28 August 2018, <www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/png-port-plan-stokes-fears-of-china-military-buildup/news-story/f0fa6fc36a1dbfc8d8acfe2bb4ea2907> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

59 Primrose Riordan and Rowan Callick, 'China's Pacific Investment Push Lands in the Solomon Islands', *The Australian*, 1 May 2018, <www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/foreign-affairs/chinas-pacific-investment-push-lands-in-solomon-islands/news-story/9c85024e3245ed8e163763c15ab0d812> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

60 David Wroe, 'China Eyes Vanuatu Military Base in Plan with Global Ramifications', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 April 2018, <www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/china-eyes-vanuatu-military-base-in-plan-with-global-ramifications-20180409-p4z8j9.html> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

61 Primrose Riordan, 'Australia Beats China to Fiji Base', *The Australian*, 7 September 2018, <www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/defence/australia-beats-china-to-funding-fiji-base/news-story/60d05ca8eb2bec629080c2c844255bbd> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

62 Rory Callinan, 'China's Samoa Plan a Concern', *The Australian*, 7 September 2018, <www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/foreign-affairs/chinas-plan-to-develop-samoan-port-a-regional-security-concern/news-story/ede01bfe7ac23d97e2872a3ff6a07368> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

63 David Wroe, 'China Casts Its Net Deep into the Pacific with \$2bn Fish Farm', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 May 2018, <www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/china-casts-its-net-deep-into-the-pacific-with-2b-fish-farm-20180518-p4zg69.html> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

64 Cited in Stephen Dziedzic, 'Prime Minister Scott Morrison Pledges \$250 Million for Solomon Islands Infrastructure', *ABC News*, 3 June 2019, <[www.abc.net.au/news/2019-06-03/scott-morrison-pledges-\\$250-million-for-solomon-islands/11172062](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-06-03/scott-morrison-pledges-$250-million-for-solomon-islands/11172062)> [Accessed 20 June 2019].

As it was, the only nations that did commit to building military facilities in the South Pacific were Australia and the United States, who announced the joint-development of a naval base at Manus Island in Papua New Guinea. This was seen, at least by some, as further bolstering the United States' 'second island chain' in the western Pacific.⁶⁵ Australia also announced an upgrade for a military base in Fiji.⁶⁶ Australia's military presence in the region looks set to increase significantly, including a new Australian Defence Force mobile training force for the region, and an increase in security spending in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Fiji.

Australia's Pacific step up was accompanied by a regional security declaration—the 2018 'Boe Declaration'—which bundled together previous security statements by Pacific Islands Forum leaders and committed island states to developing new national security strategies.⁶⁷ In an apparent reference to Chinese 'debt diplomacy', the declaration asserted the right of Forum states to conduct their affairs "free of external interference and coercion".⁶⁸ In the main, however, the Boe Declaration reflected Pacific Island countries' concern with 'non-traditional' security threats; including issues such as climate change, water security, violence against women, urbanisation, inequality and youth unemployment.⁶⁹ For its part, Australia complemented the Boe Declaration with the announcement of a new Australia-Pacific Security College, and a new Pacific Faculty of Policing at the Australian Institute of Police Management.

During 2018 Australia worked with other states, including the United States, Japan and New Zealand, to outcompete Chinese investment in strategic infrastructure in the Pacific Islands. In mid-2018, for example, Australia blocked the Chinese telecommunications company Huawei from laying an international submarine internet cable that would have

65 Head of the National Security College at the Australian National University, Rory Medcalf, explained the announcement that the Australian and US navies will work with Papua New Guinea on an upgraded base on Manus island was of "big military significance". He argued: "In one move, this could let Australia guard its northern approaches, outflank possible future Chinese bases in the South Pacific, and help Japan and the United States secure an island chain—linking Okinawa, Guam, Palau and Manus—to limit Chinese naval force projection in a crisis". Rory Medcalf, '2018 APEC Summit Possible Turning Point for China's Powerplay in the Pacific', *Australian Financial Review*, 18 November 2018, <www.afr.com/news/economy/2018-apec-summit-possible-turning-point-for-chinas-powerplay-in-the-pacific-20181118-h180y2> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

66 The Blackrock military camp outside Nadi will host a training centre for Fijian soldiers participating in UN Peacekeeping duties and serve as a regional Humanitarian and Disaster Relief Centre.

67 Pacific Islands Forum, *Boe Declaration on Regional Security*, 5 September 2018, <www.forumsec.org/boe-declaration-on-regional-security/> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

68 In part this language reflected the increased attention being paid to Chinese influence and coercion in Australia. In mid-2017 Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull warned of a "coercive China" at a regional security dialogue in Singapore. See Australian Associated Press, 'Malcolm Turnbull Warns Asian Leaders of a "Coercive China"', *The Guardian*, 3 June 2017, <www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/jun/03/malcolm-turnbull-warns-asian-leaders-of-a-coercive-china> [Accessed 16 September 2019]. Subsequently, Australia introduced foreign interference legislation that was widely seen as countering Chinese influence. Introducing the bill to parliament, Turnbull explained: "we will not tolerate foreign influence activities that are in any way covert, coercive or corrupt ... that is the line that separates legitimate influence from unacceptable interference". Malcolm Turnbull, 'Speech Introducing the National Security Legislation Amendment (Espionage and Foreign Interference) Bill 2017', 7 December 2017, <www.malcolmturnbull.com.au/media/speech-introducing-the-national-security-legislation-amendment-espionage-an> [Accessed 16 September 2019].

69 Murray Ackman, Anna Naupa and Patrick Tuimalealiifano, 'Boe Declaration: Navigating an Uncertain Pacific', *The Interpreter*, Lowy Institute, 3 October 2018, <www.loyyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/boe-declaration-navigating-uncertain-pacific>.

linked Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands with the Australian mainland.⁷⁰ This intervention also saw Australia outbid Huawei to finance a domestic cable network linking outer islands in the Solomon Islands with the capital Honiara.⁷¹ Together, Australia, Japan, and the United States, also tried to block Huawei from building a domestic submarine cable network in Papua New Guinea, by proposing a “counter-offer” of their own.⁷² However Papua New Guinea, which had already inked a deal with Huawei in 2016, decided to allow the company to continue to build the national network. Papua New Guinea’s minister for state investments, William Duma, described the counter-offer as “a bit patronising”.⁷³ In mid-2018 Australia, the United States and Japan also formed a trilateral partnership intended to mobilise investment in infrastructure in the region, and to ‘foster a free, open, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific’.⁷⁴ Furthermore, in late 2018 Australia announced its own \$2 billion Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific.⁷⁵ The Facility became operational in July 2019.

In addition to a focus on infrastructure, Australia’s Pacific step up focused on *maritime* security. In late 2018 Australia announced a new large naval ship that will operate ‘semi-permanently’ in the south-west Pacific and help respond to disasters.⁷⁶ Australia would also continue to implement a AU\$2 billion Pacific Maritime Security Program, which would see increased aerial surveillance of the Pacific Ocean and twenty-one new military patrol boats donated to island states. The first of these patrol boats was delivered to Papua New Guinea in December 2018. Australia also revealed plans for a new Pacific ‘Fusion Centre’ that would collate information from various security and fisheries agencies across Pacific Island countries to provide more comprehensive ‘maritime domain awareness’.

Australia’s Pacific step up can be understood as an attempt at strategic denial in the Pacific Islands. There is little doubt Australia is looking to shore up relations with island governments, while limiting China’s influence. Furthermore, Australia’s step up can be understood as a regional contribution to geographically broader ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ strategies, adopted by the United States and allies as a means of balancing China.

70 Liam Fox, ‘Australia, Solomon Islands, PNG Sign Undersea Cable Deal Amid Criticism from China’, *ABC News*, 12 July 2018, <www.abc.net.au/news/2018-07-12/australia-solomon-islands-png-sign-undersea-cable-deal/9983102> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

71 Malcolm Turnbull, ‘Deepening Cooperation between Australia and Solomon Islands’, *Press Release*, 13 June 2018, <www.malcolmturnbull.com.au/media/deepening-cooperation-between-australia-and-solomon-islands> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

72 Reuters, ‘U.S. to Counter Chinese Internet Bid in Papua New Guinea: Diplomat’, 28 September 2018, <www.reuters.com/article/us-pacific-debt-huawei-tech/u-s-to-counter-chinese-internet-bid-in-papua-new-guinea-diplomat-idUSKCN1M800X> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

73 Cited in Danielle Cave, ‘Australia and Huawei in PNG: More Than Too-Little-Too-Late Diplomacy’, *The Strategist*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 27 November 2018, <www.aspistrategist.org.au/australia-and-huawei-in-png-more-than-too-little-too-late-diplomacy/>.

74 United States Embassy (Canberra), ‘The US, Australia and Japan Announce Trilateral Partnership on Infrastructure Investment in the Indo-Pacific’, *Press Release*, 30 July 2018, <au.usembassy.gov/the-u-s-australia-and-japan-announce-trilateral-partnership-on-infrastructure-investment-in-the-indopacific/> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

75 Jane Norman, ‘Scott Morrison Reveals Multi-Million-Dollar Infrastructure Development Bank for the Pacific’, *ABC News*, 8 November 2018, <www.abc.net.au/news/2018-11-08/scott-morrison-announces-pacific-infrastructure-bank/10475452> [Accessed 20 June 2019].

76 David Wroe, ‘Christopher Pyne Promises New Ship in “Pivot” to the South Pacific’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 November 2018, <www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/christopher-pyne-promises-new-ship-in-pivot-to-the-south-pacific-20181108-p50es8.html> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

Even while Australia, and other states, express renewed designs on the Pacific Islands as part of their own regional geostrategy, it is important to acknowledge that Pacific Island countries have their own interests, and their own security concerns. These are considered in part three of this paper.

Part 3: Asserting Island Interests in the ‘Blue Pacific’

There is little doubt that the recent resurgence of interest in the Pacific is driven by strategic calculations. Pacific islands, and their governments, again ‘matter’ to states on the Pacific Rim in the context of renewed competition between the United States and China. This tendency—to neglect Pacific islands until national interests are piqued—has long been decried by Pacific leaders and scholars.⁷⁷ The reality is, of course, that Pacific Island states matter in their own right. Furthermore, Pacific Island countries, long adept at navigating great power competition, have exploited renewed interest in their region to demand action to tackle *their own* security concerns, particularly those associated with climate change.

‘Aqua Nullius’: The Pacific Ocean as Maritime Theatre for Power Projection

A tendency to view the Pacific Ocean as a maritime ‘theatre’ of competition is not a new phenomenon. For centuries major powers have struggled for naval supremacy in the Pacific. Pacific islanders have seen the Spanish, British, French, Dutch, Germans, Japanese and Americans all vie for control of their ocean, and these contests have indelibly marked the region, none more so than World War Two. In the decades following the war, strategic thinkers continued to view the islands through a lens of maritime power-projection. When, for example, Kiribati negotiated a fisheries access agreement with the Soviet Union in 1985, this rang alarm bells in Washington, Canberra and Wellington, where officials worried it might lead to a land-base, allowing the USSR a military presence in the region.⁷⁸ Significant diplomatic pressure was exerted on Kiribati to try to head off a deal, which angered Kiribati President Ieremia Tabai, who denied a Soviet base would ever happen, and accused Western states of neo-colonial behaviour.⁷⁹

77 As the late Tongan scholar Epeli Hau'ofa said of Australia and New Zealand: “these countries display a strong chameleonic tendency; they have a habit of dropping in and out of the South Pacific region whenever it suits their national self-interests”. Epeli Hau'ofa, ‘The Ocean in Us’, *The Contemporary Pacific*, vol. 10, no. 2 (1998), p. 400.

78 Jeff Willis, ‘When the “Tuna Wars” Went Hot: Kiribati, the Soviet Union, and the Fishing Pact That Provoked a Superpower’, *Pacific Dynamics: Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2017), p. 273.

79 Tabai explained: “The main concern I see [coming from other nations regarding the Russian fishing pact] is that we are so poor that we will allow the Soviets to establish a base in Kiribati. Well, we are not so poor as to lack principles ... We are not pro-Russian, we are pro-Kiribati and we believe in our capacity to pursue our national interests to achieve self-reliance. The colonial mentality is still around—that we are an appendage of the colonial countries ... Since 1979 we have ceased to belong to any other nation. We are only 64,000 people but we don't belong to anyone ... I have told these countries that we will continue to pursue our national interests”. *Ibid.*, cited on p. 275.

In recent years, analysts on the Pacific Rim have again come to see Pacific islands through the lens of maritime competition. It is in this vein that Australian journalists warn that island-nations like Vanuatu might serve “as a stationary aircraft carrier and a permanent port” that would “allow Beijing to project its naval forces into the Pacific”.⁸⁰ Strenuous denials from the Vanuatu government that it would ever consider a military base with China, or anyone else (similar to denials made by the Kiribati government a generation earlier), have done little to dampen speculation that Vanuatu, or other island nations, might become prey to Chinese coercion.

Again viewing the Pacific region through the lens of great power competition exacerbates a tendency to see Pacific islands as small and isolated—as pawns in a naval ‘great game’. However, Pacific Island states are powerful in their own right. Island nations have sovereign rights over a huge swathe of the Earth’s surface. It just so happens that much of their domain consists of the sea. In the Western cultural imagination, the ocean is typically conceived as a blue ‘void’ between the terrestrial spaces which ‘really matter’.⁸¹ Over centuries, norms of international law have been established which hold that nation states have exclusive sovereignty tied to defined areas *on land*, or in waters immediately adjacent to land masses. By contrast, the open ocean is owned by no-one. The ocean, and particularly the ‘high seas’, has been imagined as a space across which navies might roam, and merchant ships might travel unhindered, and over which no-one holds exclusive control. The ocean is seen as an ‘unpeopled’ space, a form of *aqua nullius*.⁸²

Key thinkers from the Pacific have long sought to explain that Pacific islanders have a different conception of their place in the world, one that is defined by connections across the sea, and by the vastness of the ocean itself. As the Tongan philosopher Epeli Hau’ofa explains, Pacific islanders are amongst the ‘proportion of Earth’s total human population who can truly be referred to as “Oceanic peoples”’.⁸³ He suggests Pacific islanders developed an oceanic cultural heritage, based on centuries of isolation from ‘continental’ cultures, and furthermore that Pacific islanders developed *shared*, pan-oceanic identities, through relationships and trade across the ocean. Differences between Western and Pacific cultural understandings of the ocean are subtle, but profound. Hau’ofa suggests that while “continental men” have tended to see only “small islands in a far sea”, Pacific peoples in fact live in a vast and interconnected “sea of islands”.⁸⁴

80 David Wroe, ‘How a Tiny Group of Islands near Australia Figure in Beijing’s Redrawing of the Map’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 April 2018, <www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/how-a-group-of-tiny-islands-near-australia-figure-in-beijing-s-redrawing-of-the-map-20180409-p4z8mb.html> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

81 For a detailed discussion of Western social constructions of the ocean, see Phillip Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

82 For pertinent discussion, see Elizabeth DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Islands Literatures* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), pp. 30–41.

83 Hau’ofa, ‘The Ocean in Us’, pp. 403–5.

84 Epeli Hau’ofa, ‘Our Sea of Islands’, in Eric Waddell, Vijay Naidu and Epeli Hau’ofa (eds), *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1993).

A 'Sea of Islands': Reclaiming the Pacific's Ocean Continent

After World War Two, even as colonial powers sought to shape a regional order that would protect their interests, Pacific islanders sought to gain greater control of regional decision-making and to reclaim a shared identity, as custodians of an oceanic continent.⁸⁵ Indeed, assertion of a regional oceanic identity proved a recurring theme in the decades that followed. As Pacific islanders gained national independence, they also sought to define the *regional* diplomatic agenda. During the 1960s Pacific islanders took greater control of decision-making at the South Pacific Commission, where they had initially been relegated to a triennial 'advisory' conference.⁸⁶ Then, in 1971, Pacific Island leaders established a regional political organisation of their own—the South Pacific Forum—which would become key to collective diplomacy. During the 1970s and '80s, Pacific Island countries worked as a bloc to secure their shared objectives in Oceania. Even in the context of the Cold War, they were able to take on major powers—and prevail. Facing opposition from the United States, Britain and others, they secured recognition of their Exclusive Economic Zones under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. Subsequently Pacific Island states also took on Japan, South Korea and Taiwan to ban driftnet fishing in the South Pacific. Taking on the United States (up to and including impounding fishing vessels), they successfully negotiated a regional access agreement for American boats fishing for tuna in their waters.⁸⁷ Much to the consternation of the French, in 1986 they successfully had New Caledonia added to the UN list of non-self-governing territories.

More recently, Pacific leaders have again asserted a pan-oceanic identity, and a willingness to use collective diplomacy strategies to pursue their interests. Since 2009, island states have embraced a 'New Pacific Diplomacy': consisting of shared strategies to pursue Pacific interests in a range of areas, including oceans management, fisheries, climate change, sustainable development, decolonisation, seabed mining, and trade.⁸⁸

85 As Albert Norman wrote in 1949: "Southern Oceania, that Pacific 'continent' which mainly is under water, is unique as a 'reclamation' project. Not an inch of soil will be reclaimed. The task is to reclaim something quite different, something that has been submerged by the chauvinistic policies of Europe ... the peoples inhabiting this submerged 'continent' occupy the higher ground. Separating each 'island' group are the waters of the South Pacific which tend to create the impression that this society is broken up and hopelessly separated from its essential parts. This geographic illusion has been heightened by the occupying European nations who, over the centuries, have 'claimed' for their own the visible peaks of the land. It was thus that the political and meaningless divisions of Europe became arbitrarily superimposed on Oceania ... The first step in 'reclamation' has been to free the land of these bonds, to restore the essential regional viewpoint and unity, to overlook the dividing waters, to see the land and its people as united ... it will be the task of the South Pacific Commission to ... promote the social reclamation of the world's seventh 'continent' and its people"; see Albert Norman, 'The Reclamation of Oceania', *Christian Science Monitor*, 4 June 1949.

86 Greg Fry, 'Regionalism and International Politics of the South Pacific', *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 54, no. 3 (1981), pp. 455-84.

87 For discussion of Pacific collective diplomacy during the Cold War, see Greg Fry, 'International Cooperation in the South Pacific: From Regional Integration to Collective Diplomacy', in Andrew Axline (ed.), *The Political Economy of Regional Cooperation: Comparative Case Studies* (London: Pinter Press, 1994). See also Greg Fry, 'At the Margin: The South Pacific and Changing World Order', in Richard Leaver and James L. Richardson (eds), *Charting the Post-Cold War Order* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993).

88 For detailed discussion of the New Pacific Diplomacy, see Greg Fry and Sandra Tarte (eds), *The New Pacific Diplomacy* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 2016). See also Sandra Tarte, 'Regionalism and Changing Regional Order in the Pacific Islands', *Asia and the Pacific Policy Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2014), pp. 312-24.

These strategies have yielded significant successes. Pacific Island states have secured much greater financial returns from their collective sovereign control of tuna resources.⁸⁹ Pacific Island countries lobbied successfully for an ‘Ocean agenda’ as part of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals.⁹⁰ In 2013 Pacific Island states successfully lobbied to have French Polynesia added to the UN list of non-self-governing territories.⁹¹

Island nations have demonstrated they are prepared to leverage their collective oceanic presence, and UN votes, to shape multilateral initiatives that have implications for all states. Most pointedly, Pacific Island countries are leading global efforts to tackle climate change and to protect the world’s oceans. The Marshall Islands patiently fostered, and then ably led, a global ‘High Ambition Coalition’, which secured the historic 2015 Paris Agreement, which is key to global efforts to tackle climate change.⁹² In 2017, Fiji assumed presidency of the UN climate talks. In the same year, Fiji also co-hosted the inaugural UN Ocean Conference, and Fiji’s ambassador to the UN was appointed the UN Special Envoy for the Ocean.

Working Together as the ‘Blue Pacific’

Pacific leaders are looking to build on recent successes of collective diplomacy. To do so they have endorsed a ‘Blue Pacific’ strategy that calls for inspired leadership and a long-term foreign policy commitment to act as one ‘Blue Continent’.⁹³ Samoan Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi explained that the Blue Pacific strategy “aims to strengthen collective action as one ‘Blue Pacific Continent’ by putting ‘the Blue Pacific’ at the centre of the policy making and collective action”.⁹⁴

89 Transform Aqorau, ‘How Tuna is Shaping Regional Diplomacy’, in Greg Fry and Sandra Tarte (eds), *The New Pacific Diplomacy* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2016). See also; Jope Tarai, 2016, ‘The New Pacific Diplomacy and the South Pacific Tuna Treaty’, in Greg Fry and Sandra Tarte (eds), *The New Pacific Diplomacy* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2016).

90 Genevieve Quirk and Quentin Hanich, ‘Ocean Diplomacy: The Pacific Island Countries’ Campaign to the UN for an Ocean Sustainable Development Goal’, *Asia-Pacific Journal of Ocean Law and Policy*, vol. 1 (2016), pp. 68-95.

91 Nic Maclellan, ‘Pacific Decolonisation and Diplomacy in the 21st Century’, in Greg Fry and Sandra Tarte (eds), *The New Pacific Diplomacy* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2016).

92 As former US President Barack Obama put it: “we could not have gotten a Paris Agreement without the incredible efforts and hard work of the island nations”. Barack Obama, ‘Remarks by the President to Leaders from the Pacific Island Conference of Leaders and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature World Conservation Congress’, 1 September 2016, Honolulu, Hawaii, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, <obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/09/01/remarks-president-leaders-pacific-island-conference-leaders-and> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

93 Pacific Islands Forum, *Forty Eighth Pacific Islands Forum: Forum Communique*, 5-8 September 2017, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Suva.

94 Malielegaoi emphasised the shared cultural heritage of Pacific Island states, joined by their connection to the ocean. He argued: “The Pacific Ocean has provided our island communities their cultural and historical identity and attachment since time immemorial. It has been the major influence in the history of Pacific Island communities. Throughout the region, customary association with the sea forms the basis of present-day social structures, livelihoods and tenure systems and traditional systems of stewardship governing its use. Pacific leaders urge the world to recognise the inseparable link between our ocean, seas and Pacific island peoples: their values, traditional practices and spiritual connections”; in Pacific Islands Forum, ‘The Blue Pacific: Pacific Countries Demonstrate Innovation in Sustainably Developing, Managing, and Conserving Their Part of the Pacific Ocean’, *News Release*, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Suva, 5 June 2017.

In 2018, the Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum, Dame Meg Taylor, explained the origins of this ‘Blue Pacific’ concept, arguing it draws on “a rich history of thinking about the possibilities of an Oceania continent”.⁹⁵ She told Australian media that leaders of the Pacific were “embracing a narrative of identity, a narrative of our own strengths, rather than always giving this sentiment that has been articulated for us, that we are just these smatterings of islands in the Pacific and that we are totally incapable of doing anything for ourselves”.⁹⁶ She argued that in the face of climate change and sea-level rise, island states were looking to secure their collective maritime boundaries, and to assert themselves as a collective maritime continent.⁹⁷

Pacific island leaders continue to insist the greatest threat they face is from climate change. For decades they have lobbied for the UN Security Council to recognise that changes to the climate, driven by the burning of fossil fuels, represent a security threat. In recent times, they have called for the appointment of a Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on Climate and Security.⁹⁸ Threats posed to island nations by climate change are multiple, and include more frequent intense cyclones, dying coral reefs, ocean acidification, sea-level rise and coastal inundation.⁹⁹ Ultimately, sea-level rise presents a threat to the territorial integrity of low-lying Pacific Island states—particularly Kiribati, Marshall Islands and Tuvalu. A study commissioned by the US military, published in 2018, found that sea-level rise will make dozens of atoll islands uninhabitable from the middle of this century, as salt-water intrusion undermines access to drinking water.¹⁰⁰ Security officials from Pacific Island states tend to argue climate change is a more likely, and more tangible, risk than those associated with other geopolitical issues; including increased competition between China and the United States.¹⁰¹ Of course this does not

95 “In essence, all of these appeals to Oceania, of who we are, respond to an awareness of the missed potential of our ocean continent, or as [Epeli] Hau’ofa describes it, the way the hoped for era of autonomy following political independence has not materialised. In response they all seek to reframe the region away from the enduring narrative of small, isolated and fragile, to a narrative of a large, connected and strategically important ocean continent”. Dame Meg Taylor, Keynote Address by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretary General Dame Meg Taylor, ‘State of the Pacific’ Conference, Australian National University, Canberra, 8 September 2018, <www.pacificwomensnetwork.com/keynote-address-by-secretary-general-meg-taylor-to-the-2018-state-of-the-pacific-conference/> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

96 Linda Mottram, ‘Australia, Don’t Fail Your Neighbours: Dame Meg Taylor on Climate Change’, *PM*, Radio National, Australian Broadcasting Commission, 10 September 2018.

97 Taylor explained: “Leaders are taking very seriously the demarcation of the maritime boundaries and are making sure all EEZs [Exclusive Economic Zones] are finalised ... There is a determined focus to have that done. It’s not unrealistic. Look, right back in the early days before the formation of the South Pacific Commission, in the [19]40’s, there was an articulation about the ‘seventh continent’. Just because it is water, doesn’t mean it doesn’t have legal boundaries, if we can secure them”. *Ibid.*

98 Climate Diplomacy, ‘A Pacific Perspective on Climate-Security Risks and the UN Security Council—Interview with the President of Nauru’, 4 July 2019, <www.climate-diplomacy.org/news/pacific-perspective-climate-security-risks-and-un-security-council-interview-president-nauru> [Accessed 20 June 2019].

99 For discussion, see Wesley Morgan, ‘Climate Change, at the Frontlines’, *The Interpreter*, Lowy Institute, 20 September 2018, <www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/climate-change-frontlines>.

100 Curt Storlazzi, Stephen Gingerich, Ap van Dongeren, Olivia Cheriton, Peter Swarzenski, Ellen Quataert, Clifford I Voss, Donald Field, Hariharasubramanian Annamalai, Greg Piniak and Robert McCall, ‘Most Atolls Will be Uninhabitable by the mid-21st Century Because of Sea-Level Rise Exacerbating Wave Driven Flooding’, *Science Advances*, vol 4. no. 4 (2018), pp. 1

101 As the commander of Fiji’s military, Rear Admiral Viliame Naupoto, told the 2019 Shangri La Dialogue in Singapore: “I believe there are three major powers in competition in our region ... there is the US, it has always been there, forever. There is China, which has been a loyal friend for many of us. The third competitor is climate change. Of the three, climate change is winning, and climate change exerts the most influence on countries in our part of the world. If there’s any competition, it’s with climate change”. Cited in Peter Hartcher, ‘Cool Rationality Replaced by US-China Fight Club’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 June 2019, <www.smh.com.au/world/asia/cool-rationality-replaced-by-us-china-fight-club-20190603-p51tvu.html> [Accessed 20 June 2019].

preclude Pacific administrations from expressing concern about geostrategic issues. Palau President Tommy Remengesau, for example, has repeatedly chided the US and Australia on climate policy—claiming that when President Trump “decided to walk away from the Paris Agreement, it also felt like he was walking away from Palau”,¹⁰² and that Australia ought to “take a more active role as a big brother in this fight [against climate change]”.¹⁰³ However, Remengesau has also suggested Palau would make a “natural ally” in what he describes as “the Pentagon’s new Indo-Pacific strategy, a plan to counter Chinese expansionism and its militarisation of islands in the region”.¹⁰⁴ He also suggested the US might help Palau to modernise its airports and construct “a fully functioning maritime port”.¹⁰⁵

In 2018, as they considered a regional security declaration for the Pacific Islands Forum, island leaders were adamant it should emphasise challenges they face from global warming. As it was, the Boe Declaration—endorsed by Pacific Island nations and Australia and New Zealand—reaffirmed climate change as the “single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and well-being of peoples of the Pacific” and reaffirmed a commitment to “progress implementation of the Paris Agreement”.¹⁰⁶ For decades, Pacific Island countries have called for global warming to be limited to 1.5°C above the long-term average. With the best available science indicating that warming beyond this threshold would critically threaten island futures, island leaders and ambassadors widely adopted the slogan: “1.5 to stay alive”. In 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) indicated that keeping global warming to below 1.5°C would require major transformation in the global economy, and most pointedly, a rapid global phase out of coal-fired power.¹⁰⁷ At present however, global emissions continue to rise. Greater ambition is needed from all states; for even if national pledges to reduce emissions—made under the 2015 Paris Agreement—are met, the planet’s average temperature is set to rise by more than 3°C by the end of the century.¹⁰⁸

At present, most Pacific Rim powers are doing little to tackle the Pacific’s key security threat. The US has announced its intention to withdraw from the Paris Agreement; China is the world’s largest coal producer; Japan is promoting coal-fired power; and Australia is the world’s largest coal exporter, and is planning to increase coal exports. Australia is also not on track to meet its Paris Agreement emissions reduction targets (indeed

102 Tommy Remengesau, ‘President of Palau: If the US Won’t Lead, We All Will’, Guest blog post by President Tommy Remengesau of Palau, Earthjustice, 2 June 2017, <earthjustice.org/blog/2017-june/president-of-palau-if-u-s-won-t-lead-we-all-will> [Accessed 16 September 2019].

103 Agence France-Presse (AFP), ‘Palau tells Australia to Step Up on Climate Change’, 2 August 2019, <www.news24.com/Green/News/palau-tells-australia-to-step-up-on-climate-change-20190802> [Accessed 16 September 2019].

104 Tommy Remengesau, ‘Pacific Defense Pact Renewal Vital to the US Amid Rising Tension with China’, 17 May 2019, *The Hill*, <thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/foreign-policy/444291-pacific-defense-pact-renewal-vital-to-the-us-amid-rising> [Accessed 16 September 2019].

105 Ibid.

106 Pacific Islands Forum, *Boe Declaration on Regional Security*.

107 See IPCC, ‘Chapter 2: Mitigation Pathways Compatible with 1.5°C in the Context of Sustainable Development’, in *Global Warming of 1.5 °C: An IPCC Special Report on the Impacts of Global Warming of 1.5 °C above Pre-industrial Levels and Related Global Greenhouse Gas Emission Pathways, in the Context of Strengthening the Global Response to the Threat of Climate Change, Sustainable Development, and Efforts to Eradicate Poverty* (IPCC, 2018), pp. 93–174.

108 UN Environment, *Emissions Gap Report 2018* (New York: United Nations Environment Programme, 2018).

domestic emissions are rising instead).¹⁰⁹ A failure to tackle climate change does little to endear Pacific Rim powers to island administrations. Dame Meg Taylor has explained for example that Australia's promotion of coal-fired power is out of step with other Pacific Islands Forum members and places the "wellbeing and potential" of the region at risk.¹¹⁰ Tuvalu's Prime Minister Enele Sopoaga has warned explicitly that Australia's climate policies risk undermining its Pacific step up.¹¹¹ Not all major powers are failing to take up the climate challenge however. The United Kingdom has legislated to become a net-zero emissions economy by 2050, and is bidding to host UN climate negotiations in 2020. The UK has made clear that pursuing global climate action is a "central plank" of its renewed engagement in the Pacific.¹¹² British ambassadors to the region have joined island states to call for countries worldwide to "follow through on their commitments under the Paris Agreement, particularly on cutting emissions".¹¹³

The return to naval competition in the Pacific Ocean means that Pacific Island countries again matter to great powers. Nations on the Pacific Rim are looking to cement existing security relations with island states or to develop new ones. However, it remains problematic that many states are stepping up in the Pacific in response to their own security concerns, while not addressing key security concerns of island nations themselves. Most pointedly, a tendency to see island states as a possible source of third-party military threat, without taking steps to address climate change—which is clearly seen by island leaders as a first order security priority—risks undermining cooperation with strategically important states.

Conclusion

For decades, if not centuries, world powers have tended to view the Pacific Ocean as a maritime theatre across which great power competition might be played out. Certainly, policymakers in Australia have long considered the Pacific Ocean as a potential source of military threat (distant though that threat may be). In that light, Pacific islands have

109 Ibid., p. 8.

110 Australia is the largest, most populated and wealthiest member state of the Pacific Islands Forum. Taylor's comments cited in Nicole Hasham, "'Truly Desperate Times': Pacific Nations Despair at Australia's Climate Action Stasis", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 September 2018, <www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/truly-desperate-times-pacific-nations-despair-at-australia-s-climate-action-stasis-20180910-p502uq.html> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

111 Mr Sopoaga explained: "We cannot be regional partners under this step-up initiative—genuine and durable partners—unless the government of Australia takes a more progressive response to climate change", cited in Stephen Dziedzic, 'Tuvalu Prime Minister Enele Sopoaga Says Australia's Climate Change Inaction Undermines Its "Pacific Pivot"', *ABC News*, 4 December 2018, <www.abc.net.au/news/2018-12-04/tuvalu-pm-says-australian-pacific-pivot-undermined-by-emissions/10579424> [Accessed 20 December 2018].

112 See UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 'Oceans Apart? The UK and the Pacific: Partnership & Shared Values', Address by the UK High Commissioner to New Zealand Ms Laura Clarke, to the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, 2 July 2019, <www.gov.uk/government/speeches/oceans-apart-the-uk-the-pacific-partnerships-shared-values> [Accessed 5 July 2019].

113 As the British High Commissioner to Fiji, Melanie Hopkins, explained in a video message in June 2019: "Through rising sea levels, a number of countries in the Pacific Ocean will become uninhabitable between 2050 and 2075 ... for the majority of countries they need to realise that for these islands it's a question about survival of peoples ... Principally we need to see countries following through on their commitments under the Paris Agreement, particularly on cutting emissions". UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Twitter post, 4 July 2019, <twitter.com/uk/status/1146712157159137285> [Accessed 5 July 2019].

been considered a “peripheral screen” behind which Australia might maintain its own national security.¹¹⁴ Today, as China challenges the naval predominance of the United States in the western Pacific Ocean, Australian analysts argue the South Pacific is “now a theatre of strategic competition, whether we like it or not, for the first time since the 1940s”.¹¹⁵ However, much has changed in the decades since World War Two. Then, thousands of islands across the Pacific Ocean were administered as far flung posts of colonial empires. Today, the Pacific Ocean is home to fourteen sovereign states who have their own national interests, and independent foreign policy.

Furthermore, Pacific Island nations are working together, as an ocean continent, to pursue their shared interests on the global stage. Island leaders have formally endorsed a Blue Pacific strategy, which builds on a regional oceanic identity as the basis for pursuing collective diplomacy.¹¹⁶ Far from being small and insignificant, Pacific Island nations are sovereign across a vast swathe of the world’s surface. They possess significant resources, including control of the world’s largest tuna fishery and a significant voting bloc at the United Nations. Over the decades since decolonisation Pacific Island countries have steadily reclaimed their pan-oceanic identity and doggedly pursued their interests through collective action. Despite opposition from major powers, they have had many successes, including recognition of their exclusive economic zones under the UN Law of the Sea, and securing greater economic returns from tuna caught in their waters. Furthermore, island states now exercise *global* leadership to tackle multilateral challenges, such as limiting climate change and protecting the world’s oceans.

Renewed geostrategic competition in the Pacific Ocean presents an historic opportunity to engage with Pacific Island countries on their own terms. If other powers want island nations to endorse their normative visions for the future of the Indo-Pacific they will need to take the security concerns of island states seriously. Here a key challenge will continue to be climate policy. Pacific Island states have long lobbied for recognition of climate change as a security threat. In 2018, island leaders again reaffirmed climate change as the “single greatest threat” to the region.¹¹⁷ It is not hard to see why. A warming climate will entail catastrophic impacts for Pacific Island nations; threatening the very survival of low-lying countries. Whilst Pacific Rim powers are investing resources in geostrategic competition, continued failure to seriously address climate change will likely undermine closer alignment between the Blue Pacific and other visions for the broader Indo-Pacific. This may change, however. If, for example, strategic visions for the Indo-Pacific were to encompass multilateral action to tackle climate change, or to bolster rules of the global climate regime, they may be more warmly embraced by island countries.¹¹⁸ In any case, it

114 See Goldsworthy, ‘British Territories and Australian Mini-Imperialism in the 1950s’, pp. 356-72.

115 Medcalf, ‘Mapping Our Indo-Pacific Future’.

116 Pacific Islands Forum, *Forty Eighth Pacific Islands Forum: Forum Communiqué*.

117 Pacific Islands Forum, *Boe Declaration on Regional Security*.

118 While action on climate change is not a key focus for the US Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy, this could change. A Democrat administration in the White House in 2020 would likely see the United States return to a position of global leadership on climate change. Democrat frontrunner Joe Biden has indicated that his presidency would “lead a major diplomatic push to raise the ambitions of countries’ climate targets” — and has specifically raised concern about China’s support for coal-fired power in Asia through its Belt and Road Initiative. See: Megan Darby, ‘Democrat Frontrunner Biden Says He Would Stop China Spreading Coal around the World’, *Climate Home News*, 5 June 2019, <www.climatechangenews.com/2019/06/05/democrat-frontrunner-biden-says-will-stop-china-spreading-coal-around-world/> [Accessed 16 September 2019].

is clear that island administrations face more options than the wholesale embrace of one or the other of regional strategies articulated for them by policymakers in Washington or Beijing (or in any of the Pacific Rim states). At the 2020 Pacific Islands Forum, island leaders will consider a '2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent'.¹¹⁹ Through this process, they look set to continue to assert uniquely Pacific visions for international relations in the Pacific Ocean. One thing is for certain, the days when major powers could take Pacific Island countries for granted are long gone.

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¹¹⁹ See Pacific Islands Forum, *Fiftieth Pacific Islands Forum: Forum Communique*, Funafuti, Tuvalu, 13-16 August 2019, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.