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The Pacific Papers

Each year, the Australian War College supports course members from across the Pacific Island nations, recognising the important role they play in strengthening regional security partnerships and fostering a shared understanding of contemporary strategic challenges. These officers contribute significantly to the learning environment by bringing diverse operational experiences, unique cultural perspectives and valuable insights into the security priorities, opportunities and challenges facing the Pacific region. Their participation enriches classroom discussion, broadens perspectives on regional security, and promotes greater mutual understanding among course members. As valued members of the College community, Pacific Island officers enhance the cultural diversity of the Australian War College and help build enduring professional networks that support cooperation, interoperability and collective security across the Pacific.

The Pacific Papers are produced by the Australian War College on behalf of the Commandant. These papers represent the best research theses, papers and essays written by Pacific Island graduates of the DSSC and ACSC and have been chosen for publication based on their scholarly attributes and the timeliness of their topic.

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Foreword

The Pacific region faces a complex and evolving security landscape. Alongside traditional security concerns, Pacific nations contend with the intersecting effects of climate change, environmental degradation, transnational crime, economic vulnerability, resource security, natural disasters and strategic competition. These challenges are often amplified by geography, limited resources, and the unique circumstances of island states. Addressing them requires not only strong partnerships, but also a deep understanding of Pacific priorities, perspectives, and lived experience.

The papers contained in this volume demonstrate the scholarship, professionalism, and strategic insight of Pacific Island graduates from the Defence and Strategic Studies Course (DSSC) and the Australian Command and Staff Course (ACSC). These works explore issues of significance to national resilience, regional security, and international cooperation. They were selected for publication on the basis of their academic merit, originality, and contemporary relevance. Importantly, they bring Pacific perspectives to questions that will shape the future of the region.

At a time when effective regional responses depend on inclusive dialogue and shared understanding, the perspectives presented here are particularly important. Lasting solutions to the region's most pressing challenges cannot be imposed from outside; they must be informed by the knowledge, leadership and innovation of Pacific nations themselves. These papers highlight the depth of professional expertise that exists across the Pacific and demonstrate the important contribution Pacific military and security professionals make to regional thinking and problem-solving.

We commend the authors for their achievement and for their willingness to contribute their ideas to the broader security community. We are confident that this collection will inform, challenge and inspire readers. More importantly, it serves as a reminder that the future security, stability, and prosperity of the Pacific will be shaped not only by partnership, but by the leadership, ingenuity, and agency of Pacific peoples themselves.

To all the authors whose ideas, experience and leadership are reflected in these pages, tenkyu tru, vinaka vakalevu, tangkyu tumas, mālō 'aupito, and tagio tumas.

Brigadier Lara Troy, CSC
Commandant
Australian War College

Air Commodore Jo Brick, AM
Director General Pacific
Pacific Division

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Research Thesis

Economic Implications of China's Belt and Road Initiative in Southwest Pacific

Colonel John Giregire, Papua New Guinea

Is there a need for national institute for defence and security education in the Pacific Island Countries? A Case for Fiji

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Colonel Soane MV 'Aholelei, Tonga

Research Thesis

Throughout the DSSC, course members undertake a rigorous research program that enables them to investigate a military or national security issue of strategic significance in depth. This research provides an opportunity to integrate and apply knowledge acquired throughout the course, while generating original insights and practical solutions to contemporary Defence and national security challenges.

As part of the thesis and associated research activities, course members further develop their analytical, research, and communication capabilities, strengthening skills that will support their future professional and strategic leadership roles. In addition to enhancing individual professional development, these research projects make a meaningful contribution to Defence policy development, strategic thinking, and professional practice.

The research thesis represents the culmination of the DSSC academic program and serves as the final assessment component of the Research Capstone Unit.

Economic Implications of China's Belt and Road Initiative in the Southwest Pacific

Author

Colonel John Giregire, Papua New Guinea

Colonel Giregire is a career officer in the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF). Currently serving as the Chief of Logistics / Support Commander and the Financial Delegate of Commander PNGDF at the Strategic Headquarters at Murray Barracks in Port Moresby. Colonel Giregire is a graduate of 2011 Malaysian Staff College with Diploma in Strategic and Defence Studies and Australian War College Class of 2023 holding a Master's degree in National Security and Strategy (Leading in International Policy). His expertise spans Force Infrastructure Development and Capability Sustenance, Nation Building Civil Works, Operational Leadership, Multinational Peacekeeping, Civil Military Cooperation, Professional Leadership Development, and Defence Contracts & Budget Management

Summary

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) infrastructure development in the Southwest Pacific is a major strategic project that challenges the United States hegemony and the international rules-based order in th.e region. The aim was to determine the issue of debt trap diplomacy compounded with the lack of absorptive capacity by the recipient countries in the SWP. Hence the research question is to what extent have BRI-funded projects contributed to increased debt levels in the SWP countries?

The research reviewed several articles on BRI from 2013 to 2023 through qualitative and quantitative analysis using both primary and secondary sources to establish the validity of the issue and identify any information gaps with empirical evidence to substantiate the findings. Also, a case study was conducted for Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands to test the government statecraft framework using a project cycle to determine absorptive capacity. It was established that both countries have limited capacity but have been engaged with BRI for several years and have never experienced increased debt levels leading to debt trap diplomacy. In fact, BRI is addressing the absorptive capacity through infrastructure projects and transforming SWP countries

Finally, a conclusion covering the significance of the thesis with both economic and strategic impacts of BRI with policy recommendations.

Introduction

In 2013, the Chinese government implemented the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with the aim of promoting economic development, trade and investment, tourism, and cooperation in the Southwest Pacific (SWP) through infrastructure development and connectivity enhancement.[1] The BRI aims to revolutionize infrastructure development to promote macroeconomic activities, bilateral trade, tourism, and social service delivery in the SWP Islands. This has resulted in China's increased influence and strengthened relationships within the SWP, allowing for greater control over available resources. To date, China has allocated US$4.5 billion towards infrastructure development in the SWP through a BRI concessional loan and has extended another US$498 billion in funding to various countries worldwide from 2008 to 2021, which is comparable to the US$601 billion provided by the World Bank during the same period (GDP Centre 2023).[2]

Even so, repeated concerns about the BRI have been raised by Western countries, especially in relation to the risks of debt-trap diplomacy that can purportedly result in a loss of sovereignty and the broader lack of absorptive capacity that is referred to the total amount of foreign capital plus technical assistance that a developing country can use productively among the recipient states.[3] Indeed, these concerns underscore the need for careful analysis of the geopolitical implications of China's growing influence, through the BRI, in the Southwest Pacific for the region's dynamics and relations with other major powers.[4]

But while the issue of debt-trap diplomacy stemming from Chinese finances and investments has generated intense debate in recent years, a number of researchers have presented compelling evidence that discredits the notion as a threat to sovereignty.[5] While Chinese development financing is often viewed as a form of soft power diplomacy intended to influence, if not coerce. China does have a track record of driving economic transformation by providing alternative funding sources for struggling nations in the region. That said, one criticism of Chinese development financing still deserves note here: that is, the frequently-levelled claim of limited absorptive capacity of recipient countries. This is because, in reality, many SWP Island governments arguably have limited capacity to negotiate and oversee Chinese development financing – and the question is to what extent is this the case?

The purpose of this thesis is to examine to what extent recipient states in the Pacific possess the absorptive capacity to make efficient and effective use of the development finance offered by the BRI, specifically with regard to infrastructure development, trade facilitation, and investment opportunities. To explore the actual and potential risks and challenges associated with debt sustainability, among other

[1] Lee, Jones and Shahar Hameiri. "Debunking the Myth of Debt-trap Diplomacy" How Recipient Countries Shape China's Belt and Road Initiative, Asia Pacific Programme (Aug 2020): 3
[2] Moses, Oyintarelado and et. "Demystifying Chinese Overseas Lending Development Finance", Global Development Policy Center, no. 18 (April 2023): 4
[3] Adler, 'Absorptive Capacity The Concept and Its Determinants', 1.
[4] Kapma, 'The Belt and Road Initiative and Cultural Bias in Bilateral Trade with China', 4.
[5] Ibid

BRI-related considerations, among SWP countries.[6] The thesis applies a conceptual framework to evaluate the economic impacts of China's developing financing, alongside the capacity of recipient states to sustain the loans.

Drawing on both primary and secondary source materials (e.g., official documents, media reports, academic journal articles and quarterly bulletins), this thesis focuses on the two case studies of Papua New Guinea (PNG) and the Solomon Islands, as both countries constitute major destinations for Chinese development finance. In view of concerns pertaining to insufficient absorptive capacity, along with accountability, corruption and limited local stakeholder participation, the thesis analyzes whether sufficient governance structures and transparency mechanisms are in place to support BRI-related projects and initiatives in these two countries – and the SWP, more broadly. Here, the project-level observations distilled from these two cases stand to raise broader geostrategic implications for the Southwest Pacific region as a whole.

Following this, the thesis advances recommendations for the region's traditional development partners (i.e., Australia, the United States (US), New Zealand, and Japan) on how to effectively manage donor-funded projects in the region. The aim here is to highlight opportunities for cooperation and partnership among SWP nations and other relevant parties, such as regional organizations, international development agencies, and private sector entities. In order to address the issue of limited capacity among Pacific Island countries, it is necessary for governments in the region to establish respective national policy frameworks to help inform how they can ensure a greater degree of control over the use of development finance.

At the crux of this thesis is the aim of uncovering the ways through which the advantages of the BRI can be optimized while its potential drawbacks are minimized. While the BRI is purportedly designed to be mutually beneficial – by supporting the economic growth of neighbouring countries while assisting China in developing markets for its products in the long term and easing industrial excess capacity in the short term – it is crucial for SWP countries to thoroughly assess the pros and cons of participating in the BRI and to put in place measures to ensure that development financing via the BRI is adaptable, transparent, and sustainable.

Overview of the Thesis

In Chapter 1, the current strategic competition between China and the US with its Allies in the region is presented with context. China's increasing economic and military strength is challenging the US's authority and the international rules-based system, particularly in the SWP. China is using soft power diplomacy to influence the SWP and is focusing on infrastructure development under the BRI. The US and its Allies are responding by taking aggressive measures to counter China, which could result in potential conflict. The chapter also explores the geographical background of the SWP and development financing with project/financial statistics. It then examines China's infrastructure development through the BRI, followed by a brief overview of the challenges faced by Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, which

[6] David De Cremer, Bruce McKern, and Jack McGuire, *The Belt and Road Initiative*, 33.

are two strategic locations for both China and the US.

The purpose of Chapter 2 is to examine and comprehend how BRI affects the absorptive capacity of recipient states. By analyzing various literature sources on BRI, it seeks to identify the potential problems associated with the lack of absorptive capacity. Furthermore, we briefly discuss the approach to evaluate absorptive capacity, and the subsequent chapters will delve into case studies to fully comprehend the impacts of BRI. Then in chapter 3, we will conduct a case study of the implementation process of the BRI project to test PNG's absorptive capacity. This chapter is a continuation of the previous two chapters, and it will examine the challenges that PNG faces and evaluate its capability to absorb BRI development financing thoroughly. We will closely analyze the implementation of Chinese projects throughout the project cycle, which comprises five stages - project identification, feasibility studies, appraisal and approval, detailed design, civil works, and project completion reports. Our primary objective is to evaluate PNG's absorptive capacity and its ability to execute BRI projects.

Furthermore, in Chapter 4, we will conduct a comprehensive case study on the Solomon Islands and its ability to execute BRI projects. The chapter aims to provide a detailed analysis of the country's history with BRI, while also highlighting the challenges presented by the strategic competition between China and the US. With the Solomon Islands recently signing a security agreement with China, there is an increased focus on their ability to carry out BRI projects without incurring unsustainable levels of debt, especially given the recent surge in development financing from China.

Moreover, Chapter 5 is dedicated to sharing the findings of the case studies carried out in the Solomon Islands and PNG. The main objective is to address the thesis question of debt-trap diplomacy, with a specific focus on absorptive capacity and the impact of BRI on these two countries. Additionally, we will also explore the strategic implications of BRI, taking into account the ongoing strategic competition between China and the US. Finally, the conclusion will include the significance of this thesis with answers to the research question. Briefly summarise the economic implications of BRI in SWP and the strategic implications in the region with policy recommendations for donor partners and development financing recipients in SWP.

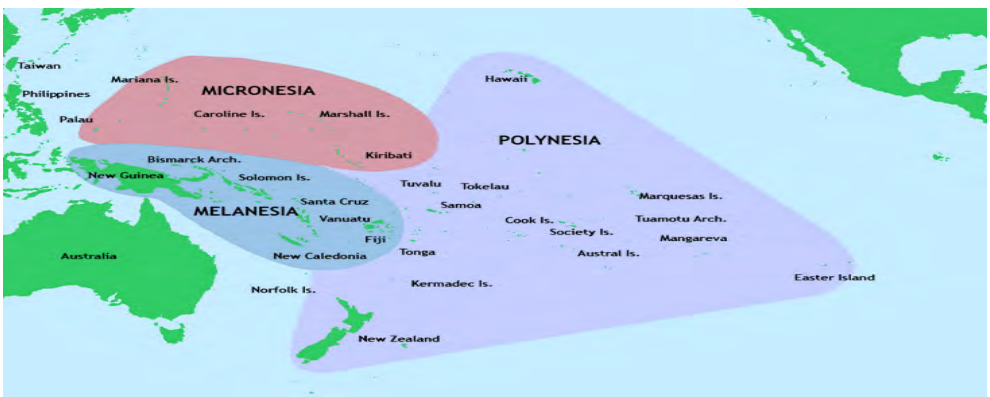
Chapter One

The purpose of this chapter is to provide context for the current strategic competition in the region between China and the US with its Allies. China's increasing military and economic power is challenging the US's dominance and international rules-based order, particularly in the SWP. Through soft power diplomacy, China is exerting its influence over the SWP, particularly through infrastructure development under the BRI. In response, the US and its Allies are taking aggressive action to counter China, which may lead to potential conflict. This chapter will also delve into the SWP's geographical background, and development financing with project/financial statistics in the aid-dependent, natural disaster-prone region. Furthermore, it will examine China's BRI infrastructure development, followed by a brief overview of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands challenges as the two strategic locations for both China and the US.

The Development Finance Context in the Pacific

The Pacific Ocean is home to the Southwest Pacific Islands, a group of islands that are divided into three main groups - Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia.[7] These islands are renowned for their pristine beaches, cultural and geographic diversity, and the unique development challenges they face. These 14 independent nations and seven territories have a combined population of under 13 million people and span over 15% of the world's surface. The Melanesian sub-region of the Pacific islands is located near the east coast of Australia, with only 6 kilometers separating Australia and PNG, and 2,000 kilometers separating Australia and Vanuatu. The atolls in eastern Kiribati are located northwards and are only 3,000 kilometers away from Hawaii, while Palau is 1,300 kilometers from Guam.[8]

Figure 1: Map of the South West Pacific Island Countries[9]



The SWP region ranks high on the list of aid-dependent regions in the world.[10] A

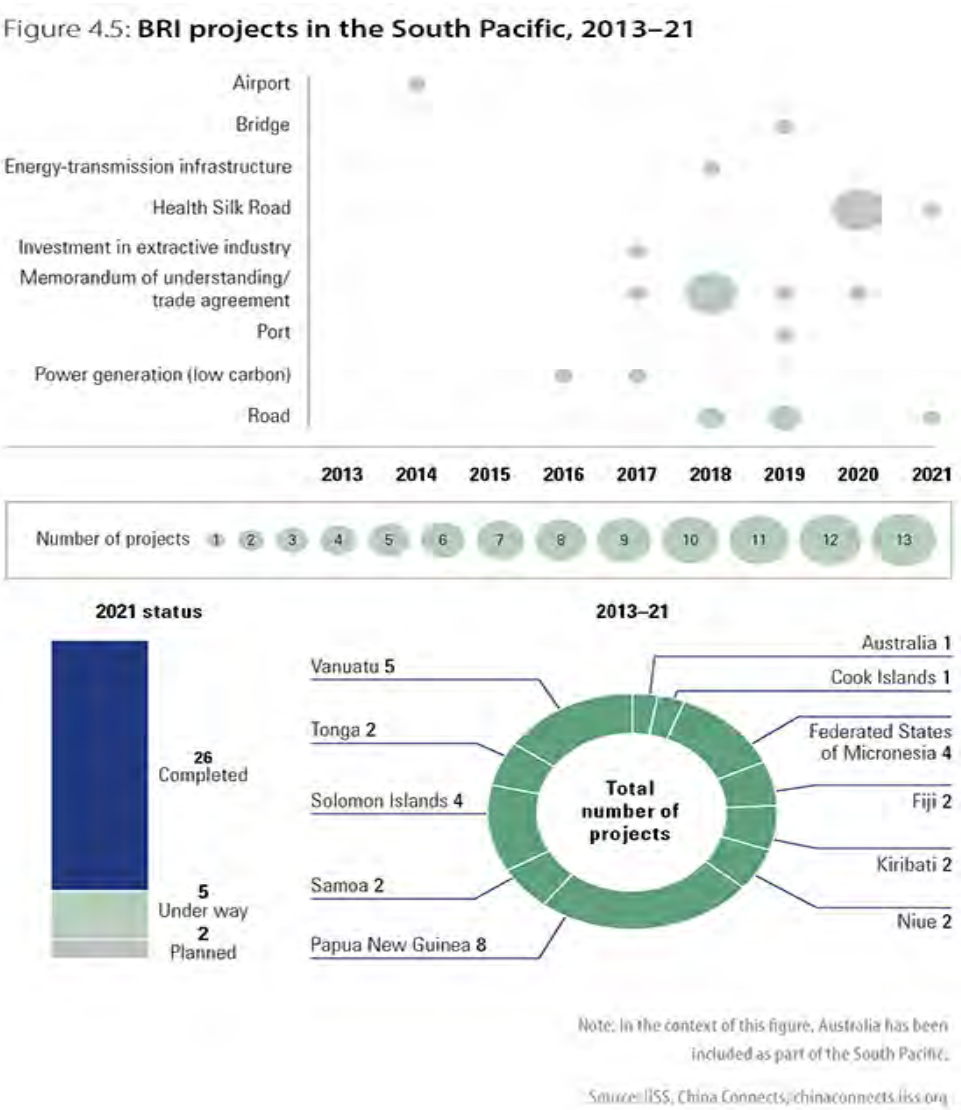
[7] Foster, Sophie. Etl, "Pacific Island region, Pacific Ocean", Encyclopedia Britannica, (June 2023)
[8] 'The Risks of China's Ambitions in the South Pacific', 2.
[9] 'Pacific Islands | Countries, Map, & Facts | Britannica', 2.
[10] Dornan and Pryke, 'Foreign Aid to the Pacific', 2017, 1.

recent report by the Development Policy Blog reveals that Australia is the largest provider of development assistance in the area, with a total of US$6.5 billion allocated between 2011 and 2017 (as shown in Figure 3). In 2019, the United States launched a new Pacific Islands regional foreign assistance program and pledged $US300 million, with an additional US$5.5 million slated for March 2023.[11] According to the Brookings Institution, China provided close to US$1.5 billion in development financing to the Pacific Islands region between 2006 and 2017, through a combination of grants and loans. This figure has since increased to US$4.5 billion by 2022.[12] The World Bank is also expanding its support in the Pacific Islands region through the International Development Association (IDA)

Over the past decade, China's BRI has had a significant impact on the Asia-Pacific region's infrastructure development, showcasing its soft power diplomacy. China provides development financing to the SWP in three forms: grants and interest-free loans administered through state finances, and concessional loans administered through China Eximbank.[13] This thesis deals with BRI's concessional loans or soft loans which have more generous terms than market loans, very low-interest rates with several years of grace periods.[14] From 2008 to 2020, China provided nearly US$3.148 billion in development finance to the SWP, with details of Chinese-funded projects available in Figure 2.[15] Chinese financing is playing a crucial role in infrastructure development, bilateral trade, tourism, and economic investment in the SWP. The BRI initiative has the potential to reduce poverty levels that have persisted for decades. Notably, China's investment in Pacific Island nations reached US$2.72 billion by the end of 2022.[16] For a comparison of Chinese development financing and investment with the Top Five South Pacific Donors from 2006-2014, refer to Figure 3.[17]

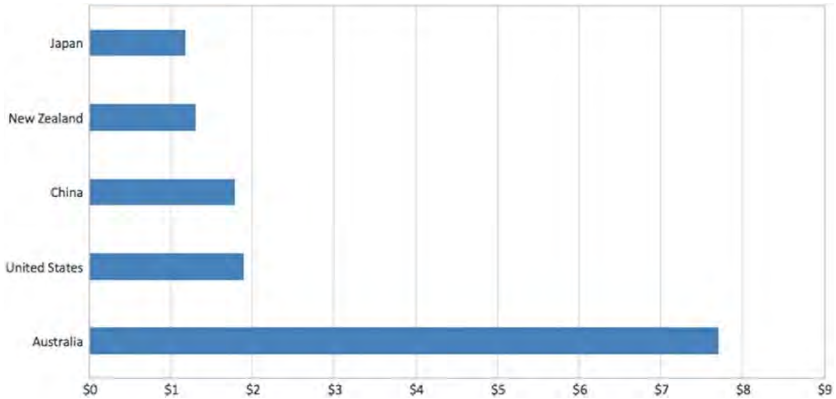
[11] 'IF11208.Pdf', 1.
[12] 'The Risks of China's Ambitions in the South Pacific', 4.
[13] Dornan and Brant, '<span Style="font-Variant', 2.
[14] 'Modernising the Measurement of Concessional Sovereign Loans - OECD', 1.
[15] 'China's Influence as a Pacific Donor | Lowy Institute', 2.
[16] Lee, 'Experts See Environmental Risk from China's Small Island BRI Efforts', 1.
[17] Dornan and Pryke, 'Foreign Aid to the Pacific', 2017, 394.

Figure 2: BRI Projects in South West Pacific 2013-2021[18]



[18] 'APRSA 2023 | Chapter 4', 13.

Figure 3: Top Five South Pacific Donors 2006-2014 ($US billion) [19]



Developing financing in the SWP Islands presents a multitude of complex challenges. Development obstacles are substantial due to the region's vulnerability to natural disasters and the impact of climate change. In the SWP, poor governance is a likely factor contributing to lower development financing project effectiveness. In the last 30 years, the Pacific has experienced less than 1% growth in per capita income, indicating restricted levels of development.[20] Economic and natural shocks pose a unique threat to the Pacific region due to the countries' small size, geographical isolation, and susceptibility to natural disasters. China's development financing to the Pacific region is delivered through sizable infrastructure projects funded by concessional loans.[21]

The SWP has seen an expansion of donors, with China now playing a significant role alongside traditional development partners. The Chinese government has funded more than 100 development projects in the region, donated over 200 batches of in-kind support, and trained approximately 10,000 local professionals since the 1970s. According to the 2022 Lowy Institute Pacific Aid Map, China provided close to $US3.148 billion in development financing to the Pacific between 2008 and 2020.[22] As part of the BRI initiative, China will contribute to the development of the SWP by investing in infrastructure, free trade, tourism, and foreign direct investments. China's assistance is aligned with the national interests of SWP, infrastructure, and socioeconomic development of the SWP countries.

Cooperation between China and the SWP in the development of island tourism, agricultural products, and infrastructure has been solidified through the signing of BRI memoranda of understanding. China holds significant power in the Southwest Pacific region, evidenced by the bilateral trade volume growth from $4.512 billion in 2012 to $8.66 billion in 2018, with an average annual growth rate of 11.48%.[23]

[19] Dornan and Pryke, 'Foreign Aid to the Pacific', 2017, 394.
[20] 'Aid Has Failed the Pacific', 1.
[21] 'The Risks of China's Ambitions in the South Pacific', 2.
[22] 'China's Influence as a Pacific Donor | Lowy Institute', 2.
[23] Ye et al., 'The Relationship between China-South Pacific Island Countries Tourism and Trade in the Context of the Belt and Road Initiative', 74.

Additionally, the number of tourists visiting the region has consistently increased each year. Specifically, the number of tourists from China has risen from 55,000 in 2012 to 143,000 in 2017 and 224,900 in 2018, with an average annual growth rate of 14.64%.[24]

Focusing on Infrastructure

The good characteristic of China's BRI is financial support to developing countries in building essential infrastructure that can enhance economic growth. The infrastructure includes transportation facilities like roads, bridges, and ports that connect markets and people. Furthermore, access to basic services such as clean water, electricity, and sanitation can improve living standards and positively impact health, education, and other aspects of life. Improved infrastructure makes trading easier and more cost-effective, leading to increased exports and revenue generation that stimulates socio-economic development.[25] Therefore, the question of increased debt levels from BRI development financing projects cannot be justified against other donors like the US, Australia, New Zealand and Japan.

One key distinction between China and conventional development partners lies in the focus of their financial support. SWP's primary objective is to promote infrastructure development that drives economic progress and lifts the nation out of poverty. Consequently, conventional development partners must decrease their investment in the social sector and channel resources towards infrastructure. This will enable the beneficiary countries to provide social services with the support of a robust economy.

The Situation in PNG and the Solomon Islands

China's BRI has played a significant role in its relationship with Pacific Island nations like PNG and the Solomon Islands. Indeed, these two countries are the SWP region's greatest beneficiaries of Chinese development finance, PNG and the Solomon Islands. China's investment in infrastructure development in PNG has led to increased bilateral trade, which surged from US$3.21 billion in 2020 to US$4.02 billion in 2021.[26] Based on this growth in trade, China and PNG are expected to sign a free-trade agreement soon, with the rest of the SWP following suit in a bid to promote and encourage economic independence. The Solomon Island Security Agreement with China can effectively be challenged by the US with the signing of a Security Agreement with PNG to establish a military presence. Despite receiving the largest number of BRI projects in the SWP region and an increase in foreign direct investment worth US$4.02 billion, PNG is currently in talks with Beijing for a free trade agreement.[27] PNG remains committed to its foreign policy of maintaining friendly relations with all nations and avoiding enemies. Furthermore, PNG is aware that BRI is a China Communist Party-driven strategy with geopolitical objectives that may lead partner countries into unsustainable debt through 'debt trap diplomacy'. Despite this, China's BRI projects have contributed to the growth of tourism, bilateral

[24] Cheer et al., 'Tourism in Pacific Island Countries', 451.
[25] 'How Will the Belt and Road Initiative Advance China's Interests?', 4.
[26] Briefing, 'A Potential China-Papua New Guinea Free Trade Agreement', 1.
[27] 'Papua New Guinea', 15 June 2023, 4.

trade, and the local economy in SWP countries.

The development financing initiative from China to the Solomon Islands has encompassed several key areas, such as infrastructure development, telecommunication, and security cooperation. One noteworthy achievement is the construction of a sports stadium that will serve as a focal point for the Pacific Games.[28] China has emerged as a major financier in the region, and in 2019, the Solomon Islands joined other Pacific nations in recognizing China, cutting diplomatic ties with Taiwan, and signing agreements with BRI. As a result, China now accounts for 46% of all trade for the Solomon Islands.[29] This is an indication that debt trap diplomacy cannot be verified against the economic growth stimulated by BRI projects. However, other nations in the Indo-Pacific region have expressed concerns regarding the security agreement between China and the Solomon Islands, as it may result in a Chinese military presence or even a base in the country.[30] Additionally, while Huawei's proposal to construct 160 telecommunication towers in the Solomon Islands could be beneficial for the nation's progress, it has also raised security concerns for the US and Australia.

Discussions surrounding China's aid to the Solomon Islands and PNG have raised concerns about China's increasing influence in the SWP, as well as doubts about its intentions and the response of Western nations to balance this influence. The security agreement between China and the Solomon Islands aims to boost the latter's national security capabilities and includes collaboration on disaster response, humanitarian aid, and maintaining social order, among other areas.[31] However, the United States and their regional partners are concerned that this agreement could lead to the deployment of Chinese soldiers to the Solomon Islands and the establishment of a permanent military base, which is less than two thousand kilometres away from Australia.[32]

Therefore, China has encountered opposition from the United States, Australia, and their allies in the Southwest Pacific due to their aid delivery to the Solomon Islands and PNG. The concern arises from China's increasing influence in the region and the possibility of aid being utilized to establish a military presence. The Solomon Islands' acceptance of $730 million in financial aid from China resulted in violent anti-government protests, causing Australia and New Zealand to express serious concerns about the security agreement between the Solomon Islands and China. As a result, the Solomon Islands promised Australia that they would not allow a permanent Chinese military presence in their country. In response, the US signed a security agreement with PNG, stating the need to cooperate on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations. However, it is important to consider the geostrategic context of the United States.[33]

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[28] 'China's Growing Reach Is Transforming a Pacific Island Chain', 1.
[29] 'The Risks of China's Ambitions in the South Pacific', 3.
[30] 'China-Solomon Islands Security Agreement and Competition for Influence in Oceania', 2.
[31] 'What the China-Solomon Islands Pact Means for the U.S. and South Pacific', 1.
[32] 'What the China-Solomon Islands Pact Means for the U.S. and South Pacific', 2.
[33] Grossman, 'America Is Winning Against China in Oceania', 2.

Chapter Two

The objective of this chapter is to evaluate and comprehend the effects of BRI on the absorptive capacity of recipient states. Through a review of various literature sources on BRI, we aim to determine the potential issues related to the lack of absorptive capacity. Additionally, we briefly touch upon the framework to assess absorptive capacity, with further details to be explored in subsequent chapters through case studies to fully understand the BRI and Its Impacts

Understanding the BRI and Its Impacts

This thesis conducted a survey of existing literature on the BRI from 2013-2023 to assess the validity of the concerns raised about the Initiative's negative impacts – in particular, those pertaining to the widely discussed debt trap diplomacy and the lack of absorptive capacity among recipient states. Although this literature review cannot purport to be exhaustive, it does draw on some key works that underscore the debates and gaps in understanding that persist in relation to these issues, as well as the relevance of the insights obtained through this survey for the Southwest Pacific context.

According to a recent study by Mansi Mishra and Vivek Kumar, China employs debt trap diplomacy to gain influence over smaller nations, as doing so allows Beijing to build infrastructure, establish capital, and promote international connectivity and trade. Doing so positions China as the central economic hub for strategically located countries. This view stands in contrast, however, to other studies and wider commentary. The Prime Minister of Samoa, Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, has stated that the BRI offers great opportunities for small countries like Samoa in the South Pacific region,[34] arguing that grants from China have been beneficial and that debt trap allegations are based on misunderstandings. Moses Oyintarelado, Cecilia Springer, and Kevin P Gallagher have likewise argued that no evidence exists to support claims that China lends to gain strategic leverage or control over strategic public assets.[35] Instead, their study found that China's Overseas Lending and Development Finance (OLDF) is linked to economic growth that benefits the host nations. In a similar vein, Deborah Brautigam and Meg Tithmire have pointed out that the term "debt trap diplomacy" has been used by US policymakers since 2018 to criticize the BRI following the transfer of the Sri Lankan port of Hambantota to Chinese management for lease after the government defaulted on BRI development financing loan.[36] They critique, however, the concept of debt-trap diplomacy and cite examples where China has offered additional funding to help countries struggling with loan repayments, such as Sri Lanka.

Research conducted by Roland Rajah, Alexandre Dayant, and Jonathan Pryke (2019) further suggests that China has not intentionally engaged in debt-trap diplomacy in the Pacific region. Even so, the significant amount of lending by China, combined with the lack of strong institutional mechanisms to ensure the debt

[34] Briefing, 'China's Belt & Road Initiative In The Pacific Islands', 3.
[35] Moses, Springer, and Gallagher, 'Demystifying Chinese Overseas Lending and Development Finance', 2.
[36] 'There Is No Chinese "Debt Trap" - The Atlantic', 2.

sustainability of borrowing countries, poses substantial risks.[37] These observations are substantiated by the work of Lee Jones and Shahar Hameiri, who reveals that the accusations of debt trap diplomacy are unfounded, as the BRI is an economic project and Chinese development funding mainly depends on the recipient. China does not dictate the construction of BRI projects unilaterally, and often it is the political leaders of the recipient countries who make poor choices that result in economic loss.[38]

In view of these observations, political leaders in the SWP must provide good governance with integrity and accountability for prudent management of project funds. While financial assistance can be beneficial, it is important that it meets specific criteria to best serve the needs of the people in the Southwest Pacific. This includes a mandatory government policy document and action plan, with a framework that outlines key performance indicators for national projects. These policy documents also guide a country's national interest in investments, including those funded through BRI concessional loans. The financier China, the US, Australia, New Zealand and Japan must only finance countries with policy documents with long-term development plans. Moreover, to continue serving as a significant financier in the Pacific, while avoiding accusations of debt-trap diplomacy, China should adapt its approach and adopt formal lending rules similar to those of multilateral development banks and in accordance with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). A unique forum where the governments of 37 democracies with market-based economies collaborate to develop policy standards to promote sustainable economic growth.[39]

Unpacking the Question of Absorptive Capacity

With respect to the question of absorptive capacity, studies on this issue have tended to focus more broadly on whether recipient countries have the capacity to productively use foreign development financing. Here, absorptive capacity refers to the total amount of foreign capital plus technical assistance that a developing country can use productively among the recipient states.[40]

As noted by Simon Feeny and Ashton de Silva, the international community has been increasing foreign aid to unprecedented levels; however, this additional development financing may not be effectively utilized due to a lack of finances and technical issues in recipient countries. These considerations led Patrick Guillaumont to explore whether the issue of absorptive capacity should serve as a mandatory reason for rejecting BRI development financing. Guillaumont argues, however, that the poverty trap is a significant concern for many nations, particularly those categorized as Least Developed Countries, and that an increase in financing would be beneficial for them. According to his study, whether or not a country can absorb development financing and other forms of development financing effectively depends on the nature of the financing itself as well as the modalities used to deliver

[37] 'Belt and Road and Debt Diplomacy in the Pacific | Lowy Institute', 2.
[38] 'Debunking the Myth of "Debt-Trap Diplomacy" | Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank', 5.
[39] 'Modernising the Measurement of Concessional Sovereign Loans - OECD', 1.
[40] Adler, 'Absorptive Capacity The Concept and Its Determinants', 1.

it.[41]

According to McGillivray, Naudé, and Santos-Paulino (2018), the United Nations views the Pacific Islands as facing significant challenges as they become more integrated into global markets. These challenges include limited resources, inadequate technology, poor economic management, and institutional capabilities. As a result, economic growth in the region is heavily reliant on external resources such as aid, migrant remittances, and foreign direct investment (FDI). Meanwhile, Yongxing (2018) acknowledges the critics who claim that China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is the new engine of global economic growth. Despite criticisms of debt trap diplomacy and concerns about absorptive capacity, China is seen as offering significant advantages in productivity, technology, funding, experience, and development to countries that participate in the Belt and Road Initiative.[42]

Framework for Assessing Absorptive Capacity

Traditional methods for assessing absorptive capacity primarily evaluate the extent to which a recipient can utilize donor funds in accordance with the donor's specifications. More advanced conventional approaches concentrate on the technical proficiency of recipients to strategize and execute programs or projects in compliance with donor criteria, which may be collaboratively determined with the recipients.[43] The usual solutions for surmounting the obstacles to development financing absorption typically presume that the standards, specifications, goals, or schemes of donor-funded interventions are "correct," and that the recipients' technical implementation skills need to be enhanced.

Absorptive capacity cannot exist in a vacuum - it is only relevant in the context of a specific intervention, program or project and as such can only be measured within a model of that intervention. For example, the implementation of a BRI road project in PNG and Solomon Islands. Additionally, improving absorptive capacity requires not only strengthening the implementation capacity of recipients but also enhancing the delivery capacity of donors and refining the design or intent of the intervention itself. This approach enables the testing of whether a given intervention or project aligns with the social, political, economic, and technical realities on the ground, ultimately answering the question: Can this BRI road project succeed in PNG and Solomon Islands? The MAC framework should be viewed as an additional module to standard tools for assessment, planning, monitoring, and evaluation within the government statecraft of both countries and the rest of SWP.

The National governments evaluate all types of development financing, including Chinese assistance, through their respective Department of Works, Infrastructure and Transport, and Planning and Monitoring. These two government agencies are responsible for assessing the effectiveness of Chinese development financing and its alignment with the recipient countries' development objectives and priorities. The framework scrutinizes project implementation, ensuring compliance with local regulations and quality standards, timely delivery, capacity-building efforts, and

[41] Guillaumont and Guillaumont Jeanneney, '13 "Big Push" versus Absorptive Capacity', 2.
[42] 'Spotlight', 1.
[43] Lamb, 'Measuring Absorptive Capacity (MAC)', 1.

technology transfer. It also evaluates the economic, social, and security impact on Pacific Island countries.[44] Evaluating development financing impact is a complex process that requires comprehensive data collection, analysis, monitoring, evaluation and reporting. This systematic assessment allows for informed decision-making and policy formulation, ensuring the effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of Chinese BRI development financing to avoid debt trap diplomacy. A detailed assessment of absorptive capacity under the BRI project will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively using a case study on PNG and Solomon Islands to determine the hypothesis of debt-trap diplomacy.

Despite the disagreements between researchers on the issue of BRI's debt-trap diplomacy compounded by the lack of absorptive capacity by recipient countries. Based on Clarke et al analysis, the Chinese BRI investment in the SWP region is focused on addressing challenges such as inadequate infrastructure and human resources. The BRI is expected to alleviate some of these challenges by enhancing regional connectivity and stimulating economic growth.[45] The initiative aims to optimize resource allocation and trade, promote regional economic integration, and achieve synchronized economic and social development. Through foreign direct investments (FDI), tourism, international capacity cooperation, and joint development of third-world markets, the BRI has delivered tangible benefits to the global community. China's objective with the BRI is to reinforce its regional dominance by fostering extensive economic integration. Ultimately, China aims to establish a regional production chain where it will lead in advanced manufacturing and innovation and set the standards for the SWP region.[46]

China's foreign aid is distinctive for several reasons when compared to other countries. A significant proportion of China's aid comprises non-concessional state loans and export credits, which are frequently employed to finance development projects in less developed nations. In 1964, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai established eight principles that continue to guide China's foreign aid policy. One of these principles stresses the importance of mutual respect and equality in aid provision, stating that aid should not be employed as a tool for interfering in the internal affairs of the recipient countries. However, empirical research suggests that China often attaches its political and economic interests to its foreign aid. For example, China tends to channel more aid towards its trade partners. China is renowned for its non-interference policy, which implies that it does not demand political or economic reforms in exchange for its aid.[47] Many observers believe that Chinese assistance is swift, responsive to the preferences of local political leaders, and has fewer conditions attached than aid from other nations. A senior Pacific bureaucrat once remarked, "We appreciate China because they bring us red flags rather than red tape.[48]

[44] Dornan and Brant, '<span Style="font-Variant', 2.
[45] Clarke, Sussex, and Bisley, *The Belt and Road Initiative and the Future of Regional Order in the Indo-Pacific*, 8.
[46] Feng and Liang, *Belt and Road Initiative*, 6.
[47] Isaksson and Kotsadam, 'Chinese Aid to Africa', 1.
[48] 'Belt and Road and Debt Diplomacy in the Pacific | Lowy Institute', 4.

Chapter Three

The aim of this chapter is to conduct a case study of the BRI project implementation process to verify the absorptive capacity of PNG. This is an extensive follow-up to the first two chapters, delving into the obstacles that PNG faces and conducting a thorough evaluation of its ability to absorb BRI development financing. Throughout the project cycle, which consists of five stages - project identification, feasibility studies, appraisal and approval, detailed design, civil works, and project completion reports - we will thoroughly scrutinize the implementation of Chinese projects in order to assess PNG's absorptive capacity and its capacity to carry out BRI projects.

Papua New Guinea Case Study on BRI Implications

Papua New Guinea (PNG) was the first country to join China's BRI infrastructure development program in 2013 and currently remains the largest beneficiary within the SWP.[49] However, there is uncertainty surrounding PNG's ability to avoid falling into the debt trap diplomacy despite facing a lack of absorptive capacity issues for over a decade. To delve into this matter further, a case study was conducted on BRI project execution in PNG, analyzing the stages of project execution from conceptual planning to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. By evaluating both China's aid's development impact and the recipient state's capacity to sustain loans, the study sheds light on the challenges that BRI project execution poses to all SWP countries.

The case study's objective is to examine the impact of BRI projects on PNG's economy and politics, including their costs and contribution to infrastructure. By analyzing the government framework's absorptive capacity, we can determine whether it is capable of effectively implementing BRI projects. If not, we will provide recommendations to improve its capacity. This research is essential because it addresses the issue of sustainability in BRI project loans, which can lead to debt trap diplomacy. Despite PNG's limited absorptive capacity, the country has managed to avoid defaulting on these loans for the past decade.

Furthermore, the bilateral trade between the two nations has increased from US$3.21 billion in 2020 to US$4.02 billion in 2021.[50] In 2018, China and PNG upgraded their relationship to a "comprehensive strategic partnership," which is one of the highest categories of bilateral relations in China's diplomatic terminology.[51] All ten Pacific Island Countries that maintain diplomatic relations with China have signed Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) for Belt and Road cooperation, with Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Vanuatu having signed Belt and Road cooperation plans.[52]

In recent times, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has posed a challenge for the United States and its partners who aim to curb China's sway and dominance over resources in the South West Pacific (SWP). Given the ongoing strategic competition between China and the US, both the US and Australia have stepped up their efforts

[49] 'Papua New Guinea', 15 June 2023, 1.
[50] Briefing, 'A Potential China-Papua New Guinea Free Trade Agreement', 1.
[51] 'Papua New Guinea', 15 June 2023, 1.
[52] 'Fact Sheet: Cooperation Between China and Pacific Island Countries', 1.

to bolster infrastructure in the SWP. As the security of Australia is closely linked to the security of the SWP, Australia must safeguard and nurture the region to prevent China from filling the gaps.

BRI Projects

From 2013 to 2021, PNG accounted for nearly a quarter of all SWP BRI projects with a total of eight among others below four, as depicted in Figure 2. At first, the projects were centred on airport infrastructure and low-carbon power generation infrastructure. However, in 2017, multiple trade agreements were established, which resulted in the expansion of BRI projects. These projects encompassed investments in various sectors, like extractive industries, bridges, energy transmission infrastructure, and ports. Furthermore, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Health Silk Road projects were inked with eight Pacific Island nations.[53]

The majority of the 15 Chinese investments in PNG that exceeded $US100 million were focused on three sectors. These sectors were transport, real estate, and metals, with four, three, and two projects respectively. The sectors that received the most Chinese investment were metals, energy, and real estate, with a combined total of $US3.88 billion. Metals received the largest investment, with $US930 million, followed by energy with $US880 million, and real estate with $US730 million. In total, these three sectors accounted for 65% of the recorded Chinese investment in PNG.[54] These foreign direct investments stimulate economic activity and generate revenue to sustain BRI loans as such the issue of debt trap diplomacy cannot be justified. It was created to discredit the excellent initiative of China to assist developing countries.

The participation of PNG in China's BRI program has caught the attention of Western nations. The program involves a considerable amount of Chinese investment in diverse projects throughout the country. There is a competition for influence in the region between China and the US, with Western countries investing more to offset Chinese-funded initiatives.[55] Nevertheless, despite the strategic rivalry between the two sides, PNG is experiencing the advantages of increased attention and investment.

Challenges - Lack of Absorptive Capacity

It is not proven that PNG is incapable of implementing BRI projects due to a lack of absorptive capacity. PNG has been actively engaged in BRI since 2013 and has established Belt and Road cooperation MOUs with all 10 Pacific Island nations that have diplomatic relations with China.

The primary obstacle is not the absence of the ability to take in new technical information, but rather the dangers of becoming ensnared in debt trap diplomacy, corruption, substandard work, and the involvement of Chinese contractors. Other critiques or concerns, mostly centred on absorptive capacity, aim to demonstrate

[53] 'APRSA 2023 | Chapter 4', 14.
[54] 'Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)', 9.
[55] 'Disconnected', 1.

why additional aid would likely be pointless, squandered, or even harmful, and therefore not result in a significant push forward or an eventual escape from poverty. However, it is important to note that absorptive capacity can only be attained by successfully implementing a project, as has been observed in PNG.

It's worth noting that the BRI has potential benefits, but there are also worries about debt sustainability, environmental impact, and geopolitical implications. Countries must manage their involvement in the BRI carefully and ensure that projects are economically viable, socially inclusive, and environmentally sustainable.[56] Some experts fear that the BRI could create instability in PNG and the Pacific. On the other hand, some proposed BRI projects have been linked to corruption.[57] The BRI also includes technology, information, and communication projects that could raise concerns about security from nations like Australia, as was seen with the sale of PNG Digicel to Telstra.[58] However, it is important to note that BRI projects have stimulated macroeconomic activities which resulted in increased bilateral trade from US$3.21 billion in 2020 to US$4.02 billion in 2021.[59]

Project Cycle Framework to Test Lack of Absorptive Capacity

Usually, the project cycle encompasses five stages, namely project identification, feasibility studies, appraisal and approval, detailed design, civil works, and project completion. During the execution of Chinese projects, a thorough evaluation of PNG's absorptive capacity was conducted in all these stages to determine if it is capable of carrying out BRI projects.

Inception and Design

According to Financial Instruction Part 11, Division 1, the primary goal of the PNG Government procurement system is to acquire public goods and services through ethical and transparent processes while ensuring that value for money is achieved and promoting fair competition. The National Procurement Commission manages the tender process, but contracts exceeding PGK10 million require endorsement and formalization by the National Executive Council (NEC) and the Governor General before implementation.[60] As a result, all projects, including those involving BRI, must follow this standard government procurement system. While allegations of corruption by politicians have been made regarding contractor selection, there is no concrete evidence to support these claims. Chinese contractors are often awarded BRI-sponsored projects due to their ability to deliver large-scale projects on time and within budget.

The issue in PNG lies not in absorptive capacity but in a lack of integrity, transparency, and accountability within government systems. The Department of Works (DoW) is responsible for infrastructure implementation throughout the country, serving as the custodian and sole authority for state infrastructure designs

[56] 'China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative', 7.
[57] 'Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)', 12.
[58] 'Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)', 14.
[59] Briefing, 'A Potential China-Papua New Guinea Free Trade Agreement', 1.
[60] Papua New Guinea Financial Instruction Part 11, Division 1

and approvals. By providing thorough project specifications and designs with professional cost estimates, the DoW can minimize corruption and ensure value-for-money outcomes. Both Chinese consultants and the DoW can generate designs for BRI projects, but they must be approved by the Secretary of the DoW and remain consistent throughout implementation, quality control, monitoring, and evaluation.

Construction and Implementation

For projects valued at PGK10 million or more, the Governor General selects the bidder recommended by the National Executive Council (NEC), a Chinese company handling BRI projects. This company brings in resources like machinery, equipment, and construction materials, along with a workforce that is deployed to the project site to begin construction by the contract terms. Due to the lower cost of bulk procurement, the Chinese company imports all resources, including workers, from China, citing a lack of absorptive capacity. However, the language barrier between the Chinese workforce and the PNG workforce makes communication difficult. There has been much debate about the limited local content and workforce in BRI projects, but no action has been taken by the government. Chinese companies do subcontract to local companies and hire casual labourers from PNG, but this does not do much to develop the capacity of the PNG workforce, mainly due to the language barrier.

There are two main reasons why construction and implementation projects may suffer from poor-quality work and incomplete jobs. The first reason is when funds that were meant for the project get redirected to other unplanned activities, which can result in a decrease in quality or even a complete stop to the project. The second reason is due to the responsibility of the DOW in managing quality control and ensuring that the design is accurately translated into the outcome. Civil and building engineers are assigned to the project, and they must ensure that the design specifications are met before signing off on a satisfactory works completion report for payment. Therefore, the issue at hand is not a lack of absorptive capacity, but rather a matter of accountability, transparency, and integrity from all stakeholders involved.

Monitoring and Evaluation

PNG possesses the ability to effectively oversee and assess infrastructure developments, including those related to BRI projects. The Department of National Planning and Monitoring (NPM) plays a crucial role in ensuring that BRI projects align with the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP). Additionally, the NPM is responsible for monitoring and reporting on the progress of these projects. The Department of Works (DoW) oversees the construction process, ensuring quality control, and guides contractors to meet the design specifications and cost estimates. Meanwhile, the NPM evaluates and monitors project progress, deliberating on the government's key performance indicators (KPIs) to assess the success of the BRI projects.

With the implementation of MTDP, the government has taken steps to avoid past issues of political favouritism and financial waste. The focus is now on investing intentionally in areas that will drive national growth and prosperity. The goal of MTDP

IV is to increase GDP by PGK164 billion by 2030.[61] To ensure success, NPM has a significant responsibility to oversee all strategic projects funded by development funds, assess progress, and provide reports on outcomes. In general, PNG has a strong foundation for delivering projects effectively and efficiently. However, individuals involved must demonstrate diligence and prudence to ensure accountability and excellence in the delivery of state infrastructure.

What needs to change / What can be done differently

Over time, the government of PNG has pursued some projects solely for political reasons without generating sufficient economic returns to service the loans obtained from various sources such as China, the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. This has resulted in a substantial debt of $US 15.3 billion, which has put pressure on the government to repay the loans and, in turn, affected the effectiveness of service delivery. It is vital for the government to carefully choose projects that can stimulate economic growth and generate revenue to repay loans. PNG has abundant resources and a significant economic base to service the loans, but the government systems require more transparency, integrity, and accountability.



Image: Papua New Guinea Vision 2050 - Department of Education

Great news! PNG has adopted a National Policy, known as "Vision 2050", which aligns with the eight Goals and Principles outlined in the National Constitution. This policy aims to create a healthy, happy and prosperous nation by 2050. By the parliamentary election cycle, the newly elected government releases a Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) every five years, which is in line with Vision 2050. This framework includes KPIs for all government department heads and statutory bodies to follow when implementing public expenditures. The policy document also guides the country's investments, including projects funded under BRI aid assistance, concessional loans, and commercial loans. Monitoring and evaluating the success and failure of these projects is done using the MTDP. This is an exciting new approach to drive socio-economic growth, leading to a more prosperous future for PNG.

[61] Papua New Guinea Government Medium Term Development Plan IV 2023-2027

Chapter Four

The objective of this chapter is to conduct a comprehensive case study on the Solomon Islands and its ability to implement BRI projects. The chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the country's BRI history, while also highlighting the unique challenges posed by the ongoing strategic competition between China and the US. With the Solomon Islands currently in the spotlight following a security agreement with China, there is heightened scrutiny of their capacity to implement BRI projects while avoiding a potentially unsustainable increase in debt levels amidst the recent surge in development financing from China.

Solomon Islands Case Study on BRI Implications

In this section, we will delve into the complex relationship between China and the Solomon Islands. Specifically, we will explore the diplomatic changes, infrastructure improvements, and the impact of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) on politics, the economy, and security. In light of the past decade's limited capacity for implementation, we conducted a case study on the execution of BRI projects in the Solomon Islands. Our study analyses how the government's lack of absorptive capacity leads to debt trap diplomacy, examining each stage of project execution from ideation to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

The relationship between China and the Solomon Islands is multifaceted, involving the BRI as well as a recent security pact. In 2019, the Solomon Islands shifted its diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China, which subsequently increased its influence in the region. In April 2022, the two countries signed a bilateral security agreement that covers areas such as humanitarian aid, disaster relief, and efforts to maintain social stability.[62] This move is likely to cause concern among the Solomon Islands' traditional partners, including Australia, New Zealand, and the United States.[63]

Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare believes that infrastructure development is a crucial step for the government to promote progress with full dedication. On September 21, 2019, China and the Solomon Islands signed a joint communique, and China currently stands as the largest trading partner and export market for the Solomon Islands, accounting for 46% of all trade.[64] Investments in the BRI by China have surpassed construction in 2022, rising to 48% compared to 29% in 2021, indicating that infrastructure development has led to increased economic activity and growth.[65]

BRI Projects

The government views infrastructure development as a crucial step in driving

[62] jkg66, 'China-Solomon Islands Security Agreement and Competition for Influence in Oceania', 2.
[63] Press, 'Solomon Islands Signs Policing Pact with China', 1.
[64] 'The Risks of China's Ambitions in the South Pacific', 3.
[65] WANG, 'China Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Investment Report 2022 – Green Finance & Development Center', 2.

progress, and the BRI is a significant initiative in achieving this goal. The Solomon Islands have joined with China in signing BRI cooperation MOUs. To promote inclusive economic prosperity in the SWP, China is financing multiple infrastructure projects in the Solomon Islands. Chinese aid pledges to the Solomon Islands are particularly noteworthy. Examples of ongoing China-funded projects include the National University dormitory complex ($US21.4 million), a comprehensive Medical Centre at the National Referral Hospital, 160 mobile phone towers ($US66 million), and a $US53 million national sports stadium.[66]

The government of the Solomon Islands has stated that the reconstruction of the port is part of a larger project worth $US170 million, funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which aims to upgrade roads and wharves. In 2022, the road component of this project was awarded to China Civil Engineering Construction Company (CCECC).[67] As part of this project, the old Honiara International Port will be rehabilitated, and the Honiara domestic port and two provincial ports will be constructed. Chinese state-owned enterprises, such as CCECC, China Railway Construction Company (CRCC), and China Harbor Engineering Company (CHEC), have been responsible for the construction of various infrastructure projects, including roads and wharves. These foreign direct investments stimulate economic activity and generate revenue to sustain BRI loans as such the issue of debt trap diplomacy cannot be justified. It was created to discredit the excellent initiative of China to assist developing countries.

While some critics contend that Chinese state-owned enterprises' involvement may not be advantageous for recipient countries in terms of capability development and knowledge transfer, I totally disagree. Many smaller Pacific Island nations may not possess the capacity to undertake large-scale projects independently, but they can still contribute significantly as sub-contractors. Additionally, politicians often award contracts to acquaintances who may have capacity issues and are unlikely to produce the desired results. By participating as sub-contractors, local contractors can progressively improve their capabilities.

Challenges - Lack of Absorptive Capacity

Smaller economies, such as the Solomon Islands, could not historically attract investment from traditional partners, resulting in limited infrastructure, economic activity, and bilateral trade. However, China is defying these odds by undertaking large-scale infrastructure projects to stimulate socio-economic growth, promote tourism, and facilitate regional trade. These efforts also address the lack of absorptive capacity by working with local sub-contractors under Chinese state-owned enterprises. It is crucial to prioritize economically viable projects that generate revenue and avoid politically motivated projects that may result in wasteful spending.

The success of BRI is contingent upon managing several challenges, such as navigating national elections, addressing corruption, and resolving complex land rights issues that could jeopardize the project's viability. While national elections are a necessary part of the democratic process, once a government contract is sealed,

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66 ibid, 2

67 ‘China Firm Wins Solomon Islands Port Project as Australia Watches on | Reuters’, 3.

it cannot be revoked without incurring the full contract value as a penalty. Corruption can arise during the awarding of major contracts by the National Executive Council (NEC) to individuals with limited capacity who have personal connections. However, the BRI project tender process is distinct, as the contractor is predetermined as part of the aid or soft loan package. Additionally, the complexities surrounding land tenure can be managed effectively. The Solomon Islands government and China have successfully addressed land issues through compulsory state acquisition programs. Given the potential environmental and social risks associated with any significant infrastructure project, the government has established the "Safeguards Procedure Manual" (SPM) to guide the Ministry of Infrastructure Development in managing these impacts and risks.

China may have arrived late to the lending and development finance game, typically dominated by advanced economies, but it has managed to invest billions of dollars in just the past five years. [68] However, the expansion of the BRI in the Pacific has sparked geopolitical rivalries and elicited mixed reactions from Pacific communities. It is important to note that there are concerns about China's growing influence in the Pacific region, particularly in the Solomon Islands, and the potential security implications of China's involvement in various projects in the area. This presents a significant challenge for both the US and Australia.

Project Cycle Framework to Test Lack of Absorptive Capacity

In general, a project cycle encompasses five distinct stages: project identification, feasibility studies, appraisal and approval, detailed design, civil works, and project completion. During each of these stages, a comprehensive assessment of the Solomon Islands' absorptive capacity was conducted to evaluate its ability to execute BRI projects effectively.

Inception and Design

The Solomon Islands National Transport Plan (NTP) is implemented by the Ministry of Infrastructure Development (MID) to ensure effective transport infrastructure and services, supporting economic growth and social development.[69] The NTP prioritizes the rehabilitation and maintenance of existing transport infrastructure while providing new facilities that are strategically important. The 20-year strategic outlook for the transport sector, known as NTP 2011–2030, serves as the basis for prioritising funding of projects and obtaining Cabinet endorsement. As a result, any BRI proposals are evaluated based on predetermined priorities within the government's transport facilities development strategy. This approach avoids politically motivated projects that fail to generate economic returns to sustain the loans.

The project cycle typically consists of five stages, which include project identification, feasibility studies, appraisal and approval, detailed design, civil works, and project completion. The infrastructure development plan is used to identify potential major projects, which are then subject to feasibility studies to determine their viability, initial

[68] 'Five Challenges for the Belt and Road', 3.
[69] Solomon Islands Government National Transport Plan 2011-2030

design, potential negative impacts, as well as benefits. The social and environmental studies and mitigation plans are disclosed to the project-affected people and the general public for mandatory feedback during the appraisal and approval stage. Once all stakeholders agree, qualified engineers initiate the detailed engineering designs. Proven by ongoing projects, the Solomon Islands government possesses the absorptive capacity and a well-established process for the inception and design phase when implementing BRI projects. [70]

Construction and Implementation

The implementation process for Solomon Island government infrastructure development projects is outlined in the "Safeguards Procedures Manual." To start, new contractors undergo training to ensure they understand all requirements of the machine-based maintenance contract (MBMC) Guideline, including the importance of the construction environment management plan (CEMP). Once completed, the project is approved by the central project implementation unit (CPIU) Safeguards Team, and construction can commence. This management practice is crucial in ensuring that construction design specifications are followed with minimal environmental impact.

In accordance with the contract terms, the Contractor is required to promptly establish a Community Advisory Committee (CAC) for projects lasting six months or more. The Chinese Contractor holds the authority to hire or subcontract community members and must inform the Site Supervisor/Regional Manager of any such arrangements. It's important to note that there are pros and cons associated with Chinese contractors importing their own workforce and materials from China. While the timely delivery of infrastructure is appreciated, it can have a negative impact on local businesses and the economy due to the lack of local content. Additionally, performance audits and outcome evaluations will be conducted upon completion of civil works. Ultimately, the objective of the project is to enhance the capabilities of Solomon Islanders through subcontracting with Chinese contractors.

Monitoring and Evaluation

A monitoring and evaluation process has been put in place by the government to ensure that national projects are of high quality, cost-effective, and beneficial for the people. Unfortunately, this process has been partially non-functional due to a lack of funding and poor management. However, the process has been revived with the help of Chinese experts in project management and a loan from the Asian Development Bank (ADB). This has resulted in the creation of a "Safeguards Procedures Manual," which serves as a guide for monthly reports. These reports include a checklist based on the guidelines of machine-based maintenance contracts (MBMC), as well as information on routine monitoring of safety, health, and the environment. If any issues arise, they are reported to the Safeguards Officer for immediate action. Furthermore, a community advisory committee (CAC) oversees contractors on quality issues and can report any incidents to the Safeguards Team.

The central project implementation unit (CPIU) and the contractor collaborate to

[70] Solomon Islands Ministry of Infrastructure, Safeguards Procedures Manual 2013

ensure quality control and monitoring, while the Safeguards Environmental officer conducts compliance audits every two months to verify the Chinese Contractor's adherence to the construction environmental management plan (CEMP). The quality progress report, which includes the findings of these audits, is prepared by the CPIU and submitted to the Ministry of Infrastructure Development and development partners. The project implementation has successfully tackled the issue of absorptive capacity in monitoring and evaluation, thanks to China's BRI, which is effectively addressing this challenge.

What needs to change / What can be done differently

In 2019, the Solomon Islands altered their diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China, which subsequently led to an increase in Chinese influence in the area. As per Prime Minister Sogavare, China's aid and support have brought about positive developments in infrastructure, roads, wharves, telecommunications, power, and energy in the Solomon Islands. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has proven to have several economic benefits, unlocking growth through enhanced trade and transportation in the SWP. These are the remarkable changes in bilateral relations with China over the past five years while still maintaining relationships with longstanding partners.



Image: Department of Defence

The Solomon Islands government has taken a decisive step forward towards improving the living standards of its citizens. Through a comprehensive infrastructure transformation and with the support of China, as evidenced by the BRI concept, the country aims to stimulate economic development. The National Transport Plan 2011-2030 provides a strategic roadmap for the transport sector over the next 20 years, with China's willingness to finance it under BRI. This approach will minimize corrupt practices and ensure investments are directed towards productive projects rather than political ones.

The security of the US and Australia in the region is of great importance due to the

ongoing strategic competition with China. However, the Solomon Islands and the rest of the SWP have a paramount national interest in infrastructure and socioeconomic development. Despite criticism from Western countries, China has been providing a solution that aligns with the principles laid out by Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai in 1964. These principles emphasize the importance of equality and mutual benefit in providing aid, which should not be used to interfere in the internal affairs of recipient countries. In light of this, the US and Australia need to learn from China and provide financial aid and assistance that focuses on developing infrastructure and stimulating economic growth in SWP countries. This will enable SWP countries to manage their social services more effectively and achieve their development goals.

Chapter Five

The intention of this chapter is to present the results of the case studies conducted in PNG and the Solomon Islands. The focus will be on addressing the thesis question of debt-trap diplomacy, with an emphasis on absorptive capacity and the impact of BRI on these two countries. Towards the end, we'll also delve into the strategic implications of BRI, considering the existing strategic competition between China and the US.

Synthesis of findings

The findings from the two case studies of PNG and Solomon Islands, by comparison, revealed that the issue of lack of absorptive capacity in implementing BRI projects contributes to increased debt trap diplomacy is not true. Both countries do have limited capacity but managed to successfully implement BRI projects over many years. In fact, BRI projects are transforming both countries' infrastructure subsequently increasing bilateral trade with social services like health and education but more importantly stimulating economic growth. The case study is limited to PNG and Solomon Islands but the positive effects of China's BRI-funded projects are experienced throughout the ten SWP countries affiliated to BRI. This is evident with China's bilateral trade with the SWP growing at an annual rate of 11.48%, from US$4.512 billion in 2012 to US$8.66 billion in 2018.[71] Therefore, the thesis question of to what extent BRI-funded projects increase debt level in the SWP and the hypothesis put forth that it resulted in debt-trap diplomacy is proven wrong.

The lack of absorptive capacity refers to the total amount of foreign capital plus technical assistance that a developing country can use productively among the recipient states. Hence, absorptive capacity can only be achieved through projects or its modalities which is the case with BRI-funded projects in the SWP countries. Moreover, China's aid is tailored to meet the national interests which are infrastructure and socioeconomic development of SWP countries. China acknowledges the challenges of limited absorptive capacity and is actively supporting the development of human resources in the region. The BRI-funded projects are expected to bring long-awaited changes and transform the economies of SWP countries.

Implications of BRI for PNG and Solomon Islands

The strategic competition between China and the US in the Indo-Pacific region has significant implications for nation-state actors like PNG and the Solomon Islands. China's investment through BRI in PNG and the Solomon Islands builds the necessary infrastructure to support and stimulate economic growth. The infrastructures like roads, bridges, ports, and other transportation facilities will help connect people and goods to markets. It can also help improve living standards by providing access to basic services such as clean water, sanitation, and electricity. which will have a positive impact on health, education, and other aspects of life. Improved infrastructure helps facilitate trade by making it easier and cheaper to

[71] Ye et al., 'The Relationship between China-South Pacific Island Countries Tourism and Trade in the Context of the Belt and Road Initiative', 74.

transport goods. Subsequently, increases exports and generates more revenue to stimulate economic prosperity. It is evident that China currently stands as the largest trading partner and export market for the Solomon Islands, accounting for 46% of all trade.[72] While PNG increased bilateral trade with China from US$3.21 billion in 2020 to US$4.02 billion in 2021.[73] Also, the Chinese foreign direct investment in metals, energy and real estate in PNG increased to $US3.88 billion.[74] However, PNG and Solomon Islands need to be cautious about their dealings with both China and the US and strive to protect their sovereignty and national interests. PNG and Solomon Islands need to develop a balanced foreign policy that takes into account the interests of all major players in the Indo-Pacific region.

Strategic Level Implications of BRI for the region

China's Belt and Road Initiative poses a challenge to traditional donor partners in the delivery of infrastructure projects that can stimulate macroeconomic activity, bilateral trade, tourism, and social services. As a result, the issue of Chinese BRI has led to concerns about debt-trap diplomacy and the lack of absorptive capacity of recipient states. However, empirical evidence suggests that these concerns are baseless propaganda from Western countries seeking to discredit China's soft power diplomacy.[75] In reality, the issue is the strategic competition between the US and China for influence and control of resources in the Indo-Pacific. China's significant investments in the region are viewed as a threat to US global dominance and the international rules-based order. Consequently, the US has introduced countermeasures like QUAD, AUKUS, and the Blue Pacific initiative. Moreover, the recent security agreement between PNG and the US which aims to counter China's security agreement with the Solomon Islands, may potentially lead to a repeat of the Pacific conflict in World War II.

Infrastructure and socioeconomic development are the main focus of PNG and Solomon Islands' national interests. Conversely, the developed Western countries and China prioritize security as their primary national interest, followed by economic sustainability. This creates a conflicting interest among all stakeholders, which China is working to address in order to achieve its security goals and aspirations. The Security Agreement between the Solomon Islands and China, along with other projects like the installation of 160 mobile phone towers, is causing concern for the US and Australia. Australia's influence prevented Huawei from participating in telecommunication services in Australia and PNG. As a result, the Solomon Islands' telecommunication project becomes crucial for China strategically, it is economically beneficial, but raises security concerns for the US and Australia. Developing countries' national interest becomes insignificant when dealing with the strategic interests of global superpowers.

[72] 'The Risks of China's Ambitions in the South Pacific', 3.
[73] Briefing, 'A Potential China-Papua New Guinea Free Trade Agreement', 1.
[74] 'Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)', 9.
[75] Moses, Springer, and Gallagher, 'Demystifying Chinese Overseas Lending and Development Finance', 2.

Offer Recommendations to Other Development Partners

Australia has been reported to be the largest provider of development assistance in the region with a total of US$6.5 billion, which is higher than China's US$ 4.5 billion, according to the Development Policy Blog.[76] But the question is how do you measure the tangible outcomes on the ground? The United States has invested well over US$1.9 billion along with New Zealand's US$1.3 billion and Japan's US$1.8 billion financing, as shown in Figure 3.[77] It is highly recommended that recipient countries' national interests, such as infrastructure and socio-economic development agendas for mass inclusive benefit, guide all expenditures. The focus on the social service sector should be shifted towards infrastructure development to stimulate economic growth, as evidenced by China's Belt and Road Initiative. The recipient countries must provide a mandatory government policy document and action plan, with a framework that outlines key performance indicators for national projects.

[76] https://www.abc.net.au/news/stephen-dziedzic/166934, 'Which Country Gives the Most Aid to Pacific Island Nations?', 1.
[77] 'IF11208.Pdf', 1.

Conclusion

Importance of this thesis paper

Research and findings regarding China's Belt and Road Initiative in the Southwest Pacific are of utmost importance due to the significant impact it will have on the region, particularly given the ongoing strategic competition between China and the United States and its allies. It is crucial to recognize the differences in national interests between developed nations and developing states, as the latter prioritizes economic development and prosperity over security interests. This is the primary reason why ten SWP countries have chosen to participate in the BRI, as it offers a pathway towards poverty alleviation, infrastructure development, and economic growth.

Answer to the Research Question

After conducting qualitative and quantitative analyses of various primary and secondary sources, the results of two case studies on PNG and Solomon Islands have indicated that the notion of a lack of absorptive capacity hindering the implementation of BRI projects leading to debt trap diplomacy is unfounded. While both countries do face capacity limitations, they have managed to effectively execute BRI projects over an extended period of time. In reality, these projects are actively addressing the capacity issues and revolutionizing the infrastructure of both nations. This, in turn, is fostering greater bilateral trade, and foreign direct investment, and promoting economic growth.

Economic Implications of BRI

In brief, the Belt and Road Initiative has made a significant impact on the Southwest Pacific with an investment of US$4.5 billion. The resulting infrastructure improvements, including roads, bridges, ports, wharves, and transportation facilities, will help connect communities and goods to markets and essential services like clean water, sanitation, and electricity. This will have a positive impact on health, education, and overall quality of life, as well as make trade more accessible and inexpensive.

Moreover, the BRI has bolstered China's influence in the region, with bilateral trade volume increasing from US$4.512 billion in 2012 to US$8.66 billion in 2018, an annual growth rate of 11.48%. The number of tourists from China also increased from 55,000 in 2012 to 224,900 in 2018, with an average annual growth rate of 14.64%. By the end of 2021, China's foreign direct investment in the SWP had reached $US2.72 billion. Most importantly, the BRI aligns with the national interests of SWP Island countries for infrastructure and socio-economic development and marks a long-awaited shift toward much-needed change.

Strategic Implications of BRI

China's Belt and Road Initiative has had a significant impact on the SWP, posing a challenge to the US and the international rules-based order in the region. As the US and China compete for influence and control of resources in the Indo-Pacific, China's

substantial investments are viewed as a threat to US global dominance and stability. To counter this, the US has implemented measures such as QUAD, AUKUS, and the Blue Pacific initiative. The recent security agreement between PNG and the US aims to address China's security agreement with the Solomon Islands, which could potentially lead to a repeat of the Pacific conflict of World War II.

Policy Recommendations

While financial assistance can be beneficial, it is important that it meets specific criteria to best serve the needs of the people in the South West Pacific. This includes a mandatory government policy document and action plan, with a framework that outlines key performance indicators for national projects. These policy documents also guide a country's national interest in investments, including those funded through BRI concessional and commercial loans.

For example, Papua New Guinea's Medium-Term Development Plan 2023-2027 is a strategic guide for all investments and infrastructure development, with monthly reports provided to the Chief Secretary by department heads. Similarly, the Solomon Islands National Transport Plan 2011-2030 serves as a basis for prioritizing funding and obtaining Cabinet endorsement. By ensuring accountability, integrity, and prudent management practices, these policies can help reduce corruption and minimize unproductive political projects, while avoiding debt-trap diplomacy.

It is crucial that development project financiers such as China, the US, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan make these policy documents mandatory for recipient countries. This will encourage good governance and promote secure, prosperous, and harmonious relationships among our Southwest Pacific neighbours in the Indo-Pacific region.

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Image: Department of Defence

Is there a need for national institute for defence and security education in the Pacific Island Countries? A Case for Fiji

Author

Colonel Aseri Nabete Rokoura, Fiji

Colonel Rokoura is a career officer in the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF). Currently serving as the Director of Force Development and Strategic Engagement at the RFMF Strategic Headquarters in Suva, Fiji. Colonel Rokoura is a graduate of the 2018 Australia Command Staff College with Master's degree in Military and Defence Studies and Australian War College Class of 2024 holding a Master's degree in National Security and Strategy (Leading Capability Development and Policy). His expertise spans force development and modernisation, operational leadership, multinational peacekeeping, civil military cooperation and professional leadership development.

Summary

This paper investigates the need for a defence and security education institution in Pacific Island Countries, with Fiji as a case study. Fiji's security strategy is influenced by its involvement in regional diplomacy, peacekeeping, and challenges such as political instability, transnational crime, and climate change, as well as the importance of its geographical location. The research emphasises Fiji's shift from reliance on foreign education for military and civil servants' professional development to advocating the establishment of a domestic institution that is grounded on national experiences that could be conceptualised into local and traditional perspective and integrated with Western concepts. This could potentially provide future leaders with education in governance, defence, cyber-security, diplomacy and most importantly, the application of national best practices in the defence and security spectrum.

This institution could enhance Fiji's approach from reactive to proactive education and research for both its military and civilian industry experts. It would facilitate regional cooperation education on issues such as resource depletion and climate change by promoting collaboration among government, commercial sectors, and civil society. It would develop a curriculum that addresses specific security challenges and training that is relevant and practical in the Fiji and regional context. The institution has the potential to improve Fiji's leadership in regional security by integrating local knowledge with global security frameworks. The institution is essential for Fiji's strategic autonomy and would establish the country as a leader in addressing the security challenges of the 21st century in the Pacific.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Methodology

The evolving and complex security environment in the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) demands numerous national strategies from these oceanic states with existing agencies to navigate these current and future challenges. One of these approaches that this paper suggests is through defence and security education that provides the cognitive pathways that potentially support national security strategies by enhancing capacity, promoting whole of government approach, and harnessing a security culture across all sectors. Pacific countries, with defence establishments like Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and Tonga have traditionally relied on overseas institutions for the professional education for defence and civil servants. These nations face growing traditional and non-traditional security challenges such as geopolitical conflicts, climate change impacts, transnational crime, and cyber threats.[1] Therefore, the need to establish national frameworks for defence and security education, research, and policy formulation in the local context is critical. It also includes harnessing strategic frameworks that could regulate a whole–of–government approach toward these challenges.

This thesis examines the viability and need of setting up the defence and security education in the PICs, using Fiji as a case study. Fiji's distinctive geopolitical location, diplomatic relations, history of military coups and political instabilities, and contributions to global peacekeeping and other non-traditional threat like the impact of climate change underscore how significant it is as a focal point in developing a national framework for defence and security education. The thesis also analyses comparable social science-oriented methodologies in defence and security education, utilising examples from the experiences of Albania and Romania. Both these examples underscore the significance of integrating social science approaches in the development of defence and security systems that integrate local Western knowledge and promote citizen awareness. This research investigates how institutional, structural, and ideational factors that shape Fiji's national interests and further uses these elements to determine the higher education needs analysis for defence and security roles across all departments. According to Parson's casual logic theory, the rationales for strategic decisions are influenced by structural, institutional, ideational, and psychological factors.[2] Strategic decision also employs elements of national power, and this aligns with Morgenthau's national power theory for statecraft which includes geography, economy, diplomacy, military politics and demography.[3] The correlation between these two theorists is significant to frame Fiji strategic policies for defence and security. In addition, this research further explores the integration of government departments that have direct or indirect roles in defence and security and establishes an intellectual and practical security culture for Fiji.

For over four decades, Fijian Senior Officers have graduated from overseas staff

[1] 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent," 2022. https://forumsec.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/PIFS-2050-Strategy-Blue-Pacific-Continent-WEB-5Aug2022-1.pdf (1-21)
[2] Craig Parsons, How to Map Arguments in Political Science (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010).
[3] Hans J Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985).

and war colleges in partnership with prominent universities, particularly in Australia, New Zealand, the U.K, the U.S., India, Malaysia, and China. It also includes senior public servants who have graduated from higher institutions locally and abroad. Despite the valuable knowledge and practitioner experience gained from these esteemed international institutions, Fiji has yet to fully integrate or incorporate this expertise into its local academic framework. This gap has hindered the development of a national institute dedicated to defence and security education and research. Implementing such an institute could yield significant policy insights, facilitate the establishment of think tanks, and advance research consistent with Fiji's national security strategy.

Research Objectives

The aim of this research is to evaluate the need to set up a national defence and security institute in Fiji by firstly determining the structural, institutional, and ideational factors that impede the nation's interest in defence and security. It investigates the extent to which these factors affect Fiji's national interests, highlighting the need for a practical and localised defence and security education strategy. Moreover, this paper further seeks to determine the education needs analysis for defence and security roles with a focus on professional development, capacity building, and national empowerment through knowledge-based platforms. Furthermore, the research seeks to assess the local and international educational institutions towards the development of defence and security curricula that potentially could enhance Fiji's national capacity. The research further investigates the ways in which social science concepts can effectively influence security frameworks, improve Fiji's strategic capabilities, and adopt best practices by drawing comparisons with European and international models.

Research Question

The central questions focus on what structural, institutional, and ideational variables influence Fiji's national interests, and how do they underscore the requirement for a local institute for defence and security education, to strengthen national capabilities to address evolving strategic challenges. This inquiry potentially offers a comprehensive analysis of Fiji's national interest, emphasising the influence of structural, institutional, and ideational factors that may shape or compromise it. It also presents the concept of local cognitive development and empowerment as methods for capacity enhancement.

The secondary inquiry questions the function that such an institute would serve within the nation's overarching security framework, emphasising its potential contributions to education, research, and policy formulation in tackling these issues. Finally, the supporting question explores how such institute can contribute to the cultivation of a strategic security culture throughout the government by advocating for a comprehensive approach involving all sectors and further extends collaboration with strategic partners as well.

Research Methodology

This research employs a predominantly qualitative methodology, complemented by

quantitative analysis, to offer an in-depth understanding of Fiji's state obligations and strategic assistance to governmental institutions. The complexity and variety of the results highlight the interrelation of defence and security concepts, requiring a comprehensive yet targeted research approach. This study aims to substantiate the need for a local defence and security framework by analysing Fiji's national and regional strategic landscape via both qualitative and quantitative perspectives. The qualitative part establishes the research within recognised theoretical frameworks, particularly referencing Parson's causal logic theory and Morgenthau's national power theory that is also grounded on realist perspectives considering Fiji's case on the impact internal power struggle and military coups towards international relations. This method enables the research to contextualise Fiji's strategic environment and security dilemmas, establishing a solid basis for the planned defence and security institute. The literature evaluation includes contextual literature and theoretical frameworks pertinent to national power and strategic security studies. Furthermore, qualitative methods encompass the analysis of documents on essential government policies, official conceptions, and annual reports from relevant ministries and agencies. This method identifies repeating themes associated with governance, security, and policy development, facilitating the recognition of patterns and correlations within a comprehensive governmental strategy.

Quantitative Approach

This study integrates quantitative data analysis to assess the state's financial commitments to the defence and security sectors. Budgetary statistics about security allocations among government ministries central to its national economy were examined. The investigation further analyses the public funding for higher education institutions that demonstrates the government commitment towards professional and technical development for its people. This financial data was analysed to evaluate the state's dedication to enhancing capability within these institutions, emphasizing deficiencies in funding and strategy alignment with national security goals.

Limitations

A limitation of the research is the accessibility and breadth of secondary data about institutional collaboration, especially pertaining to higher education institutions in Fiji. The research indicated that the University of Fiji has commenced a comparable program as an Institute for Defence and Strategic Studies, which is under the Faculty of Law; however, there was inadequate source to indicate cooperation with the Fijian government in furthering this effort to enhance defence and public servant professional pathway. Future research should investigate how these institutions might formally cooperate with state agencies to address Fiji's changing security requirements.

Structure

Chapter one introduces the thesis conceptual framework and the research methodology, and chapter two provides a literature review on the topic. Chapter three examines Fiji strategic landscape and analyse how it impacts and influence national decision making central to defence and security perspectives. It seeks to lay the groundwork and provides a structural and institutional frame to determine the

role of defence and security education in sustaining, managing and advancing Fiji's national interests. Chapter four examine Fiji's security challenges as a broad problem narrative. By conceptualizing how the defence and security institute can serve as a cognitive platform for future success, this chapter will articulate the institute's potential role in enhancing Fiji's ability to anticipate, respond to, and mitigate security challenges, thereby reinforcing the thesis's core argument for establishing such an institution.

In chapter five, Parson's institutional causal logic is employed to examine the role of existing higher education infrastructure and how these platforms potentially support a defence and security education.[4] It analyses how these existing higher education institutions like the University of the South Pacific (USP), Fiji National University (FNU), and the University of Fiji can strengthen partnership incorporating local and traditional knowledge significant for such defence and security institute. A tailored educational approach that strengthens Fiji's strategic capabilities and secures its future in a way that resonates with its cultural identity will be stressed, along with the need to drive intellectual edge and harness intellectual property grounded in local and traditional knowledge.[5] The analysis of the social science approach to defence and security studies to validate the importance of education and research for cognitive development and empowerment will be examined in chapter six. This chapter outlines various discourses on defence and security pedagogy and draws examples of Albania, Romania, and the European Union higher education. Chapter Seven provides a summary of the findings and a conclusion that highlights policy recommendations and recognition for future research, given the gaps encountered during the thesis.

Significance and Originality

Against the backdrop of this research are the recently launched Fiji National Development Plan for 2025 to 2030, the current review of the Fiji national defence and security strategy, as well as the implementation of the 2050 Blue Pacific Strategy. In addition, leveraging Fiji's experience in navigating its complex strategic and security landscape needs to be captured and translated into academia for higher education and research. Therefore, the research posits a capability platform through cognitive and pedagogical concepts for institutional empowerment in national defence security needs and best practices. Given Fiji's strategic environment and the evolving security challenges, there is a demand for a comprehensive and holistic approach to developing a culture of critical thinking from a local practitioner's capacity. It should not be perceived as a prescriptive approach to Fiji's national security but proposes a people capability development with roles to inform policymakers and manage potential challenges. Meg Keen stated that "approaches to Pacific security are still predominately top-down from regional to national declarations to national and local actions. They are often lost in translation when regional priorities transition to the local level."[6] Given this assessment, this paper

[4] Craig Parsons, How to Map Arguments in Political Science (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010).
[5] Kalouniwai, Jone, Jack Moceica, Akuila Savu, and Alipate Naulivou. "Achieving Best Practice through Security Cooperation: The Pacific Way," 2021. https://pacificsecurity.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/DB82_Part29.pdf
[6] Keen Meg, Security through a Pacific Lens. ANU

examines the role of the proposed institution in strengthening a bottom-up and integrated whole-of-government approach central to the empowerment of defence and middle-career leaders and practitioners who potentially are strategic enablers for policy advice and decision-making.

The need to establish a local institution for these curricula is often central to Fiji's security spectrum, but this is overlooked as international partners usually provide this. Therefore, this research objectively seeks a breakthrough in Fiji's defence and security studies with the justification framed by coherent and rational approaches that necessitate its establishment. Like other PICs, Fiji remains vulnerable to traditional and non-traditional security challenges that undermine its capacity to manage its strategic environment and impede national objectives.[7] A cognitive approach through education and academia to build a security culture for the key stakeholders and enablers provides a more rational approach to fundamental shifts in mindsets. The Pacific Island Forum's BOE Declaration of 2018 articulates that education is one of the essential pathways for peace and security.[8] Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has reinforced its support for the outcome of the PIF BOE Declaration by establishing the Pacific Security College [PSC] under the Australia National University [ANU].[9]

[7] "2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent," 2022, https://forumsec.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/PIFS-2050-Strategy-Blue- Pacific-Continent-WEB-5Aug2022-1.pdf
[8] 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, 2022
[9] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "Australia Pacific Security College Mid Term Review," 2021, https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/dfat-foi-lex8209.pdf.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Fiji's colonial history and developments in the post-independence era, its strategic positioning, and the existing higher education framework compared to other PICs make it an ideal prospect for the establishment of a national institute for strategic and security education. Its political concerns, neutral position in regional geopolitics, and significant contributions to global peacekeeping provide important insights into security and diplomacy. The nation's experience with international sanctions imposed by Australia, New Zealand, and the United States has shaped its strategic autonomy and regional diplomacy.[10]The possibility of foreign military involvement during its coups, while eventually averted, underscores the need for enhanced national defence and diplomacy resilience.[11]Strategic and security education may provide future leaders with the competencies to handle geopolitical rivalry and manoeuvre complex regional dynamics, establishing Fiji as a paradigm for addressing security challenges in the Pacific through education and research.

Strategic Landscape

Fiji's strategic landscape is defined by its ability to manage, sustain, and advance its national interest domestically, regionally, and globally with a focus on prosperity and stability. Tarte analyses Fiji's geostrategic significance with the term hub, elaborating on the country's location as a crossroads to regional trade, transportation, and a centre for international headquarters. Wallis describes Fiji's position in its regional leadership role and as an activist state in the context of its ability to forge new international partners or alliances outside Australia and New Zealand's sphere of influence with other traditional partners.'[12] Powles and Sousa-Santo have observed that Fiji's leadership responsibilities, including its presidency of the Group of 77 and chairmanship in the United Nations General Assembly, further accentuate this strategic importance. The country's diplomatic autonomy, cultivated during times of international sanctions, highlights the necessity for a more robust national security framework that depends less on foreign military education.

Komai and Mawi, in similar literature, examine the challenges and success of Fiji's diplomacy during the sanction period from 2006 to 2014 and beyond. Furthermore, Fiji's national policies, such as the Fiji National Development Plan 2025, emphasise a strong platform that strengthens pillars towards ensuring prosperity and stability on the domestic front.[13] This is also reinforced by the Fiji Foreign White Policy Paper that recognises and articulate guidance its Fiji's national interest at regional and

[10] Powles, Anna, and Jose Sousa-Santos. "Principled Engagement: Rebuilding Defence Ties with Fiji." Lowy Institute for International Policy, 20 http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep10181.
[11] Tarte, Sandra. "Fiji Islands Security Challenges and Defense Policy Issues. Asia Pacific Countries Security Outlook and Its Implications for Defense Sector ," 2010
[12] Wallis, Joanne. 2017. "Crowded and Complex: The Changing Geopolitics of the South Pacific," April. [14]
[13] Ministry of Finance Republic of Fiji Government Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, "Fiji National Development Plan 2025-2029 and Vision 2050," 2024, https://www.finance.gov.fj/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/NPDF_final-9.pdf.

international.[14] The need for a national institution focused on defence and security education is evident in this setting. As Fiji shifts from reliance on foreign military education to a more autonomous position, this institute can establish a basis for teaching future leaders across all government sectors the cognitive aspect of causal approach in addressing complex geopolitical concerns. Similarly to the strategy employed by Romania in its post-communist transition, Fiji might leverage its diplomatic experiences during international sanctions to reinforce its strategic orientation via defence and security education.

Security Challenges

With the security challenges, Ratuva stated that Fiji's security landscape, like other PICs, is 'dynamic, complex and varied, reflecting the broad and dispersed nature of a region that is both globalised and constantly evolving.'[15]Tarte and Ratuva both highlighted the security challenges that Fiji encounters with military coups, political instability, and foreign interventions. Veitayaki's perspective delves into more socio-economic and socio-political factors of Fiji's internal security issues.[16] He further contends the underdevelopment of rural regions that have fragmented the nation and increased political instability, as successive administrations have inadequately addressed the fundamental challenges that resulted in heightened political fragmentation; an issue similarly observed in Romania, where rural underdevelopment intensified societal divisions throughout its transitional phase.[17] Comparing these two locations reveals that improving security education is essential not only for mitigating external threats but also for establishing a framework that fosters national resilience against internal political instability.

National policies, such as the Fiji Defence White Paper 1997, Fiji Development Plan 2025-2030, and the 2024 Fiji Foreign White Policy Paper, necessitate the systematic responses to evolving security concerns domestically, regionally, and globally. These policies underscore the deficiencies in Fiji's existing security architecture, indicating the need for specialised education and training for its defence and public sector personnel. A local institute specialising in defence and security education might address this deficiency by offering targeted, pertinent pedagogic focus that corresponds with Fiji's distinct security challenges. This immediately supports the research topic, which aims to investigate the structural, institutional, and ideational elements affecting Fiji's national interest. In this framework, security education serves as both a proactive and reactive approach to external challenges and a strategic instrument for enhancing national resilience and autonomy.

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[14] Republic of Fiji, "Foreign Policy White Paper - Ministry of Foreign Affairs," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, September 27, 2024,https://www.foreignaffairs.gov.fj/foreign-policy-white-paper-2/.

[15] Ratuva, Steven. 2019. *Contested Terrain: Reconceptualising Security in the Pacific*. Acton, A.C.T.: ANU Press.[101-103]

[16] Veitayaki, Joeli. 'Breaking Fiji's Coup Culture through Effective Rural Development.' in Understanding Oceania: Celebrating the University of the South Pacific and Its Collaboration with the Australian National University, Edited by Stewart Firth and Vijay Naidu Http://Www.jstor.org/Stable/J.ctvk8vzcb.19." (ANU Press, 2019).

[17] Veitayaki, Joeli

Higher Education Infrastructures

Fiji's higher education institutions are pivotal in influencing national security; nevertheless, existing frameworks lack the specialised emphasis required for defence and security education. Overall, the Fiji Development Plan 2025-2030 and the 2024 Fiji Foreign White Policy Paper emphasise education and training for capacity building and empowerment. The Fiji National University (FNU), which is a government-sponsored higher education institution, has a dual sector role and provides a multidisciplinary programme for highly skilled and academic candidates that, has the potential to support key ministries and assist in national building.[18] In addition, the newly established University of Fiji, a faith-based institution that offers multidisciplinary academic courses has also pioneered the Institute of Strategic and Defence Studies, however, there remains little evidence to show a formal collaboration or partnership with the Fijian government in enhancing this institute to meet the needs of the workforce. The intent to utilise this existing local higher education will be similar to Albania and Romania's incorporation of security studies into their national academic systems during political transitions. Fiji could gain from a more comprehensive partnership between its higher education sector and national security frameworks. In particular, developing specialised programs could cultivate expertise in defence and security academics, and professional education for military and public servants for national security.

Regionally, the University of the South Pacific (USP) based in Fiji offers programs centred on the roles of higher education for the region. Education, research, and technology are vital strategic pathways that support the thematic area of peace and security as articulated in the 2050 Strategy for Blue Pacific, and USP, in this context, leverages its capacity to provide curricula subject matter expert support.[19] USP's focus on enhancing the ability to address new security challenges, together with FNU that is responsible for domestic challenges, aligns with Romania's national goal for building resilience against security threats via education. The need to institutionalise a security culture, as emphasized by Romania's National Strategy for Defence, offers significant insights on how Fiji might cultivate a cohesive approach to national defence and security education that support ministerial and practitioner roles.[20]

Furthermore, the BOE Declaration of 2018 prompted the establishment of the Australia Pacific Security College (PSC) at the Australia National University (ANU), to support capacity building for security management in PICs.[21] Capacity building that focused on "developing the executive leadership courses and providing forums for senior policymakers to discuss security challenges and opportunities with their peers". A report of APSC's independent mid-term review released by DFAT stated that the APSC was established to facilitate the execution of the 2018 BOE Declaration on Regional Security, which recognised a broadened understanding of

[18] Fiji National University (FNU), https://www.fnu.ac.fj/.
[19] 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent [21]
[20] Lupulescu, Georgiana-Daniela. "Security Education – the Main Tool for Strengthening the Security Culture." *Land Forces Academy Review* 27, no. 3 (September 1, 2022): 221–34. https://doi.org/10.2478/raft-2022-0029. (224-226)
[21] Australia Pacific Security College Independent Mid Term Review." 2021. https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/dfat-foi-lex8209.

security that encompasses both conventional and unconventional security matters.[22]

Defence and Security Education in Social Science Concept

The research on global literature in defence and security education seeks to determine the merit of defence and security education through a social science perspective exemplifying cases in Albania and Romania. In their proposal to the University of Tirana in Albania, Spahu, Lam, and Xharo observed that security studies examine structural dangers and the developing notion of security in a more predictable environment.[23] They underscore the increasing need to comprehend the evolving global security landscape, characterised by escalating threats, intricate terrorist operations, nuclear ambitions, cyber-attack vulnerabilities, unstable nations, and violations of individual rights.[24] According to Spahu, Lam, and Xharo's research on Albania's developing security studies, curriculum must be adjusted to reflect the shifting landscape of international security. Fiji's security concerns correspond closely with this, especially when it comes to climate change and regional diplomacy.

Furthermore, Lupulescu's works on security education provide a connection between security discipline and developing security culture, with emphasis on citizen awareness and state resilience, and could provide a blueprint for Fiji. Romania has shown how security education may be used as a strategic mechanism for enhancing national resilience by emphasizing the development of a security-aware society.[25]In Fiji, incorporating this methodology into a national security institute may facilitate the development of a strategic security culture that educates citizens about their role in national security in addition to preparing public servants and defence personnel. The cohort of professionals who would also benefit are those that are also not defence and [26]security specialists but have to deal with these challenges in their line of work, for example civil servants working with the Ministry for Economy, Agriculture, and Fisheries, Immigration to name a few.

Comparisons with Similar Countries

Albania and Romania provide informative case studies illustrating how security education can enhance national resilience throughout political transitions and external pressures. Albania's transition from a rigid, militaristic security paradigm to a more comprehensive educational framework highlights the significance of interdisciplinary curricula that extend beyond conventional military instruction.[27] Romania's emphasis on security culture to cultivate national cohesion and resilience against global security threats has a parallel for Fiji, where the promotion of a comprehensive security education model could also strengthen national unity and

[22] Australia Pacific Security College Independent Mid Term Review." 2021.
[23] Spahiu, Vilma, Blendi Lami, and Kristaq Xharo. "Within the Paradigm of Security Studies." Polis 18, no. 1 (n.d.): 59–76. doi:10.58944/VPDC1677.
[24] Spahiu, , Lami, and Xharo [67-68]
[25] Lupulescu, Georgiana-Daniela. "Security Education – the Main Tool for Strengthening the Security Culture." *Land Forces Academy Review* 27, no. 3 (September 1, 2022): 221–34. https://doi.org/10.2478/raft-2022-0029. (224-226)
[26] Spahiu, Vilma, Blendi Lami, and Kristaq Xharo. (59-70)
[27] Lupulescu, Georgiana-Daniela.. (224-226)

strategic capacities.[28] Furthermore, Romania's situation illustrates the significance of incorporating local cultural values into global security frameworks. In Fiji, where indigenous cultural knowledge is integral to societal governance, a defence and security institute could effectively integrate local traditions with international security requirements, preparing future leaders to tackle both local and global concerns as well as collaborate more effectively across multi-dimensional sectors in the country.

[28] Lupulescu, Georgiana-Daniela. (224-226)

Chapter 3: Fiji's Strategic Landscape and the Role of Strategic and Security Education

Defence and security in Fiji's strategic landscape is centred on safeguarding its national interest and support to national building and the advancement of Fiji's interest. To frame Fiji's strategic landscape, this thesis employs Parson's structural causal logic factors, which is 'what people do as the function of their position *visa-a'-visa* exogenously given the material structures like geography, distribution of wealth or a distribution of physical power.'[29]In Fiji's context, it may include geographic position, natural resources, demographic distribution, and the physical environment, which underscores the rationale for strategic decisions. Moreover, Fiji's strategic landscape can be defined by the scope of its national interest domestically and on the international stage and how global trends continue to shape Fiji's efforts in navigating the complexities of its evolving strategic and security landscape. It comprises Fiji's strategic appetite for advancing, sustaining, as well as the development of opportunities for prosperity and stability for the nation. This chapter will examine Fiji's current and future strategic landscape and further analyse the role of defence and security education and research institution. It examines Fiji's strategic landscape through a domestic lens that covers its geography, economy, and demography. The second part examines Fiji's statecraft within both the regional and global contexts, focusing on its use of diplomacy, particularly military, and economic statecraft. Fiji's geostrategic location, its role as a United Nations peacekeeper, and leadership in climate change advocacy are central to its foreign policy and national interests. The chapter also explores Fiji's diplomatic efforts, regional leadership, and military cooperation, which have enhanced its global standing and contributed to its influence in Pacific and international affairs.

Domestic Strategic Landscape: Fiji's National Power and National Interest

Defence and security play a vital role in Fiji's domestic affairs particularly in safeguarding and maintaining its national interest and supporting national building and humanitarian aid disaster relief operations. Lessons learnt from domestic achievements and challenges are critical for academia focus on military and public servant professional development. Central to Fiji's domestic interest is the need for prosperity and stability, considering the country's history of political upheavals, military coups, ethnic tensions and other non-traditional challenges. Firstly, its geographical characteristics are fundamental to its economy and demographical construct and impact its national defence considering its maritime borders. According to Morgenthau, the most stable factor upon which the power of a nation depends is geography.[30] Fiji's landmass provides natural mineral resources and sustains primary industries like forestry, agriculture, livestock, as well as manufacturing industries. In addition, its EZZ provides maritime resources such as fisheries and a coastal area that supports its tourism industry. The need to sustain and protect this economic base has prompted the focus for a whole of government

[29] Craig Parsons, *How to Map Arguments in Political Science* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010).
[30] Morgenthau, Hans J. *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985

approach across all sectors.[31] Fiji's national policy emphasise the fundamental areas that promote economic prosperity and stability.[32]For example, stressing the importance of national cohesion, good governance, internal security and stability as well as strengthening our sovereign and territorial integrity.[33]Therefore, the notion of international security and stability, and the strengthening of sovereignty and territorial integrity are central to the defence and security role employed by the Republic Fiji Military Forces, the Fiji Police Force, and other security agencies.

Fiji's geography, together with its rich natural resources, fosters the development of essential sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, and tourism. The abundance of marine and mineral resources, coupled with fertile land and a tropical climate, positions this region as a prime candidate for industries like sugar production, agriculture, and fisheries, while its natural oceanic appeal enhances its appeal for tourism. Furthermore, Fiji's porous borders make it an important point for regional security, emphasising the need for defence investments in protecting maritime resources and securing economic activities critical to national prosperity.[34] The table represents abstracts from Fiji Budget estimates passed annually from 2016-2024. It represents five key productive industries that relate to geographical and natural characteristics.[35] In addition, this data shows the Fiji government's commitment in monetary terms and how significant these are to defence and security policies in safeguarding these industries. Safeguarding these sectors via policies that emphasise security, stability, response, and recovery to traditional and non-traditional challenges could impact future prospects via effectively developed educational curricula.

Year	Fisheries ($000)	Agriculture ($000)	Tourism ($000)	Sugar ($000)	Mining ($000)	Other Income-Generating Ministries ($000)
2016-2017	11,012.10	62,547.10	44,400.00	22,876.40	9,500.00	130,000.00
2017-2018	11,912.00	64,441.40	49,000.00	24,780.50	10,340.00	142,000.00
2019-2020	10,780.00	60,705.40	51,000.00	57,750.40	9,900.00	148,000.00
2020-2021	11,080.00	62,968.70	47,000.00	60,730.00	10,500.00	153,500.00
2023-2024	13,490.00	81,800.00	52,650.00	70,800.00	11,800.00	160,000.00

Table 1.1 Summary of Productive Sectors central to Fiji Geography.[36]

Demography, a key factor in national progress, defence, and security, often shapes the fundamental characteristics of a country. In the theory of national power, a huge

[31] Fiji National Development Plan 2025-2050
[32] Fiji National Development Plan 2025-2050
[33] Fiji National Development Plan 2025-2050
[34] Mason Smith, Josh Kemp, and Rustam Pulatov, "Navigating Fiji's Maritime Future: Safety First in the Blue Pacific," UNDP, September 26, 2024, https://www.undp.org/pacific/blog/navigating-fijis-maritime-future-safety-first-blue-pacific
[35] Ministry for Economy Fiji, "Budget Estimates 2016-207" (Fiji Government , June 22, 2016), https://www.parliament.gov.fj/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/2016-2017-Budget-Estimates.pdf.
[36] Ministry for Economy Fiji , "Budget Estimates 2016-2024):*Fiji Budget estimates have been collated to reflect the number of years Fiji government has invested in this economic sectors*

population is a vitally necessary; however, it does not automatically guarantee strength.[37]A large population may augment a nation's potential power by supplying a significant workforce, consumer market, and military capability; yet it does not inherently result in national strength without effective government, economic advancement, and social stability.[38]The Fiji government has recognised that Fiji's demographics, is unique in the Pacific region, and given its ethnic social construct and that impacts its economic strength.[39]Fiji national development policy articulates a vision of "Empowering the People of Fiji through Unity", which demonstrates the government emphasis on national cohesion that underpins prosperity and stability.[40] More so Fiji's mixed demographics, especially its indigenous or I-Taukei and Indian ethnic-Fijians, Chinese, European descendants and other pacific islanders produce a complex social fabric unlike other Pacific states.[41]Historically, ethnic conflicts and divisions affected Fiji's internal balance of power, hurting social cohesiveness, political stability, and governance.[42] In contrast to other Pacific states, Fiji has had to overcome severe cultural and political conflicts that affect its identity and politics. In addition, with regards to the economic power, the Fijians ethnic Indians, who make up 45 per cent of the population, have traditionally controlled trade, agriculture (especially sugarcane), and businesses, while I-Taukei has dominated more than 82 per cent of Indigenous land ownership.[43]

In addition, despite Fiji's diminutive size, capitalises on its demographic advantages to establishing a socio-economic framework that fosters national identity, thus positioning itself as a considerable commercial and geopolitical force in the South Pacific region. This strategic position strengthens its influence in international relations and regional trade. More so, ensuring the unity of social fabric for national cohesion prompts the need for prosperity and stability, and these demands could be reinforced through education and awareness central to the security of ethnic tensions. This demographic analysis corresponds to how Fiji's distinct ethnic composition and socio-economic structure impact its national security interests, emphasising the necessity of a local institution to tackle these complexities through education and formulation of policy. By promoting national unity and addressing ethnic conflicts, such an institution would bolster Fiji's strategic ability to address internal and regional security concerns, hence augmenting its geopolitical impact and resilience.

Regional and Global Landscape: Statecraft in Fiji's Context

Diplomacy, although subject to instability, is relatively significant compared to other factors of national power.[44] Morgenthau states that the "quality of diplomacy

[37] Jablonsky, David, and J. Boone Bartholomees. "National Power." JSTOR, 2014. http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep12023.12.
[38] Jablonsky, David, and J. Boone Bartholomees
[39] Fiji National Development Plan
[40] Fiji National Development Plan
[41] Ratuve Steve (78, 271)
[42] Ratuve Steve (78, 271)
[43] Veitayaki, Joeli. 'Breaking Fiji's Coup Culture through Effective Rural Development.' in Understanding Oceania: Celebrating the University of the South Pacific and Its Collaboration with the Australian National University, Edited by Stewart Firth and Vijay Naidu Http://Www.jstor.org/Stable/J.ctvk8vzcb.19." ANU Press, 2019. [289]
[44] Morgenthau.

combines different factors into an integrated whole, give them direction and weight, and awakens their slumbering potentialities by giving them the breath of actual power".[45] The education on Fiji's diplomatic platforms from a defence and security perspective could provide more understanding and allows its citizens to value it diplomacy qualities. In Fiji's context, the qualities of its diplomacy are grounded on its geostrategic location, economic interest as well as its global citizenry role in international peacekeeping as well as an advocate for climate change. These are elements of Fiji's statecraft, and its diplomatic qualities have been tested prior to, and during the seven years of sanctions from Australia, New Zealand, and the U.S, as well as in the regional leadership organisation such as the Pacific Island Forum (PIF).[46] Geographically, Fiji serves as a strategic hub in the Pacific and geostrategic position within the regional and global framework, and recognised as a key contributor in the Pacific.[47] Fiji's geostrategic location facilitates various regional organisations, accommodates U.N. agencies operating in the South Pacific including other diplomatic missions. The country functions as a hub for trans-Pacific maritime and aerial pathways, acting as an entry point for various nearby countries which depend on it for the transfer of goods in their global commerce. This strategic position leverages Fiji in exerting influence in regional politics, fostering regional collaboration, and enhancing global connections whilst maintaining its geostrategic role as a connection area.[48]

The Fiji Foreign Policy White Paper (FFPWP) recognises and emphasises Fiji's active participation in regional diplomacy and its national interests, underscoring the significance of its geopolitical position in the Pacific, and its leadership in promoting regional stability.[49] Furthermore, this policy document further articulates the recent initiatives like the Oceans of Peace vision, which underscores Fiji's commitment to ensuring that its geopolitical position is leveraged not only for national benefit but foster partnership and engagement with larger global powers while advocating for wide pacific interest.[50] Such statecraft demonstrates the broad themes of how Fiji's national powers intertwined with its strategic diplomatic efforts focused on prosperity and stability. The fact that Fiji's policies recognise the importance of leveraging diplomacy is critical, especially from defence and security perspective, whereby Fiji has been viewed as one the activist state in the Pacific regions.[51] Therefore, maintaining longevity for such foreign policies will require state-driven institutes that focus on education and research and set a platform as a national think-tank for policy.

The repercussions of the 2006 coup compelled Fiji to operate as a coerced state

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[45] Morgenthau.
[46] Sandra Tarte, "Building a Strategic Partnership: Fiji–China Relations since 2008," ed. Graeme Smith and Terence Wesley-Smith, JSTOR (ANU Press, 2021), https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1h45mkn.16.
[47] Tarte, Sandra. "Fiji Islands Security Challenges and Defense Policy Issues. Asia Pacific Countries Security Outlook and Its Implications for Defense Sector," 2010.
[48] Anna, Powles, and Cain Tess Newton. "Why the Pacific Islands Is Seeing a Rise in 'Defense Diplomacy.'" United States Institute of Peace, May 14, 2024. https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/05/why-pacific-islands-seeing-rise-defense-diplomacy.
[49] Fiji Foreign White Paper
[50] Fiji Foreign White Paper
[51] Wallis

under sanctions from its traditional Western partners, including Australia, New Zealand, and the United States.[52] The lessons learnt are fundamental to understanding leadership, statecraft and employment of national power in navigating complex geostrategic situation. The seven-year period of sanctions also led to Fiji's suspension from the Pacific Islands Forum, a regional assembly where Fiji, alongside Papua New Guinea, played a crucial role in amplifying its Pacific voice in the post-colonial context.[53] However, using its geostrategic significance, Fiji strengthened its mini-lateral construct with the Melanesian Spearhead Group [MSG] through various partnership initiatives such as MSG trade agreements[54].Furthermore, Fiji was pivotal in reshaping the regional narrative in the U.N. by strengthening the concept of Pacific Small Island Developing States: a narrative re-coined from the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS).[55] The AOSIS, formed in 1990, represents the interests of 39 small and low-lying coastal developing states in international climate change, sustainable development negotiations, and processes.[56] Such comprehensive diplomatic engagement during this period catalysed Fiji's position as the chairmanship of G77 plus China, the Presidency of UNGA, and later the chairmanship of COP23.[57] Drawing from this experience fundamentally could enhance education and research in defence and security. Such an institute would ensure that Fiji's strategic diplomatic efforts are supported by informed decision-making, contributing to national resilience and strengthening the country's regional and global leadership.

Fiji's geo-economic landscape spans from its domestic space and goes beyond its national border and regional peripheries. As a social determinant for national power, Fiji's trade in terms of commodity and service exports has solidified Fiji's position as an emerging economy in the Pacific. The Fiji National Development Plan 2025 delineates the ways in which economic development, which is fuelled by critical sectors such as agriculture, tourism, and manufacturing, contributes to Fiji's national interests in the pursuit of stability and prosperity.[58] Fiji is one of the largest economies in the PIC in 2022; Fiji had recorded one of the highest GDPs in the Pacific apart from Australia and New Zealand. Its diversified economy includes tourism which accounts for 40 per cent of GPD followed by agriculture, which accounts for about 14 per cent of the GDP.[59] The World Bank reported that growth in the PIC post-COVID decelerated in 2023 but remained robust due to the normalization of economic activity in Fiji, which recorded a 20 per cent growth rebound. Notably, Fiji has been well represented in the international scene as a member of the African Caribbean Pacific Forum and International Sugar Organisation. For example, in 2012, Fiji resumed the Chairmanship of the ISO. Furthermore, when the country

[52] Tarte, Sandra. "Fiji Islands Security Challenges and Defense Policy Issues
[53] Litia Mawi, "Fiji's Emerging Brand of Pacific Diplomacy: A Fiji Government Perspective," ed. Greg Fry and Sandra Tarte,
JSTOR (ANU Press, 2015), https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt19w71mc.15
[54] Litia Mawi,
[55] Litia Mawi
[56] AOSIS. “Member States,” n.d. https://www.aosis.org/about/member-states/.
[57] Komai, Makereta. “Fiji’s Foreign Policy and the New Pacific Diplomacy.” Edited by Greg Fry and Sandra Tarte. JSTOR. ANU Press, 2015.
https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt19w71mc.16.
[58] Fiji National Development Plan 2025 -2050
[59] The Global Economy.com. "Fiji Economic Indicators | the Global Economy.com," 2024. https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Fiji/remittances.

assumed the appointment of the G77 group [135 countries plus China], it emphasized the need for sustainable development and further strengthened a South-South Cooperation reinforcing the new concept of Pacific Small Island Development States [PSIDS]. [60]

Military statecraft in Fiji's context can be categorized into two folds. One that includes peacekeeping in volatile regions for over 40 years to the status quo, and second, the military cooperation forged with its bilateral and multilateral defence partners. Clausewitz's concept of war as a "continuation of politics by other means" provides a valuable framework for analysing Fiji's peacekeeping commitments as an extension of its political objectives.[61] Fiji's participation in peacekeeping strengthens its global standing, contributes to regional stability, and offers economic and military advantages, in line with its foreign policy objectives.[62]The effectiveness of these missions relies on strategic planning and the collaboration of military, governmental, and societal support, illustrating Clausewitz's intertwined "trinity." [63]Ultimately, Fiji's involvement in peacekeeping extends beyond mere military efforts; it serves as a strategic mechanism for enhancing its influence on both global and regional stages. On the second fold, Fiji's military although has provided the platform for regional and global diplomacy. In the region, Fiji established a relationship with Australia through the Defence Cooperation Programme and the Pacific Security Maritime Programme.[64] The hallmark of this cooperation has resulted in the construction of a Peacekeeping Centre, the Continuation of training and professional military education, and exchange programs. This cooperation has alleviated the 'Vuvale' or Family partnership commencing with Fiji-Australia Security cooperation to a more whole-of-government approach after the renewed signing in 2023.[65] Furthermore, the relationship with N.Z. includes a Mutual Assistance Programme focused on capacity building. As for the U.S., defence relationships include annual exercises with INDOPACOMD, quarterly information sharing and State partnership programme with Nevada National Guard.

Leadership and Politics

The characteristics and approaches adopted by leaders are fundamental to national progress, and this study of leadership in the defence and security paradigm is critical for a nation's future strategic outlook. Leadership provides an ideational approach for institutional strengthening, and capturing these qualities, in Fiji's context, is a strategic imperative. Fiji has experienced leaders at the national level whose philosophies and politically driven policies make it unique for future academic studies

[60] Komai, Makereta.
[61] Clausewitz, Carl Von. *On War*. Princeton University Press, 1832.
[62] Baledrokadroka, Jone. "The Unintended Consequences of Fiji's International Peacekeeping." *Security Challenges* 8, no. 4 (2012): 105–16. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26462895.
[63] Clausewitz, Carl Von
[64] Wallis, Joanne, Henrietta McNeill, James Batley, and Anna Powles. “Mapping Security Cooperation in the Pacific Islands.” Apo.org.au, June 15, 2021. https://apo.org.au/node/312723.
[65] Stünkel, Larissa. “Issue Brief Fijian Leadership in the Pacific: Charting a New Course?,” 2020. https://isdp.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/The-Future-Course-for-Fiji-IB-13.09.20.pdf.

for military and public servants' professional education development. For example, Ratu Sukuna, a prominently high chief and statesman during the colonial period, provided the impetus for the balance of power in Fiji's national leadership that focussed on the Three Legged Stool concept; "The Vanua (Traditional Land and People), Lotu (Religion-Christianity), Matanitu (Government)"[66]. Later, Fiji's first Prime Minster, Ratu Sir Mara, pioneered the concept of the "Pacific Way," providing impetus for regionalism that has evolved to the contemporary era as the Oceania states or the Blue Pacific.[67] In addition, former Prime Minister Bainimarama was instrumental in introducing the policy for the term Fijians to be accorded to all citizens regardless of race or ethnicity, laying the pillar for national cohesion. Current Prime Minister of Fiji Rabuka introduced and advocated the concept of Oceans of Peace that emphasises non-alignment, collaboration among major countries like as the United States and China, and Pacific Way diplomacy, with the objective of bolstering security and alleviating the dangers of increasing militarisation in the region.[68] Fiji's leadership in regional discussions and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) is pivotal to furthering this agenda and Fiji's numerous leadership ideologies have significantly influenced national identity and regional diplomacy, promoting stability and unity. As the nation progresses, the strategic methodologies of its leaders will be pivotal in confronting forthcoming problems and possibilities in the Pacific.

In conclusion, Fiji's strategic landscape is characterised by its geographical, economic, and demographic and leadership elements play a crucial role in shaping its national strategy that includes the defence and security needs. Fiji's geostrategic location and overall national interest significantly contribute to its involvement in both national and regional developments that extend to the global stages, thereby amplifying its diplomatic and economic prospects. The intricate social structure in Fiji's diverse populace has traditionally influenced its political landscape, yet recent initiatives aimed at fostering national cohesion and constitutional changes have contributed to its internal stability. Fiji's approach to international relations, especially through its involvement in peacekeeping missions and military diplomacy, has enhanced its standing and strengthened its partnerships on both regional and global levels. In this context, an institute focused on defence and security education and research is crucial for providing Fiji with the necessary knowledge and resources to tackle evolving strategic challenges.

[66] Sir Lala Sukuna, *Fiji: The Three Legged Stool, Selected Writing of Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna, Edited by Deryck Scarr*, 1983.
[67] Kirsch, Stuart. “Talanoa Dialogue at UN Climate Change Meetings: The Extraordinary Encompassment of a Scale-Climbing Pacific Speech Genre.” *Oceania*, September 30, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1002/ocea.5314.
[68] Tarte, Sandra. "Advancing Regional Stability in an Era of Geopolitical Competition and Tension: The Role of Fiji Sandra Tarte," 2024. https://cms.apln.network/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Fiji-Paper_Sandra-Tarte_V4.pdf.

Chapter 4: Fiji Security Challenges: Deciphering Concepts for Contextualisation

Fiji's security challenges are shaped by internal and external factors with a unique combination of the interrelation of traditional and non-traditional threats. As the Indo-Pacific becomes a centre of global strategic struggle, the region has grown more important in key nations' geopolitical agendas. As a regional hub, Fiji must comprehend and adapt to a complicated and evolving security environment. An overview of the security landscape and its challenges are fundamental to shaping the concept of national security strategies thus demands cognitive approaches through education, research and policy formulations. PICs security concerns have traditionally focused on natural disasters, political instability, and economic vulnerability.69 Cyber insecurity, international crime, and climate change have also changed regional security objectives. The strategic interests of foreign nations, especially the increasing influence of China, along with the engagement of traditional allies like the US and Australia, are adding to the complexity to the security dynamics in the Pacific.

Before contextualizing the Fiji security landscape, this chapter first examines the definition and concepts of security based on the various literature and international theories that often frame perspectives and national policies. Furthermore the chapter will contextualise these concepts and analyse the traditional non-traditional security challenges, stressing the trends, problems, and possibilities that justify a national security education and research institution.

Defining Security and its Concepts

Researchers have argued that security lacks a universally accepted definition due to its dependence on context; its interpretation evolves with shifts in perceptions and discussions surrounding threats and dangers.70 The traditional definition of international security pertains to the armed protection of territory in the context is an anarchic state system characterised by a perpetual competition for security that is predominantly founded on military power.71 This concept has evolved and transformed where the traditional notion of security has been challenged in this contemporary era. For example, human security is a key reference for atypical security, challenging the standard and traditional concepts. The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the necessity of human security. The Commission of Human Security rethought security such as shifting from state-centric security that centred on state safety from military aggression to individual security, protection, and empowerment.72 Therefore, the state-centric, military-focused concept of

[69] 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent." n.d. https://forumsec.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/PIFS-2050-Strategy-Blue-Pacific-Continent-WEB-5Aug2022-1.pdf.
[70] S. H. Jore, The Conceptual and Scientific Demarcation of Security in Contrast to Safety," *European Journal for Security Research* 4, no. 1 (November 7, 2017): 157–74, https://doi.org/10.1007/s41125-017-0021-9.
[71] Newman, Edward. Human Security and Constructivism." *International Studies Perspectives*2, no. 3 (2001): 239–51.
[72] Masys, Anthony J. *Sensemaking for Security*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2021. ISBN 978-3-030-71998-2.

international security is consistent with Fiji's traditional security challenges, which include the management of geopolitical tensions in the Pacific and the preservation of territorial integrity and its commitment to peacekeeping duties in volatile regions. Nevertheless, Fiji's non-traditional security concerns, such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change, transnational crime, and the focus on human security in general, prompt the prioritisation of the safety, well-being, and empowerment of individuals over just military defence.

Furthermore, the characteristics of the security landscape have been shaped by, and integral to the aspects of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity.73 Volatility is the rate of change in an industry, market, or the planet. It is linked to demand variations, turbulence, and brief market access, as described in industrial dynamism literature. In a turbulent environment, more things change quicker.74 Complexity is the term used to describe the number of factors that must be considered, their variety, and the relationships between them.75 People's inability to comprehend a situation is a component of uncertainty that is perceived and associated.76 Uncertainty, however, is a more objective characteristic of an environment. An environment that is truly uncertain is one that cannot be predicted, even on a statistical basis. It is more difficult to forecast the universe when it is more uncertain. A lack of clarification regarding the interpretation of something is referred to as ambiguity.77 In the context of Fiji, the security characteristics of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity are essential to defence and security studies, as they illustrate the dynamic and unpredictable nature of domestic and regional security environments, necessitating adaptive, flexible, and informed strategies to confront evolving threats and challenges in the South Pacific.

Traditional Challenges: Military Role and Experiences

Fiji's experience in a conventional warfare environment is characterised by its involvement in the First and Second World Wars, including the Malayan emergency campaign.[78] The nation's defence force structure, military characteristics, and culture established under the British colony have evolved through the post-independence period to the status quo.[79] Its conventional exposure spans from its peacekeeping mission overseas to safeguarding its maritime sovereign border and further posturing itself from foreign inventions experienced during its political tensions in 1987 and 2006.[80] In peacekeeping mission, Fiji's experience in this is phenomenal considering its deployment since 1978 in Lebanon to the current occupied Golan Heights in Syria. Historically, peacekeeping missions arose in reaction to

[73] Masys, Anthony J. *Sensemaking for Security*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2021. ISBN 978-3-030-71998-2.
[74] Masys, Anthony
[75] Masys, Anthony
[76] Masys, Anthony
[77] Masys, Anthony
[78] Howlett, Robert. 1948. *The History of the Fiji Military Forces, 1939-1945*. https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=ae800fbc-eaf1-3adc-b986-9bb27d25bf28.
[79] Goiran, Hélène. “The Political Roles of the Fiji Military: A Brief History of the Chiefs’ Warriors, Heroes of the World Wars, Peacekeepers and Dictators.” Edited by David Hegarty and Darrell Tryon. JSTOR. ANU Press, 2013. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2tt18z.12.
[80] Tarte, Sandra. Fiji Islands Security Challenges and Defense Policy Issues. Asia Pacific Countries Security Outlook and Its Implications for Defense Sector," 2010

conventional threats, often tasked with enforcing ceasefires, maintaining buffer zones, or supervising peace accords between the conflicting parties.[81] Deployments into these volatile territories expose peacekeepers to high-risk situations, like dealing with warring factions using force as self-defence, as well as perceived by local population as occupiers.[82]More than 60 Fijians soldiers have lost their lives whilst deployed in UN peacekeeping missions in South Lebanon, Iraq, Sinai and Occupied Golan in Syria as well as in East Timor.[83] Apart from the risk to personnel, Fiji's peace operation experience prompts the need for defence and security studies in Fiji context. The execution and sustainment of the UN's mission in the Middle East region, in the context of a small Pacific island country, demands competent and quality defence planners from strategic to tactical level to fulfil the intended mandates. Secondly, the combined arms and multinational force experience significantly shape and enhance Fiji's military characteristics that can prepare for future conflicts. Both these experiences, compiled with other lessons learned during deployment, are significant for future studies and research that harness Fiji's national security and foreign policy.

In addition, Fiji had come closer to foreign interventions during it political crisis when Australia and New Zealand came closer to intervening in Fiji military coups in 1987 and 2006 respectively. Australia and New Zealand were prepared to intervene militarily to evacuate their nationals in the event that the law-and-order situation in Fiji deteriorated following the first coup in May 1987.[84] Defence planners had a "hard-learned lesson" from the events of 1987, especially about the traditional allies' negative reaction to the military takeover. "Every sovereign nation (including Fiji) must look to its own defence," was the lesson learned.[85] Australia's participation came under scrutiny once again in the run-up to the December 2006 coup. Numerous SAS officers were purportedly among the Australian defence personnel who were deployed to help the Australian diplomatic mission with evacuation arrangements in the event of unrest. It was believed that the officers had entered the country covertly, potentially carrying a cargo of weaponry.[86]The apparent goal of a Navy deployment into Fiji's seas just before the coup was to support a potential evacuation of Australian citizens. Along with two additional navy warships, the mission included a Blackhawk helicopter detachment and a guided missile frigate.[87]These two incidents prompt the need for defence and security studies, particularly understanding the deployment of hard power by neighbouring countries and navigating these challenges through diplomatic means as in Fiji's case.

In addition, the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF), Naval Division is tasked with preserving and protecting Fiji's territorial integrity and sovereignty in the maritime

[81] Pablo Antonio Fernández Sánchez. 2018. *Peacekeeping: Global Perspectives, Challenges and Impacts*. Hauppauge, New York: Nova. https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=ecc60894-abbd-3415-aa26-9f4db6ed3684.
[82] Pablo Antonio Fernández Sánchez. 2018.
[83] United Nations, "Fatalities," United Nations Peacekeeping, 2023, https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/fatalities.
[84] Tarte, Sandra. "Fiji Islands Security Challenges and Defense Policy Issues. Asia Pacific Countries Security Outlook and Its Implications for Defense Sector," 2010.
[85] Tarte, Sandra. "Fiji Islands Security Challenges and Defense Policy Issues
[86] Tarte, Sandra. "Fiji Islands Security Challenges and Defense Policy Issues
[87] Tarte, Sandra. "Fiji Islands Security Challenges and Defense Policy Issues

domain.[88]The naval division's maritime role is also recognised under the international conventions whereby Fiji is obligated to conduct those maritime related activities within the framework of these conventions such as UNCLOS.[89] Therefore, these demand the employment of military capabilities that borders on conventional warfare setting. There have been tensions and disputes on EZZ boundaries with neighbouring countries Tonga and Vanuatu to an extent.[90]The contention between Tonga and Fiji on Minerva Reefs pertains to territorial assertions and lucrative subaqueous mineral entitlements.[91]Despite Tonga's four-decade dominance, Fiji has lately contested this authority by deploying naval troops to dismantle navigational infrastructure, therefore escalating tensions, particularly given the historical and cultural connections both countries have in the area. [92] Such territorial disputes borders on traditional threats and potentially could undermine the Pacific Security architect. Therefore, collaborative educations on diplomacy and defence are crucial from local perspective in managing such tensions in the future.

Non-Tradition Challenges: Negating Fiji's National Power

The non-traditional security challenges encountered by Fiji stem from a combination of environmental, socio-political, and economic factors. Fiji is increasingly threatened by elevated sea levels, extreme weather conditions, and coastal degradation, jeopardising its infrastructure, agricultural productivity, and overall food security. The impact of climate change intensifies existing vulnerabilities in health systems, livelihoods, and economic stability, leading to what some experts describe as a "threat multiplier" effect. The expected economic impact of climate change is estimated to exceed 12 per cent of the GDP in the Pacific region by 2100, with Fiji identified as one of the most significantly affected locations[93]. Furthermore, the political landscape in Fiji is marked by instability due to ethnic divisions and the entrenched role of military influence in governance. In the aftermath of the coups in 1987 and 2006, the military in Fiji has taken on a crucial role within the political framework, with the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) acting as both a stabilising force and an active political player.[94]This involvement has led to a militarisation of public life, undermining democratic frameworks and creating an alternative system where military authorities hold significant political and economic influence.[95]Moreover, the socio-political factors in Fiji's context are intricately connected to issues of land ownership, ethnic identity, and economic inequality, making internal security vulnerable.[96]In addition, the administration of resources in Fiji is appearing as a more urgent concern. Unsustainable practices in logging, fishing, and mining have led to environmental degradation, exacerbating tensions

[88] Fiji Defence White paper 1997
[89] United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), 1982, https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/CTC/Ch_XXI_6_english_p.pdf.
[90] Field, Michael. "Fiji, Tonga War over Minerva Reef." Stuff, May 15, 2011. https://www.stuff.co.nz/world/south-pacific/5008060/Fiji-Tonga-war-over-Minerva-Reef.
[91] Field, Michael.
[92] Field, Michael.
[93] Keen Meg, Security through a Pacific Lens. ANU
[94] Ratuva, Steven. 2019. *Contested Terrain: Reconceptualising Security in the Pacific*. Acton, A.C.T.: ANU Press.[101-103]
[95] Ratuva, Steven. 2019
[96] Ratuva, Steven. 2019

between indigenous communities and political elites.[97]Disputes over land and resource ownership, often associated with communal land tenure systems, pose significant obstacles to social stability, especially in rural areas where traditional authority remains highly influential.[98]

By offering a platform for research, policy development, and education, the establishment of a defence and security education in Fiji could be instrumental in confronting these non-traditional security threats in a holistic approach bringing together training and education to build local expertise and capacity in the workforce. An institute of this nature could concentrate on the integration of local knowledge with global security frameworks, thereby promoting a more profound comprehension of Fiji's distinctive security environment. It has the potential to foster interdisciplinary collaboration in the development of strategies for sustainable development, conflict resolution, and climate resilience. The institute could improve Fiji's national security capabilities and guarantee that the nation can effectively address its complex security challenges through training in disaster response and management for enhancing resilience and preparedness. It could also serve by providing training to future leaders and policymakers, especially strengthen the relationship between civil-military relations in having a platform to promote and share best practises and professional development. Moreover, the institute has the potential to serve as a regional centre for security education, thereby enhancing collaboration with other Pacific Island nations and promoting a collective response to shared security threats. A dedicated institute can provide specialized training and education to address issues including maritime security, illegal fishing and impacts of climate change in the Fiji context as well as in a regional context. The institution could more importantly become a focal point for strategic competition where military resources are used to build relationships and influence as well as address security concerns and contributing to broader development goals in the region.

[97] Ratuva, Steven. 2019
[98] Ratuva, Steven. 2019

Chapter 5: National Educational: Institutional Approach to Security

The role of higher education institutions for the nation and in the region is crucial, as it potentially provides the broader platform for cognitive empowerment and develops a knowledgeable and skilled society and culture.[99]The concept of defence and security education that aligns with an institutional approach to manage structural factors shapes a nation's appetite for its strategic interest.[100]Institutional factors as refers to 'what people do as a function of their position within man-made organizations and rules'.[101] In Fiji's context, institutional approach, therefore, includes government agencies and other state-sponsored institutions and policies that underscore the advancement and protection of Fiji national interest.



Image: Fiji National University

This chapter examines how institutions like the Fiji National University (FNU) facilitate support to the government in integrating higher education with national interests, especially regarding security and strategic planning. The analysis will examine the University of the South Pacific's (USP) as regional institutional role by analysing how it fosters national and regional development, emphasising its contribution to regional security frameworks. Furthermore, an analysis of the University of Fiji Defence and Security program will be conducted in the context of modelling its platform for national institutes. In addition, higher education curricula provided by defence partners particularly specialised for staff and war colleges and other universities will be analysed to evaluate their influence on Fiji's security capabilities. Finally, the need for a specialised local institute for defence and security education and research will be assessed, considering how such an entity may consolidate efforts to tackle both conventional and unconventional security challenges.

Fiji National University: State-Sponsored Higher Education Institution

FNU plays an essential role in Fiji's socio-economic and educational development via a dual-sector model that combines technical and vocational training with higher education.[102]This framework guarantees that FNU aligns with the nation's

[99] Rauno Pirinen, Juha Mäkinen, and Arto Salonen, "Towards Comprehensive Security Related Pedagogy - an Approach to
Learning and Resilience," *Theseus (Ammattikorkeakoulujen)*, January 1, 2016, https://doi.org/10.5220/0006090102540262.
[100] Rauno Pirinen, Juha Mäkinen, and Arto Salonen (258-259)
[101] Parson Craig
[102] Fiji National University

development objectives while fulfilling labour market demands via partnerships with enterprises and governmental agencies. In 2010, Fiji amalgamated its existing advanced technical colleges that were founded backed in 1885, like the Fiji School of Medicine (FSM), Fiji School of Nursing (FSN), Fiji College of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Fiji Institute of Technology (FIT), Fiji Maritime Academy(FMA), into FNU.[103] The University plays a significant part in the governance of Fiji, principally by being a public institution that is mostly supported by the Fiji government via operational grants and student tuition fees.[104] FNU also helps Fiji's socio-economic development by delivering both technical and vocational education (TVET) as well as higher education up to the PhD level. FNU's programs, which encompass a wide variety of subjects, relate to national goals and are established in conjunction with businesses, ensuring that students are equipped to contribute to Fiji's labour market. Moreover, FNU's position in research and teaching is meant to directly affect national and regional development, making it a crucial educational institution for Fiji's growth.

Furthermore, FNU conducts research for government ministries, including agriculture, health, and marine, via a range of programs and colleges. For instance, the College of Agricultural, Fisheries, and Forestry (CAFF) conduct research and offer postgraduate degrees that are specifically related to the agricultural industry. Furthermore, the College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences actively engages in research that is directly applicable to the healthcare industry. This program aims to expand research and includes the listing of institutions such as the Environmental Health Lab and Nuffield Clinic. Furthermore, the Fiji Marine Academy (FMA) carries out research and initiatives that are pertinent to the marine industry. The FMA programs for seafarers and their compliance with international standards compromise a few areas of focus for research.

The University of Fiji's, International Relations and Diplomacy and Faculty for Law exemplifies the institution's comprehensive interdisciplinary approach to teaching the defence and security modules.[105] Courses like Politics of International Justice and Conflict and Peace in the Pacific focus on significant global themes such as justice, peace, and multilateral cooperation, whereas courses such as Geopolitics of the South Pacific and Contemporary Strategic Issues in the Asia Pacific critically examine strategic challenges in the Pacific, North Korea's nuclear threats, and China's military endeavours.[106]This curriculum aligns with the University's overarching objective to address complex regional issues through an interdisciplinary approach that combines security and defence with geopolitics, international relations, and local contexts, such as the climate and food security challenges in the Pacific region.[107]This model can be adopted by the Fiji government for a national institute for defence and security studies and research. However, given the ambiguity of collaboration between the government and the University of Fiji, the thesis suggests more research on this to ascertain the development and level of

[103] The University of Fiji. 2024. *Future Ready Handybook & Calender 2024*. https://www.unifiji.ac.fj/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Final-Handbook-and-Calendar-2024-1.pdf.
[104] Fiji National University Future Ready
[105] The University of Fiji. 2024. *Future Ready*
[106] The University of Fiji. Future Ready
[107] The University of Fiji Press. 2022. "Strategic Plan 2022-2026." https://www.unifiji.ac.fj/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Strategic-Plan-2022-2026.pdf.

public involvement. Although the institution benefits from significant government funding, its dependence on this funding given the relatively small allocation of higher education of average of 3.47 per cent as shown in Table 1.2 is a concern regarding the long-term sustainability of these programs, particularly if external challenges, such as economic recessions, affect government contributions.

Regional Institution: Defence and Security Education in Regional Scope

The setup of the University of the South Pacific in Fiji has a strategic value that allows Fijians and other Pacific Islanders access to higher education learning. As a regional institution, it reinforces the strategic intents articulated as articulated under the 2050 Blue Pacific Strategy. Established in 1968, USP is one of only two institutions of its kind worldwide.[108]The entity is jointly held by the governments of twelve member nations: the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. USP manages campuses in each of these member nations.[109]It provides comprehensive academic programs in social sciences and sciences that correspond with national and regional objectives. The social science programs at USP, especially within the School of Law and Social Sciences (SoLaSS), encompass various disciplines including law, political science, international affairs, and governance, thereby providing students with essential skills for policy formulation, legal practices, and diplomatic functions.[110] Simultaneously, the sciences, particularly via the School of Agriculture, Geography, Environment, Ocean, and Natural Sciences (SAGEONS), highlight disciplines such as environmental management, marine science, and sustainable agriculture.[111]These initiatives are essential for national strategic research, tackling issues like as climate change, food security, and regional development. The academic programs of USP in law, governance, environmental sciences, and international affairs provide a solid framework for adopting a planned national institution for defence and security studies in Fiji. Utilising USP's expertise in policy formulation, climate resilience, and regional security matters, the institution can promote pioneering research and informed decision-making essential for national security and strategic planning.

Higher Education Infrastructure Analysis

The establishment of a national institute for defence and security studies could notably benefit from the collective capacities of Fiji National University (FNU), the University of Fiji, and the University of the South Pacific (USP). FNU's pragmatic educational method, rooted in technical and vocational proficiency, along with its research competencies in fields such as agriculture, health, and marine sectors, will guarantee the institution incorporates security issues related to national resources and key infrastructures. The University of Fiji's multidisciplinary approach, especially in security and defence studies, would provide significant academic and research perspectives, concentrating on the socio-political aspects of security, including

[108] University of South Pacific, "USP Shaping Pacific Futures, Explore Vuvale 2022 Prospectus," 2022, https://www.usp.ac.fj/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/2022-USP-Prospectus.pdf.
[109] University of South Pacific
[110] University of South Pacific
[111] University of South Pacific

international relations, climatic issues, and regional geopolitics. USP, as a regional institution, provides a comprehensive strategic outlook, using its proficiency in governance, law, environmental sciences, and regional collaboration, which are essential for tackling both conventional and unconventional security challenges in the Pacific.

Collectively, these institutions may provide a multidisciplinary framework for the proposed institute, guaranteeing that it addresses Fiji's urgent security requirements while also fostering long-term resilience and strategic planning at both national and regional levels. To address contemporary security challenges, the institute must prioritise the integration of academic research with practical defence strategies, promote inter-institutional collaboration, and customise its curriculum to Fiji's unique security context, encompassing environmental threats and geopolitical changes in the Pacific.[112]Therefore, the existing infrastructures have the potential to support a state-sponsored national institute for defence and security studies focus on research and empowerment for practitioners in Fiji national security.

Tables 1.2 illustrate Fiji's government commitment from 2016 to 2024 towards higher education institutions. It is drawn from Fiji budget estimates for the focus years. Notably, these commitments are critical when new national institutions or higher education centres are proposed for national capacity and capability, which are investigated in this paper.

University	2016-2017 Budget	% of GDP	2017-2018 Budget	% of GDP	2020-2021 Budget	% of GDP	2023-2024 Budget	% of GDP
University of South Pacific	30,217,468	0.3	30,745,864	0.28	27,618,635	0.28	33,530,000	0.25
Fiji National University	45,072,521	0.45	56,072,521	0.51	49,000,000	0.49	41,456,429	0.31
University of Fiji	2,334,862	0.02	3,442,029	0.03	2,734,962	0.03	2,804,774	0.02

Table 1.2: Summary of Fiji Government budget on Higher Education Institution[113]

[112] Kalouniwai, Jone, Jack Moceica, Akuila Savu, and Alipate Naulivou. "Achieving Best Practice through Security Cooperation: The Pacific Way," 2021. https://pacificsecurity.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/DB82_Part29.pdf

[113] Fiji Budget Estimates for 2016-2017, 2017-2018, 2020-2021, 2023-2024.

Chapter 6: The Role of Security Education in Fiji Strategies: A Social Science Approach

Education plays a crucial role in establishing a sense of security as it encompasses both the acquisition of knowledge and the understanding of our existence.[114]It goes beyond simply acquiring knowledge as well as taking actions to ensure the continuity and stability of existence.[115]In this sense, to delve and explore into the security rationale one focuses on the power of cognitive approaches that drives a nations' intellectual edge that not only conforms future policies but set platforms for interagency and international collaboration. More importantly, security education offers the potential interagency and ministerial collaboration concepts that harness a bottom-up approach for strategic and security curricula and correlation that integrate localised (traditional culture and national experience) and Westernized approaches.[116]

Exploring security studies as an academic paradigm involves delving into the framework of threats and examining how the concept of security has evolved in our ever-more uncertain world[117]. The importance of understanding the evolving global security landscape has reached unprecedented levels. With the rise of various threats, such as sophisticated terrorist attacks in urban areas worldwide, nuclear ambitions, the escalating danger of cyber-attacks, the resurgence of 'empires,' and the risks associated with the failure of new democracies, and the vulnerability of 'fragile' states, the need to address these issues has become more critical than ever.[118]Within this context, security studies appear as a scholarly discipline that seeks to offer insightful analysis and predictions for all individuals or entities involved in matters of security.[119]Lupulescu stated that security education should be an essential part of a person's education where its enables the population empowerment to gain the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to foster and enhance a security culture.[120]

Essence of Strategic Security Education

Education in security focuses on equipping individuals with the necessary skills to recognize and address potential risks and vulnerabilities, ultimately playing a crucial role in safeguarding national security. This requires primarily adopting a proactive

[114] Drabik, Krzysztof. "The Subjective Dimension of Security Education." *Security and Defence Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (October 22, 2018): 23–37. https://doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0012.6494.
[115] Drabik, Krzysztof.
[116] Kalouniwai, Jone, Jack Moceica, Akuila Savu, and Alipate Naulivou. "Achieving Best Practice through Security Cooperation: The Pacific Way," 2021. https://pacificsecurity.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/DB82_Part29.pdf
[117] Spahiu, Vilma, Blendi Lami, and Kristaq Xharo. "Within the Paradigm of Security Studies." *Polis* 18, no. 1 (January 1, 2019): 59–76. https://doi.org/10.58944/vpdc1677.
[118] Spahiu, Vilma, Blendi Lami, and Kristaq Xharo
[119] Rauno Pirinen, Juha Mäkinen, and Arto Salonen. "Towards Comprehensive Security Related Pedagogy - an Approach to Learning and Resilience",*Theseus (Ammattikorkeakoulujen)*, January 1, 2016. https://doi.org/10.5220/0006090102540262.
[120] Lupulescu, Georgiana-Daniela. (228-229)

approach.[121]The concept and environment of security are in a state of perpetual, uninterrupted, and rapid evolution.[122]The security process is becoming more challenging as scenarios are constantly evolving. Preparing for change is the most effective method of predicting the future. Academic forums are at the vanguard of analysis, evaluation, and opportunities for solutions.[123] Prominent institutions in the Western world, including universities, academies, colleges, and institutes, are dedicated to the study, explanation, and prediction of security-related developments. They provide scientific analysis and recommendations to decision-making institutions about the dynamics of developments.[124]Security studies now include a wide range of complicated national and international topics, including sovereignty, military power, and state-to-state confrontations. Economic capacity, ethnic and ideological tensions, non-state actors, climatic change, and political instability are studied. At the 2010 Lisbon Summit, NATO approved a New Strategic Concept that prioritises "human security" and individual well-being and safety.

In the case of Albania, the country's approach to security studies has been influenced by its unique historical background and the difficulties of embracing Western norms while moving away from a traditional security mindset. Throughout the Cold War era, Albania's security studies had a limited scope, primarily centred on safeguarding its territory. These studies were strongly shaped by ideological and military doctrines. The progress of this approach has been sluggish as traditional concepts continue to dominate academic and institutional frameworks.

Nevertheless, recent endeavours, especially in partnership with Western institutions, have been made to update Albania's security education. These efforts aim to introduce comprehensive curricula that cover a wide range of security issues, such as human security, economic stability, and transnational threats. The reforms in Albania demonstrate the country's ongoing efforts to move away from a history of strict, militaristic security views towards a more comprehensive understanding that incorporates current global security issues and equips future leaders to navigate a rapidly evolving security landscape. European University of Tirana (UET) is at the forefront of modernising security studies in Albania, setting itself apart from the traditional approaches that have historically dominated the field. UET stands out from traditional institutions by adopting a modern, interdisciplinary curriculum that incorporates international relations, strategic studies, crisis management, and other relevant subjects. This approach proves a notable change towards a more comprehensive view of security, which includes aspects related to human well-being, economic stability, and transnational cooperation. UET's programs are carefully crafted to meet global standards, taking inspiration from top Western universities. The goal is to equip students not just for national security roles but also to actively participate in international forums. UET is playing a crucial role in preparing security professionals for the challenges of the 21st century by providing advanced modules and promoting a holistic understanding of security.

[121] Lupulescu, Georgiana-Daniela. (228-229)
[122] Spahiu, Vilma, Blendi Lami, and Kristaq Xharo
[123] Spahiu, Vilma, Blendi Lami, and Kristaq Xharo
[124] Spahiu, Vilma, Blendi Lami, and Kristaq Xharo

Towards a Strategic and Security culture

When Lupescu examined the security education and culture literature, it became clear that there is often a misperception between the concepts of security culture and security education. The two concerns share a common objective: ensuring that the population possesses the necessary knowledge, skills, and behaviour to uphold and enhance national security.[125]Nevertheless, conceptual and approach disparities exist. Security education should primarily be the responsibility of the state, necessitating a structured setting and specialised teaching methods that are tailored to the population's experience and status.[126]On the other hand, security culture is the ultimate outcome of successful security education. This distinction is significant in shaping practitioners.[127]Culture teaches us norms, behaviour, and practices that must be followed by a group or community. A society without standards, or culture, is anarchy where everyone does their own thing and considers nothing. We need culture to operate and avoid conflict. In the security zone, we see the necessity to develop a culture of security by establishing laws, norms, and behaviour so that society feels free and safe.[128]

In order to build a strong security culture, security education must focus on skills, critical thinking, and the capacity to analyse the environment and adapt. However, security education cannot be implemented without government involvement, a legal framework, systematisation of the learning process, and on-going content updates.[129]Security education continues after leaving the institutional context. It is permanent and applies to both professional and personal life, especially in state security agencies. Education and culture are essential for the well-being and safety of individuals, communities, and nations, both at home and abroad. Developing a strong security culture is often the result of successful security education. Undoubtedly, the development and reinforcement of a security culture are greatly influenced by practical experience. However, the importance of education cannot be overlooked, particularly when it takes place in a structured setting, with up-to-date and reliable information delivered by knowledgeable instructors using adaptable methods tailored to the audience.[130] A cultural perspective that influences contemporary security thinking and underscores its humanistic components, transcending ordinary theoretical assertions intended for academic discourse. Modern civilization's growth, nearly universal systems, complexity, global character, and high specialisation benefit this cultural idea.[131] Adapting to a technological environment is now difficult.[132]Education is crucial to security growth. Education is becoming more important as civilisation and culture develop. Modernisation made people think about the past and future. One paradigm in modern security discourse is subjectivity (personal security), which prioritises cultural over naturalist

[125] Lupulescu, Georgiana-Daniela
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[131] Lupulescu, Georgiana-Daniela
[132] Drabik, Krzysztof. "The Subjective Dimension of Security Education." *Security and Defence Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (October 22, 2018): 23–37. https://doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0012.6494.

perspectives and puts man at the centre of security development, including education.[133]

Integrating Security Education and Security Culture into Fiji's Context

In alignment with the social science approach of security education, the proposed institute for defence and security education holds immense potential to become the foundation of a comprehensive strategy that brings together various government ministries, moving away from the conventional isolated mind-set that has frequently impeded coordinated national security endeavours. Through the centralisation of education and research, the defence and security education institute aims to foster a cohesive approach to security practices across various sectors. This will facilitate shared understanding of security threats and the necessary strategies to combat them effectively. Adopting a comprehensive strategy is essential in addressing the diverse security issues that Fiji confronts, including climate change, public health risks, transnational crime, and geopolitical tensions in the Indo-Pacific region.

Furthermore, the importance of a cognitive approach within this framework cannot be emphasised enough. A national defence and security institute for Fiji has the potential to lead the way in fostering strategic thinking and critical analysis skills among Fiji's defence and public servants professionals, enabling them to effectively predict and address complex security challenges. Through partnerships with local higher education institutions like the University of the South Pacific (USP), Fiji National University (FNU), and the University of Fiji, as well as international collaborators such as the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA) and the US Naval War College, the propose defence and security institute is able to incorporate a blend of local expertise and global standards into its curriculum. This collaboration aims to cultivate a security culture that considers local realities and benefits from global perspectives, resulting in a strong and flexible security framework for Fiji.[134]By adopting an integrated approach, Fiji's security strategy becomes comprehensive, proactive, and resilient, establishing the nation as a regional security leader in the broader Indo-Pacific context.

[133] Drabik, Krzysztof. "The Subjective Dimension of Security Education." *Security and Defence Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (October 22, 2018): 23–37. https://doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0012.6494.
[134] Kalouniwai, Jone, Jack Moceica, Akuila Savu, and Alipate Naulivou. "Achieving Best Practice through Security Cooperation: The Pacific Way," 2021. https://pacificsecurity.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/DB82_Part29.pdf

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of Research Findings: Fiji Context

This thesis questions the need to establish an institute for defence and security studies for Fiji, prompted by evolving regional strategic and security concerns, the advancement of the national interest, and future causal logic decisions required at the strategic level. Fiji's geostrategic location and its regional diplomatic activities highlight its crucial role in the Pacific for regional progress and stability. Notwithstanding its increasing importance, Fiji continues to rely excessively on foreign and partner countries to provide defence and security studies education for its military and civil servants' professional development. This reliance constrains its ability to develop local resources based on national experiences and traditional philosophies and autonomously tackle the escalating complexities of future security challenges.

A national defence and security institute could bridge this gap by developing localised solutions tailored to Fiji's strategic context. The overall security challenges spanning geopolitical conflicts, peacekeeping missions, and the impact of climate change, transnational crime, and cyber threats require a comprehensive national framework that enhances best practices in policy, planning, and implementation. Fiji should enhance its defence and public sector capabilities to foresee, mitigate, and address this strategic security challenge. A dedicated national institute might significantly contribute to fostering resilience and autonomy, especially to curb political instability and the persistent influence of the military in governance.

The universities in Fiji, FNU, and USP have ample academic resources, but they do not offer any specific national security and defence programs driven by strategic needs that regulate a whole government approach for education and research coordination. The University of Fiji's recent defence and security studies programme setup has paved the way for such an academic approach.

The education capability for national security could serve as a model for other PICs. Furthermore, integrating theoretical knowledge with practical experiences, the proposed institute seeks to improve security education and best practices. In addition to fortifying Fiji's framework for national security, this would establish it as a leader in the region for security education contextualised for other PICs.

Analysis of Policy Implications

There would be significance national policy implications for establishing a defence and security institute for Fiji. Establishing such an institute would represent a shift toward increased independent thinking in Fiji's defence and security strategy on the home front. It would balance Fiji's reliance on international defence education programs and enable the creation of a curriculum that is appropriate for the local environment and international scene. Fiji can create a more unified national security strategy that combines local and regional customs and values with international security norms by investing in the educational and professional development of its

own defence and public sector leaders. [135] Multiple challenges threatening Fiji, including geopolitical competition, the impact of climate change, cyber threats, maritime disputes, and transnational crime, are also encountered by neighbouring Pacific nations. A national defence and security institute in Fiji can be modelled by other PICs to support their own national security framework. It could also strengthen regional cooperation and provide educational and policy development opportunities for leaders around the Pacific. This would bolster regional security and diminish dependence on external entities in accordance with the objectives of the PIF Blue Pacific Strategy.

Public-private partnerships and collaboration with international partners could facilitate the practical implementation of this institute. Fiji could capitalize on both international best practices and local knowledge incorporation by leveraging the expertise of global military academies and security institutions, including those in the United States, New Zealand, and Australia. The institute could also function as a research centre, fostering innovation in critical areas such as managing great power competition contextualised on Fiji perspectives in navigating political instabilities and ethnic division, the impact of cyber threats , resource management, and climate change adaptation; all of which are essential for the Fiji and the Pacific's future stability and prosperity.

Policy Recommendations for Establishing the Institute in Fiji

The following policy recommendations are essential for establishing a national defence and security institute in Fiji, tasked with cognitive development and empowerment, collating local intellectual property for research, and advisory formulations. Firstly, the Fiji government's commitment is crucial, as it must prioritize the institute by investing sufficient financial resources and regulating institutional support. Such policies entail establishing public and international collaborations for infrastructure advancement, faculty acquisition, and program design. Secondly, regulating interagency collaboration is essential. The effort and policy towards interagency collaboration entails the requirement of a holistic national strategy that regulates the integration of key ministries such as defence, foreign affairs, economy and strategic planning, trade, agriculture and primary industries, Indigenous or I-Taukei, and multi-ethnic affairs and education to formulate a multidisciplinary curriculum. Engagement with civic society and the commercial sector will guarantee a comprehensive strategy for national security.

In addition, regional and international partnerships are fundamental for developing Fiji's national security capability through education. Enhancing cooperation with regional institutions such as USP is essential for using existing academic expertise. The higher education collaboration includes partnerships with respected defence colleges in Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and the UK, which will provide essential knowledge and resources to create a primary curriculum that reflects integrated local and Westernised knowledge for education and research. The latter should be extended to the broader Asia region, noting Fiji's defence partners like Malaysia, India, China, and Indonesia. Furthermore, leadership development is essential for a broader strategic approach, especially for middle-level career professionals. The proposed institution should provide specialized leadership

[135] Kalouniwai, Jone, Jack Moceica, Akuila Savu, and Alipate Naulivou

development programs for mid-career and senior individuals in both defence and civilian servants. This establishment could cultivate leadership development in national security and protection domains, equipping future leaders to address intricate security challenges in a progressively linked global landscape.

Future Research Recommendation

While this thesis highlights the essential need for a national defence and security institute in Fiji, additional research is necessary to enhance the institutional framework, curriculum, and operation focus. With research gaps identified, it is recommended that a curriculum innovation study be focused on examining the integration of Fiji and the broader Pacific local and traditional knowledge based on its national experiences post-colonial era, with the global security frameworks. Case studies from places like Albania and Romania may provide insights into enhancing strategic security education via local expertise. In addition, further research on climate change impact is necessary to evaluate the implications of climate change on national and regional security. This should guide both policy formulation and teaching material inside the institution.

Further research studies could focus on cyber-security and emerging technologies, considering the increasing significance of these developments and threats in the Pacific. The research on this could concentrate on integrating technology breakthroughs and the impact of disruptive technologies into the institute's curriculum to adequately equip future leaders for digital security problems in the Pacific. In addition, more extensive research could focus on how Fiji may enhance its leadership in regional security cooperation by using its peacekeeping knowledge and experience to foster collective regional stability and advance regional commitments into global citizenship roles.

Conclusion

Fiji's strategic significance in the Pacific and its growing vulnerability to both conventional and unconventional security threats highlight the urgent requirement for a National Defence and Security Institute. Enhancing local capacity in security education, research, and policy formulation would enable Fiji to strengthen its strategic autonomy further and make substantial contributions to the overall security of the Pacific region. This institution has the capacity to serve as a fundamental element of Pacific security, promoting cooperation, innovation, and resilience to tackle 21st-century concerns.

The creation of this institution will not only bolster security resilience but also rectify significant deficiencies in Fiji's existing defence education system by amalgamating Western security ideas with local knowledge and concepts. This will allow Fiji to create a unique educational framework corresponding to the country's geopolitical and cultural setting. This institution would provide stakeholders with the means to formulate holistic answers to regional issues, including climate change, maritime security, and transnational crime, while simultaneously enhancing Fiji's leadership in regional peacekeeping and diplomacy. Additionally, the institution would function as a regional platform, promoting joint security initiatives among Pacific Island Countries (PICs) and diminishing dependence on foreign organizations for defence

training and education. This comprehensive defence and security education strategy will enhance national and regional security while equipping a new generation of leaders to manage the changing global security environment adeptly.

By addressing these strategic and security challenges, the institution could guarantee that Fiji and its regional allies are more adequately prepared to confront the complex challenges of the modern age, whether via proactive policy formulation, strategic alliances, or adaptive security education. This program is crucial for Fiji's national security strategy and critical for the long-term stability for the nation and the Pacific region through educational and research pathways.

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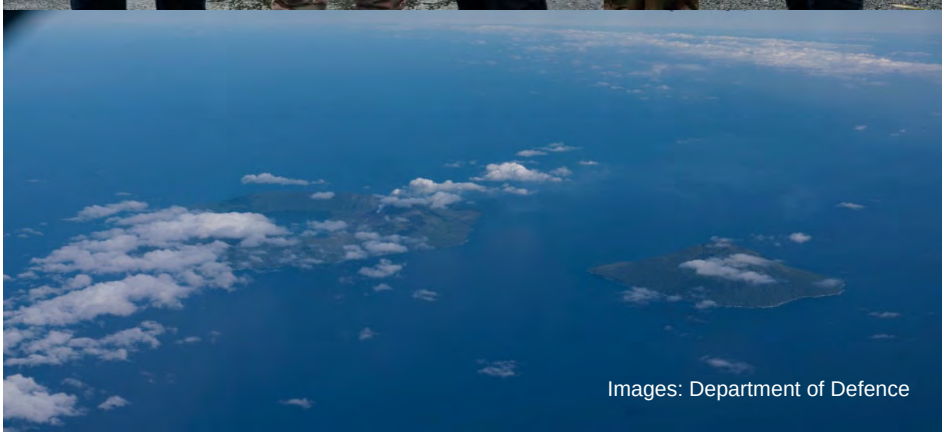
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Images: Department of Defence

A Thirst for Survival: Climate Change and the National Security Dimension of Water in Tonga

Author

Colonel Soane MV 'Aholelei, Tonga.

Colonel Aholelei (Tau) is currently the Deputy Chief of Defence Staff of His Majesty's Armed Forces. He is a graduate of the Australian Command and Staff College (ACSC) in 2013 and the Defence Strategic Studies Course (DSSC) at the Australian War College in 2025, and oversees governance and capability development.

Summary

This study examines how Tonga's National Security is threatened by water scarcity that is driven by climate change. Tonga will continue to face the gradually growing challenges of sustaining livelihoods, protecting public health, and preserving national sovereignty due to the rising sea levels, erratic rainfall patterns, and damages to its already fragile water infrastructure.

Central to the research question is how water scarcity effects interact with the economic, social and geopolitical sectors, and the impact on Tonga's nation security. Furthermore, recognizing strategic responses are necessary to protect its resilience. A qualitative case study approach is used in this thesis to analyze national policy documents, academic literature, regional and international frameworks.

The thesis confirms that water scarcity is a force multiplier that deepens Tonga's vulnerabilities. The decline in agricultural productivity impacts food self-sufficiency, increases import dependence and erodes economic independence. And the restrictions to fresh water worsen sanitation, health risks, human security and societal resilience. Water insecurity has become a means for developed donor states to project influence. This results in raising both opportunities and risks for Tonga's sovereignty.

In concluding this study, addressing Tonga's water crisis urgently demands an integrated strategy. That combines domestic adaptation with regional cooperation, and strategic diplomacy to protect its long-term security and sovereignty.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

The Kingdom of Tonga has become all too familiar with the relentless and devastating impacts of climate change over the past decade.[1] Like many other small island developing states (SIDS) across the Pacific, Tonga contributes minimally to global carbon emissions yet bears a disproportionate share of climate-related hardships. The nation has faced a rising tide of environmental challenges including sea level rise, increasing surface temperatures, declining rainfall during the wet season, and the growing intensity of tropical cyclones. These threats have repeatedly tested the resilience of Tonga's communities and ecosystems. Despite significant progress in disaster preparedness and response planning, these efforts were severely tested and, in some respects, overwhelmed on 15 January 2022, when the Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha'apai volcano erupted with unprecedented force.[2] The explosion was the largest recorded submarine eruption on record, generating shockwaves that circled the globe and producing tsunami waves over 15 meters high. Within moments, the once-clear skies were choked by dense volcanic ash that plunged the islands into darkness, blanketing homes, crops, and infrastructure alike. The ensuing tidal surges not only devastated coastal communities but also drove seawater deep into Tonga's freshwater lenses,[3] dramatically increasing salinity levels in many rural areas.

In addition to the contamination of groundwater, rainwater tanks, the primary source of drinking water for many households were buried, cracked, or polluted by volcanic ash. This left the nation with virtually no access to clean and safe water. In the aftermath of cyclones, Tongans have long relied on boiling water as a purification method, but this time, the problem was beyond remedy as ash could not be boiled away. Children and adults alike endured an unrelenting thirst. Indeed, the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai eruption is a rare phenomenon that may never happen for another century.[4] Along with the terror of its destruction, it raised a critical concern regarding the integrity of water security in Tonga.

This thesis seeks to examine the multifaceted effects of climate change on water security in the Kingdom of Tonga. It will analyse the structural weaknesses inherent in Tonga's water infrastructure, the pressures arising from population growth, and the broader implications of water scarcity for food security, public health, and economic resilience.[5] Furthermore, it will assess the current adaptation measures and policy responses aimed at safeguarding the nation's water supply, emphasizing the urgent need for climate-resilient infrastructure, evidence-based governance, and

[1] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "Australia and Kingdom of Tonga Development Partnership Plan 2024–2029" (Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2024), https://www.dfat.gov.au.
[2] Government of Tonga, "Budget Statement 2022-2023" (Nuku'alofa, Tonga: Ministry of Finance, June 14, 2022),15-17.
[3] Ian White and Tony Falkland, "Management of Freshwater Lenses on Small Pacific Islands," *Hydrogeology Journal* 18, no. 1 (November 11, 2009): 227–46, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10040-009-0525-0, 228.
[4] Hag, Piango, and CFST, "Priorities next Steps for Greening Humanitarian Action in Tonga: Contextualising the Framework for Greening Humanitarian Action in the Pacific" (Melbourne: HAG: Humanitarian Horizons , 2024),7 and 8
[5] Ian White, Tony Falkland, and Tevita Fatai, "Vulnerability of Groundwater in Tongatapu, Kingdom of Tonga" (Canberra, ACT: Australia National University (ANU) Press, 2009), 268.

sustainable investment in water management systems. Ultimately, this research will frame water security as a non-traditional security (NTS) concern recognizing that climate change and water scarcity are not only environmental or developmental issues,[6] but existential threats to human welfare, national stability, and even sovereignty itself.

Research Question

This thesis is driven by two key research questions: *How does climate change affect water security in Tonga?* And *what are the national security implications of these impacts?* Having served as a military officer for over thirty years, I have developed a deep understanding of the challenges that arise in resource-constrained environments, particularly during national emergencies. The 2022 Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha'apai volcanic eruption served as a stark reminder of the fragility of Tonga's water systems and the profound consequences that environmental disasters can have on human security and state stability. During the crisis, my unit worked tirelessly to support affected communities, yet our operations were severely hampered by the pervasive volcanic ash. Freshwater supplies, which would normally be rendered safe through boiling, were rendered undrinkable, as the ash contamination could not be removed through conventional means.[7] Simultaneously, the massive seawater intrusion caused by the tsunami further degraded groundwater sources, compounding the crisis. Even the rainwater tanks that usually sustain communities in the aftermath of cyclones were buried or contaminated by ash, leaving many households without any access to potable water.

This experience made it clear to me that our limited water resources are at great risk and are directly threatening our national security. The military's ability to aid civil authorities during national emergencies requires safe sustainable water supply. But more importantly, water is a critical need for Tongans both in good and difficult times. For a small nation like ours, every individual has a part to play and is required to be fully operational and resilient in hard times. Ultimately, it is a national strategic necessity that our water resources are safeguarded to ensure our Island Kingdom continues to thrive into the future, and that starts now.

Research Method

This thesis employs a qualitative, interdisciplinary approach grounded in a constructivist epistemology,[8] in order to explore the complex interplay between climate change, water security, and national security in Tonga. In doing so, it seeks to understand how climate-induced stressors affect water resources and the

[6] François Gemenne, Bastien Alex, and Alice Baillat, "Implications of Climate Change on Defence and Security in the South Pacific by 2030" (Paris, France: Directorate General for International Relations and Strategy (DGRIS) of the French Ministry of Armed Forces, 2019), 14.
[7] Emma Newland, "Identification of Options for a Partnership Program to Strengthen Water Management and WASH Service Delivery in Tonga" (Melbourne, Australia: GHD Pty Ltd, August 13, 2021), 6.
[8] Margie Burns et al., "Constructivist Grounded Theory or Interpretive Phenomenology? Methodological Choices within Specific Study Contexts," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 21, no. 21 (January 2022): 1–13, https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221077758,1.

subsequent impacts on both human and state security.[9]

The research methodology incorporates document analysis, drawing on a diverse range of primary and secondary sources, including government policy documents, strategic frameworks, and scholarly literature addressing water-related challenges in Tonga. To provide comparative and contextual depth, the study also includes a case study of Fiji's water governance and climate adaptation practices, offering valuable regional insights and lessons applicable to the Tongan context.

In addition, the thesis employs discourse analysis and comparative case study methods, with particular attention paid to integrating cultural perspectives and traditional knowledge systems.[10] These analytical tools will be used to uncover the social, political, and cultural dimensions of water insecurity and their implications for national resilience. While the study acknowledges limitations such as data scarcity, it seeks to address these challenges through a careful selection and triangulation of reliable source materials to ensure methodological rigor and ethical integrity.[11] Ethical considerations have guided every stage of the research process, ensuring transparency, respect, and accuracy in data handling and analysis.

Doing so is meant to bridge gaps in the existing knowledge, allowing for the emergence of new perspectives and ideas. Ultimately, the thesis aims to inform both policy and practice through enhancing the resilience of Tongan communities, and by contributing to the safeguarding of the nation's sovereignty in the face of escalating climate threats.

A Caveat

A distinct limitation is the human relationship between various agencies and the local communities. The relationship, communication and interaction are only on a case by case basis, very ad hoc. Lacking a sense of community or ownership, and this is reflected in how water is managed in Tonga. First, there is a lack of local data on water consumption, in part due to outdated urban and rural water infrastructure, as well as unreliable figures in relation to domestic and international migration. The lack of a centralized agency responsible for climate change is also the cause for this lack of information and database. It is also the cause for the lack of a clear policy and strategy that align with the Tongan cultural and social contexts, as the country's policies and strategies are often borrowed from other pacific island countries (PICs) without much local translation.

Significance

This thesis emerged from my professional curiosity and a recognition of the limited understanding surrounding climate change as a non-traditional security threat (NTS). In seeking to explore the role of His Majesty's Armed Forces (HMAF) in addressing

[9] National Intelligence Council, "Global Trends: A More Contested World" (Washington DC, US: Publication of the National Intelligence Council, 2021), 2-3.
[10] Maria Julia Trombetta, "Environmental Security and Climate Change: Analysing the Discourse," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 21, no. 4 (January 26, 2008): 585–602, https://doi.org/10.1080/09557570802452920, 585
[11] Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2018), chapter 1.

the challenges posed by climate change–induced water scarcity an area that has received little scholarly or policy attention despite its critical implications for Tonga's national security this thesis challenges conventional security narratives by reframing water scarcity as a strategic security issue, rather than a purely developmental or environmental concern. Indeed, the existing literature reaffirms this narrative by presenting climate change and water security as humanitarian and ecological problems.[12] However, this thesis presents climate change and water access as a strategic threat with direct and far-reaching ramifications for Tonga's sovereignty, public health and safety, economic progress, stability, and regional resilience. By combining traditional knowledge (including shared knowledge with regional neighbours) and environmental science with national security frameworks will provide the study with a culturally grounded, whole-of-nation approach.[13]

By drawing lessons from other Pacific Island countries (PICs), this thesis seeks to identify practical strategies to strengthen freshwater governance and enhance Tonga's overall water security and resilience. In doing so, it aims to offer actionable insights for policymakers, security planners, and both governmental and non-governmental actors including international organisations (IOs) regarding the treatment of water as an NTS issue within the Pacific context.[14]

Moreover, this thesis aspires to raise awareness and contribute to the implementation of Tonga's National Security Strategy by addressing the evolving challenges of climate-related security threats.[15] It seeks to inform and influence the strategic thinking of national leadership as they adapt to the shifting dynamics of climate change, particularly its impacts on water security and broader national stability. Ultimately, the thesis aims to elevate the profile of climate change and water scarcity within Tonga's national security discourse, helping to define what it means to safeguard and sustain an island nation in an era of growing climatic uncertainty.[16]

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organised into eight chapters, each systematically examining the complex interconnections between climate change, water security, and national sovereignty in Tonga. The discussion is divided into two main sections. Part One(Chapters 2 to 4) explores the concept and realities of water security within the contexts of Tonga and Fiji, providing a comparative foundation for understanding

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[12] Pacific Islands Forum, "Boe Declaration on Regional Security | Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat," forumsec.org, September 5, 2018, https://forumsec.org/publications/boe-declaration-regional-security.

[13] "Chapter 9: Thirst for Life: Water Security and Changing Climate in the Pacific – Pacific Dynamics," Pacificdynamics.nz, 2024, https://pacificdynamics.nz/chapter-9-thirst-for-life-water-security-and-changing-climate-in-the-pacific/.

[14] Joanne Wallis and Anna Powles, "ASPI: SPECIAL REPORT Smooth Sailing? How Australia, New Zealand and the United States Partner In-and With-the Pacific Islands," 2023,

[15] Government of Tonga, "Budget Statement 2022-2023" (Nuku'alofa, Tonga: Ministry of Finance, June 14, 2022), 22.

[16] Jess Marinaccio, "Oceania Matters in Diplomacy Fry, Greg and Sandra Tarte (Eds). 2015. The New Pacific Diplomacy", Canberra: ANU Press, 326 Pp, ISBN: 9781925022827," *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 58, no. 3 (December 2017): 396–97, https://doi.org/10.1111/apv.12152, 10.

regional challenges. Part Two (Chapters 5 to 7) focuses on strategies and pathways for strengthening water security in Tonga, identifying practical and policy-based approaches to enhance resilience and sustainability.

Chapter 1 is the introduction. Chapter 2 reviews the existing literature to define key concepts such as 'water security' and to identify the climate-related drivers of water stress in Tonga, alongside governance challenges in view of regional and international frameworks. Chapter 3 undertakes a case study of Fiji, illustrating best practices and lessons learned to enhance Tonga's water governance and resilience strategies. Chapter 4 will examine in-depth the water security challenges in Tonga. Chapter 5 explores regional cooperation, norms, and political action, emphasizing the importance of regional forums and climate finance. Small island nations such as Tonga do not have the resources to solve our water insecurities and we must use regionalism. Chapter 6 examines external aid and geopolitical risks, discussing how foreign assistance from various powers impacts sovereignty and security, and proposes mitigation strategies. This is integral for Tonga's water security, but it can act as a double edged sword and Tonga must know how to navigate this not always straight path. Chapter 7 develops strategic and diplomatic approaches, focusing on water diplomacy, regional alliances, and navigating geopolitical tensions to uphold Tonga's sovereignty and long-term resilience. Chapter 8 integrates human security and economic sovereignty, emphasising community engagement, traditional knowledge, and the role of agriculture, while analysing urban vulnerabilities and local solutions. This is perhaps one of the most important concepts that will provide the most sustainable and resilient water security in Tonga. The Conclusion presents a long-term resilience framework, advocating for adaptive governance, infrastructure development, community empowerment, and regional partnerships. It concludes with actionable recommendations to embed water security within Tonga's national security architecture, safeguarding sovereignty amid climate uncertainties.

Chapter 2 – Water Security in the Pacific: The Tongan Experience

Despite being surrounded by the largest ocean in the world, Tonga faces a persistent and growing challenge to its water security. Understanding this paradox requires an appreciation of the cultural values that shape Tongan society. In Tonga, as across much of the Pacific, resilience is not only a necessity but a way of life: communities recover from disasters, adapt to limited resources, and draw strength from deeply rooted Christian faith. Biblical teachings such as Matthew 6:34, *"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself"* capture the ethos of many Tongans, where emphasis is placed on divine provision for the present rather than deliberate preparation for the future.

While this cultural orientation has fostered social cohesion and endurance, it has also, at times, hindered proactive governance and long-term planning in critical areas such as water management. These dynamics extend beyond resource management, influencing education, governance, and national strategies for navigating both domestic and international challenges. However, the accelerating impacts of climate change have rendered traditional approaches to resilience insufficient. The Hunga Tonga-Hunga Haapai volcanic eruption caused contamination of all the water resources in Tonga, rendering the water unsafe to consumption. The growing threat to Tonga's water security underscores the urgent need to balance cultural values with forward-looking strategies, ensuring that the nation can both honour its traditions and adequately prepare for the environmental uncertainties ahead.

The aim of this chapter is to provide an account of how climate change undermines water security in the Pacific region, and Tonga in particular, and to determine the risks that water insecurity poses to national security. Based on a review of the current literature, the chapter will begin by defining the dimensions of water security. It will then focus on the impacts of climate change on water security and, in turn, its effects on national security. Next, it will explore the governance dimensions of water management and evaluate existing adaptation strategies and solutions in Tonga.

Defining 'Water Security' in the Pacific

According to the United Nations, water security is "the capacity of a population to safeguard sustainable access to adequate quantities of acceptable quality water for sustaining livelihoods, human well-being, and socio-economic development; for ensuring protection against water-borne pollution and water-related disasters; and for preserving ecosystems in a climate of peace and political stability."[17] This multidimensional definition underscores that water security extends beyond availability, encompassing environmental, social, and institutional resilience.

The Asian Water Development Outlook (AWDO) evaluates water security through a framework built around five key dimensions. These dimensions encompass the full

[17] UN-Water, *Water Security and the Global Water Agenda: A UN-Water Analytical Brief* (Hamilton, Canada: United Nations University, 2013), 1, https://www.unwater.org/sites/default/files/app/uploads/2017/05/water_security_summary_Oct2013.pdf.

range of water-related challenges faced by countries across Asia and the Pacific. The first is rural or household water security, which measures access to safe and reliable water and sanitation services in rural areas. The second, economic water security, assesses how effectively water resources are used to support economic activities such as agriculture, industry, and energy production. The third dimension, urban water security, focuses on the capacity of cities to provide sustainable and equitable water services to their growing populations. The fourth, environmental water security, examines the health of ecosystems and the extent to which natural water systems are protected and maintained. Finally, water-related disaster security evaluates a country's ability to manage and mitigate the impacts of floods, droughts, and other water-induced disasters. Together, these five dimensions provide a comprehensive picture of a nation's overall water security and resilience.[18] Despite growing awareness, none of the 49 ADB member states, including developed economies, achieved "model" water security status in 2020.[19] It is interesting to note that although Pacific Island countries performed relatively well in environmental resilience, limited progress was shown overall. Governance weaknesses particularly inadequate financing, poor management of trade-offs, and weak monitoring systems remain key barriers.[20]

In fact, for Tonga, the country's freshwater supply is primarily derived from rainwater harvesting and groundwater recharge, forming the foundation of its climate adaptation strategy. The country's carbonate islands contain freshwater lenses positioned above saline groundwater, displaying vertical salinity gradients that intensify with depth from low-salinity freshwater through a diffuse transition zone to seawater.[21] The Mataki'eua–Tongamai wellfield on Tongatapu supplies most of Nuku'alofa's freshwater needs. However, data on village-level wells and boreholes remain limited, complicating equitable water governance.[22] These decentralized sources face high risks of microbial and chemical contamination from aging septic systems and pit latrines, undermining progress toward SDG Target 6.1 (universal access to safe water) of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Groundwater infrastructure data is also lacking in Ha'apai and Vava'u, where dependence on unmonitored wells persists.[23] Addressing these information gaps is essential to strengthen climate-resilient water management and improve SDG 6 indicators. Such challenges are discussed in greater detail in the subsequent

[18] Asian Development Bank (ADB), *Asian Water Development Outlook 2020: Advancing Water Security across Asia and the Pacific* (Manila: ADB, 2020), https://www.adb.org/publications/asian-water-development-outlook-2020
[19] Asian Development Bank (ADB), *Asian Water Development Outlook 2020: Advancing Water Security across Asia and the Pacific* (Manila: ADB, 2020), https://www.adb.org/publications/asian-water-development-outlook-2020
[20] Asian Development Bank (ADB), *Asian Water Development Outlook 2020: Advancing Water Security across Asia and the Pacific* (Manila: ADB, 2020)
[21] shneel Sharan, Alvin Lal, and Bithin Datta, "Evaluating the Impacts of Climate Change and Water Over-Abstraction on Groundwater Resources in Tonga," *Groundwater for Sustainable Development* 21 (2023): [3], https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gsd.2022.100839.
[22] Ian White, Tony Falkland, and Tevita Fatai, *Vulnerability of Groundwater in Tongatapu, Kingdom of Tonga: Groundwater Evaluation and Monitoring Assessment*, Final Draft Report (Suva, Fiji: SOPAC and EDF-8, 2009), 68.
[23] Australian Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO. *Current and Future Climate of Tonga*. Melbourne: Pacific-Australia Climate Change Science and Adaptation Planning Program, 2014, 4,

sections.

Tonga's Geography and Climate Context

The Kingdom of Tonga, a Polynesian archipelago, comprises approximately 169 islands dispersed across 700,000 square kilometers of the southwestern Pacific Ocean. Its unique geography, characterized by low-lying islands and a limited landmass of roughly 750 square kilometres, renders it exceptionally vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation.[24] According to the 2021 national census, approximately 75% of Tonga's population resides on Tongatapu, with more than one-third located within the capital city of Nuku'alofa. The remaining quarter is distributed across the other four island divisions.[25] The country's demographic profile reveals a youthful population, with 55% of individuals under 25.[26] Economically in 2023, Tonga recorded a per capita GDP of T$10,410, reflecting a growth rate of 2.1%.[27] Tonga ranks third globally among 181 nations on the World Risk Index, underscoring its environmental and climatic hazards exposure.[28] Progress toward the SDGs remains limited, with Tonga achieving only four out of seventeen targets—among them, SDG 6, which focuses on universal access to clean water and sanitation.[29]

The archipelago is divided into five principal divisions: Tongatapu, Vava'u, Ha'apai, 'Eua, and the Niuas. The western islands are primarily of volcanic origin, while the eastern islands are characterized by uplifted coral limestone and sandy substrates. Several of the eastern isles, most prominently Tongatapu, possess a mantle of fertile volcanic soil deposited through historical eruptions from the western volcanic islands. This geographic diversity influences the distribution of freshwater resources and the vulnerability of local communities to climate-related hazards.[30]

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[24] Tonga Statistics Department, *Tonga Census Population and Housing Factsheet 2021* (Nuku'alofa: Tonga Statistics Department, 2021), 1, https://tongastats.gov.to/download/272/census-report-and-factsheet/7645/census-factsheet-2021.pdf.

[25] Tonga Statistics Department, *Tonga Census Population and Housing Factsheet 2021* (Nuku'alofa: Tonga Statistics Department, 2021), 1, https://tongastats.gov.to/download/272/census-report-and-factsheet/7645/census-factsheet-2021.pdf.

[26] Tonga Statistics Department, *Tonga Census Population and Housing Factsheet 2021* (Nuku'alofa: Tonga Statistics Department, 2021), 2.

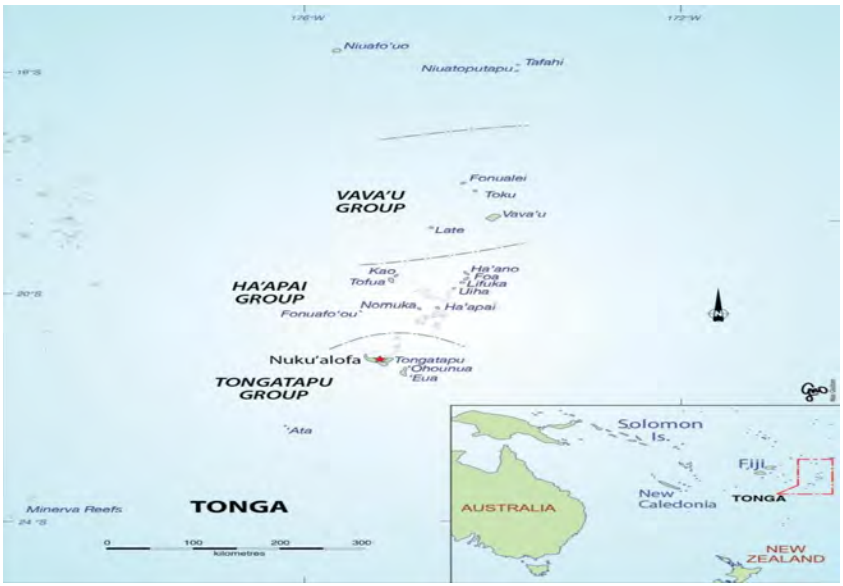
[27] Ministry of Finance, *National Accounts Statistics Bulletin Financial Year 2022–2023* (Nuku'alofa: Ministry of Finance, 2024), 8, https://www.finance.gov.to/sites/default/files/2024-10/GDP_Bulletin-2022-23_final.pdf.

[28] Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft and Institute for International Law of Peace and Armed Conflict (IFHV), *WorldRiskReport 2021: Focus – Social Protection* (Berlin: Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft, 2021), 6, https://weltrisikobericht.de/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/WorldRiskReport_2021_Online.pdf

[29] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025* (New York: UN DESA, 2025), 10, https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2025/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2025.pdf. UNSD

[30] Tonga Statistics Department, *Tonga Census Population and Housing Factsheet 2021* (Nuku'alofa: Tonga Statistics Department, 2021), 1

Figure 1: Map of Tonga



Tonga experiences a tropical climate distinguished by two principal seasons: a wet season extending from November to April and a dry season from May to October. The wet season aligns with the cyclone period and is typically associated with elevated temperatures and increased rainfall, averaging 1.3 cyclones annually. In contrast, the dry season presents cooler nocturnal temperatures, accounting for approximately 35% of the annual precipitation. The nation's climate is governed by two major systems: the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) and the South Pacific Convergence Zone (SPCZ), which significantly influence rainfall patterns, sea temperatures, and the frequency of extreme weather events.[31]

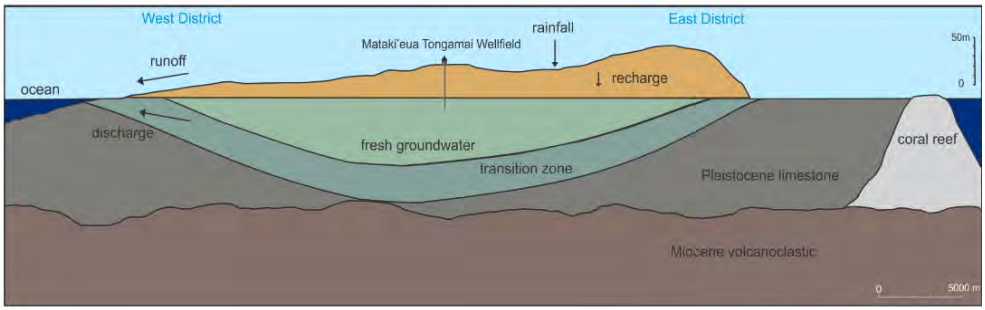
Tonga's Water Resources and the Impacts of Climate Change

Tonga's freshwater supply is primarily derived from rainwater harvesting and groundwater recharge, forming the foundation of its climate adaptation strategy. The country's carbonate islands contain freshwater lenses positioned above saline groundwater, displaying vertical salinity gradients that intensify with depth from low-salinity freshwater through a diffuse transition zone to seawater.[32] Lens salinity varies with rainfall, extraction rates, and geomorphological features. On volcanic islands such as 'Eua and Niuafo'ou, alternative aquifer systems, including perched springs and crater lakes, provide additional sources, though these remain under-researched.

[31] Australian Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO. *Current and Future Climate of Tonga*. Melbourne: Pacific-Australia Climate Change Science and Adaptation Planning Program, 2014, 2, https://www.pacificclimatechangescience.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/10_PACCSAP-Tonga-11pp_WEB.pdf.

[32] shneel Sharan, Alvin Lal, and Bithin Datta, "Evaluating the Impacts of Climate Change and Water Over-Abstraction on Groundwater Resources in Tonga," *Groundwater for Sustainable Development* 21 (2023): [3], https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gsd.2022.100839.

Figure 2: Tongatapu cross-section and geography of ground water characteristics



Climate change has intensified environmental stressors in Tonga, posing a direct threat to water security. The key impacts include rising temperatures, erratic rainfall patterns, increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, and rising sea levels. Indeed, there has notably been an increase in temperatures with recent climate trends, with the mean and minimum wet season temperatures increasing by 0.15°C and 0.13°C per decade, respectively, since 1949.[33] These shifts have heightened evaporation rates across water storage systems, soils, and reservoirs, reducing available freshwater resources for domestic, agricultural, and ecological use, particularly during the dry season. Rising temperatures contribute to increased evapotranspiration, reducing soil moisture and exacerbating drought conditions.

Here, erratic rainfall patterns are a result of the disruption of the SPCZ under warming conditions, and these are marked by prolonged dry spells and intense rainfall events. These trends pose challenges to rainwater harvesting, water storage and infrastructure planning. Concurrently, reductions in rainfall compromise aquifer recharge rates, further limiting access to groundwater.[34] The changes in climate change have also increased the severity of extreme weather events. Tonga is highly susceptible to cyclones and, when affected by El Niño storms, cyclones occur more frequently at 1.64 cyclones per season.[35] In 2018, Category 4 Cyclone Gita hit Tonga and destroyed 800 homes, causing severe damage to 80% of the power grid and with water and sanitation severely disrupted.[36] The estimated damage was US$164 million, which was 38% of Tonga's GDP.

Finally, it is important to note how the impacts of sea-level rise are further

[33] Australian Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO. *Current and Future Climate of Tonga*. Melbourne: Pacific-Australia Climate Change Science and Adaptation Planning Program, 2014,5.
[34] Australian Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO. *Current and Future Climate of Tonga*. Melbourne: Pacific-Australia Climate Change Science and Adaptation Planning Program, 2014. 6
[35] Ofa Fa'anunu and Mele Lakai, *Climate, Climate Variability and Change of Tonga*, Tonga Meteorological Service, accessed September, 2025, https://tonga-data.sprep.org/resource/29/download/file
[36] Tonkin & Taylor International Ltd, "TC Gita Emergency Preparedness and Response: A Comprehensive Review and Lessons Learnt" (Tonkin & Taylor International Ltd, December 2018), 1

compounding these vulnerabilities. Between 1993 and 2024, Tonga's sea level rose by approximately 22cm, averaging 6.4mm per year, nearly twice the global mean.[37] This increase facilitates saltwater intrusion into shallow coastal aquifers, significantly degrading the quality and quantity of potable groundwater. Scientific assessments jointly conducted by the Global Water Institute at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) highlight the acute susceptibility of Tonga's freshwater lenses to salinisation, drought, and sea level rise, advocating for enhanced rainwater harvesting, groundwater monitoring, and pollution controls.[38]

Foreign aid programs, such as the Pacific Adaptation to Climate Change (PACC) initiative, have expanded access to safe water through solar pumps, elevated storage tanks, and boreholes in drought-prone communities.[39] Complementary projects, including the New Zealand–funded National Water Tank Project and 2025 Hunga Island groundwater development, have also improved rural access in Tonga, in line with SDGs 3, 6 and 11.[40] A scientific study by UNSW and the FAO further confirms the vulnerability of Tonga's freshwater lenses to salinisation, drought and sea-level rise, recommending enhanced rainwater harvesting, groundwater monitoring, and pollution control.[41] As discussed later, policy reforms, including updates to the Water Bill and the formulation of a National Water Policy, need to integrate climate risk considerations, as exemplified by Climate-Resilient Water Safety Plans (CR-WSPs).[42] Collectively, these measures would help to shift policy responses toward more adaptive water governance and greater institutional resilience.

Implications of Tonga's Water Insecurity

Regional Security

At the national level, water insecurity undermines sovereignty by weakening disaster response and reducing national self-reliance. Climate-induced threats such as salinisation and drought jeopardize community health and disaster preparedness. But water insecurity in a country like Tonga can also hold regional implications,

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[37] NASA Sea Level Change Team, *Sea Level Summary for Nuku'alofa, Tonga (Combined)*, last modified August 30, 2024, https://sealevel.nasa.gov/internal_resources/528/Nukualofa_Tonga_combined.pdf

[38] University of New South Wales (UNSW) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), *Vulnerability of Freshwater Resources in Pacific Island Countries: Tonga Country Assessment*, accessed September 5, 2025, https://www.fao.org/3/i9824en/I9824EN.pdf

[39] United Nations Environment Programme, *Adapting to Climate Change in the Pacific: The PACC Programme* (Nairobi: UNEP, 2017), 32, https://www.unep.org/resources/report/adapting-climate-change-pacific-pacc-programme

[40] Kingdom of Tonga, *Budget Statement 2024–2025* (Nuku'alofa: Ministry of Finance, 2024), [page number if applicable], https://finance.gov.to/sites/default/files/2024-05/Budget%20Statement%202024%20-%202025.pdf.

[41] University of New South Wales (UNSW) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), *Vulnerability of Freshwater Resources in Pacific Island Countries: Tonga Country Assessment*, accessed September 7, 2025,

[42] Government of Tonga. *Climate Change Policy: A Resilient Tonga by 2035*. Nuku'alofa: Department of Climate Change, Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change and Communications, 2016. https://ccprojects.gsd.spc.int/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/19.-Tonga-CC-policy.pdf

potentially driving migration and resource tensions across the Pacific. This reality reflects the Blue Pacific Strategy's emphasis on building collective resilience.

Between 2010 and 2021, Pacific Island Countries received approximately US$3.4 billion in climate and disaster risk financing. Over half of this funding flowed through multilateral banks such as the ADB and World Bank, with the remainder from bilateral donors (Australia, New Zealand, Japan, China, the EU, and the U.S.) and global climate funds (GCF, Adaptation Fund, GEF).[43] Programs such as the Pacific Adaptation to Climate Change (PACC) initiative have also expanded access to safe water through solar pumps, elevated storage tanks, and boreholes in drought-prone communities.[44] Complementary projects, including the New Zealand–funded National Water Tank Project and 2025 Hunga Island groundwater development, have improved rural access, advancing SDGs 3, 6, and 11.[45]

Even so, aside from problems of limited coordination and absorptive capacity that constrain the effectiveness of such projects locally, foreign aid for water infrastructure can carry strategic interests, risking undue external, policy influence if not strategically managed by the recipient country.[46] In particular, while aid from Australia, China, and the U.S. supports critical infrastructure, it can also introduce strategic dependencies. As a country that has attracted much geopolitical interest, Tonga must balance these relationships by prioritizing transparency, national interests, and community driven planning. Sustainable water security rooted in sovereignty, inclusive governance, and regional solidarity remains central to Tonga's resilience and long-term national security.

Here, Tonga's forthcoming National Security Policy (NSP) should aim to not only integrate water security considerations but also align foreign aid with national interests to enhance Pacific agency and capability, emphasizing transparency, national ownership, and regional cooperation through the Pacific Islands Forum. Here, regional solidarity remains key. Frameworks like the Blue Pacific Strategy and the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent should be leveraged to promote Pacific-led solutions, emphasizing shared regional governance and environmental stewardship.[47] Tonga's active engagement in regional platforms will be equally vital to shaping water diplomacy grounded in local needs and priorities.

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[43] Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Information Paper No. 11: Climate and Disaster Risk Finance*, (Suva, Fiji: Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2024),2, https://forumsec.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/Climate%20and%20Disaster%20Risk%20Finance_0.pdf

[44] United Nations Environment Programme, *Adapting to Climate Change in the Pacific: The PACC Programme* (Nairobi: UNEP, 2017), 32, https://www.unep.org/resources/report/adapting-climate-change-pacific-pacc-programme

[45] Kingdom of Tonga, *Budget Statement 2024–2025* (Nuku'alofa: Ministry of Finance, 2024), [page number if applicable], https://finance.gov.to/sites/default/files/2024-05/Budget%20Statement%202024%20-%202025.pdf.

[46] Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent.* Suva, Fiji: Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2022. https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/2050-Strategy-for-the-Blue-Pacific-Continent.pdf

[47] Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. *The Blue Pacific Continent: A Region of Peace, Harmony, Security, Social Inclusion, and Prosperity.* Suva, Fiji: Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2017.

Economic Security

Water scarcity directly threatens Tonga's economic base. Agriculture, fisheries, and tourism rely heavily on consistent water access. Contamination and reduced rainfall lower productivity, increase import dependence, and weaken the tourism sector. Repairing disaster-damaged infrastructure diverts funds from development priorities.[48] Building resilient water systems and embedding them into economic planning is essential for sustaining national prosperity.

Scientific studies by the UNSW Global Water Institute and FAO (2023) confirm the vulnerability of Tonga's freshwater lenses to salinisation, drought, and sea-level rise, recommending enhanced rainwater harvesting, groundwater monitoring, and pollution control.[49] Policy reforms, including updates to the Water Bill and the formulation of a National Water Policy, integrate climate risk considerations, supported by Climate-Resilient Water Safety Plans (CR-WSPs).[50] Collectively, such measures would help shift Tonga toward adaptive water governance and institutional resilience that serve as the basis for more sustainable economic growth.

Overview of Key Challenges in Tonga's Water Sector

The following discussion sets out the four key challenges found in Tonga regarding water security and governance: limited data, aging infrastructure, lack of institutional capacity, and policy fragmentation.

Data Scarcity and Monitoring:

Limited data on water availability, usage, and quality makes it difficult to accurately assess the current state of water resources and predict future needs. This hinders adaptive management and evidence-based decision-making. For instance, data gaps persist for groundwater infrastructure in Haʻapai and Vavaʻu, where reliance on local wells is common but unmonitored. This leads to decentralized sources of water at risk of chemical and microbial contamination from the aging septic systems

Aging Infrastructure:

Many water supply systems in Tonga are old and unserviceable due to poor maintenance over time, leading to significant water losses through leakages and illegal connections. It has been estimated to be a loss of up to 50% of water through leakages or illegal connections.[51] The Niuatoputapu water tank project, for example, demonstrates how communities need far outstripped delivery timelines in relation to

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[48] Asian Development Bank. *Tonga: Water and Sanitation Sector Assessment, Strategy, and Road Map*. Manila: Asian Development Bank, 2017. https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/33072/files/water-sanitation-sector-tonga.pd

[49] University of New South Wales (UNSW) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), *Vulnerability of Freshwater Resources in Pacific Island Countries: Tonga Country Assessment*, accessed September 7, 2025,

[50] World Health Organization, *Climate-Resilient Water Safety Plans: Managing Health Risks Associated with Climate Change* (Geneva: WHO, 2017), https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241512838

[51] Asian Development Bank (ADB). *Tonga: Integrated Urban Resilience Sector Project*. Manila: ADB, 2020. https://www.adb.org/projects/49455-001/main

funding, logistics and planning delays.[52]

Institutional Capacity Limitations:

Limited local expertise in technical areas such as water resources management, infrastructure maintenance, and climate adaptation has hindered the implementation of effective water security solutions in the country. Further to this, insufficient funding for the operation, maintenance, and development of new infrastructure projects limits the ability to address water scarcity and improve water quality. At the same time, as discussed later, it can also increase Tonga's dependence on foreign aid, which can come with its own challenges. An example of this is that Tonga implements community-based water management and remains a central component to its strategy. Projects such as the Pacific Adaptation to Climate Change (PACC) and Climate-Resilient Water Safety Plans (CR-WSPs) have strengthened local capacity to manage wells and tanks in drought-prone areas.[53] Yet insufficient data, limited technical expertise, and dependence on external aid hinder this process

Fragmentation and Coordination Issues:

Multiple ministries and agencies (e.g., for meteorology, energy, infrastructure, health, lands) have overlapping responsibilities for water management. This creates a lack of a unified strategy, making it difficult to implement cohesive policies and allocate resources effectively. There is limited coordination between urban water systems, managed by the Tonga Water Board, and rural water systems that are often managed by village committees or the Ministry of Health. This leads to uneven service delivery and challenges in ensuring consistent water quality across the country.[54]

The overarching absence of an integrated water resources management (IWRM) framework means that water management is not systematically integrated into broader development and climate adaptation planning. This can lead to a siloed approach that fails to address the interconnectedness of water security with other sectors like agriculture, health, and the economy. For example, in the absence of IWRM frameworks in climate and security planning, projects are often reactive.[55]

In sum, Tonga's water security is threatened by fragmented governance, data scarcity, and aging infrastructure, intensified by climate change impacts. This combination hinders effective management and jeopardizes the nation's economy and communities, especially in rural areas. To address this, this thesis posits that

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[52] Pacific Community (SPC). "Ensuring Water Security for Niuatoputapu: A Milestone in Rainwater Harvesting." *SPC Updates*, March 2025. https://www.spc.int/updates/blog/dynamic-story/2025/03/ensuring-water-security-for-niuatoputapu-a-milestone-in

[53] PACC Consultation Team (PCT), Chief Technical Adviser, UNDP Programme Officer, and GEF Expert Consultant, "Pacific Adaptation to Climate Change (PACC): In Country Consultation, Tonga" (Suva, Fiji: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) , 2007),4.

[54] Edward M., "Delivering Water to the People of Tonga: Challenges and Solutions," PowerPoint presentation, December 28, 2024, accessed October 9, 2025, https://www.slideserve.com/edwardm/our-water-our-people-powerpoint-ppt-presentation

[55] Hemant Ojha, Nicholas Schofield, and Jeff Camkin, eds., *Climate Risks to Water Security: Framing Effective Response in Asia and the Pacific* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023).

Tonga must prioritize improved data collection and governance framework. Adopting an IWRM approach, combined with improving inter-ministerial coordination and ensuring sustainable financing, are also critical steps in this regard.

Governance and Policy Frameworks

Further to the preceding discussion, Tonga's water governance framework combines legislative, institutional, and strategic instruments that seek to protect and manage water resources. The principal legislation is the Water Resources Act, which regulates groundwater abstraction and the declaration of water reserves. However, this Act is outdated and lacks provisions for enforcement, monitoring, and climate adaptation. To address these gaps, the government has developed a draft National Water Policy and a new Water Bill that aim to establish a coordinated and climate-resilient framework. These reforms introduce clear institutional mandates, define water quality standards, and incorporate Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) principles, promoting sustainability and resilience in water governance.

Institutional responsibilities for water management in Tonga are distributed across several ministries. The Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change and Communications (MEIDECC) leads national adaptation and water security initiatives. The Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources manages groundwater licensing, while the Ministry of Health oversees water quality and sanitation. The Tonga Water Board, under the Ministry of Infrastructure, administers urban water supply systems. Despite these efforts, the lack of a central coordinating authority has resulted in fragmented governance and limited data sharing. Plans to establish a National Water Committee are therefore essential to strengthening inter-ministerial coordination and accountability.

Water policy development is also guided by broader national frameworks, including the Joint National Action Plan for Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management (JNAP2, 2018–2028) and the Climate Change Policy (2016–2035).[56] These policies identify water scarcity as both an environmental and security concern, emphasizing resilient infrastructure, community participation, and adaptive governance. The National Infrastructure Investment Plan (NIIP) complements these by prioritizing investments in desalination systems, boreholes, and rainwater harvesting facilities to enhance water access across the islands[57] Community-based water management remains a central component of Tonga's strategy. Projects such as the Pacific Adaptation to Climate Change (PACC) and Climate-Resilient Water Safety Plans (CR-WSPs) have strengthened local capacity to manage wells and tanks in drought-prone areas. Nevertheless, challenges persist, including insufficient data, limited technical expertise, and dependence on external aid. Donor-supported programs funded by the ADB, World Bank, New Zealand Aid, and the Green Climate Fund (GCF) have improved water infrastructure but sometimes risk creating maintenance

[56] Government of Tonga. *Climate Change Policy: A Resilient Tonga by 2035*. Nuku'alofa: Department of Climate Change, Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change and Communications, 2016. https://ccprojects.gsd.spc.int/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/19.-Tonga-CC-policy.pdf

[57] Asian Development Bank (ADB). *Integrated Urban Resilience Sector Project: Economic Analysis*. Manila: ADB, 2020. https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/linked-documents/49455-002-ea.pdf

challenges and policy dependency[58]

Table 2.1 Relevant Strategies for governing water resources management in Tonga

Key Climate Policy Instruments	Implementation Status	Capacity Gaps
TSDF II 2015 - 2025	Urban Water Supply Pumps was 100% converted from Diesel engines to Electric	~ 60% of Village Water Supply pumps are diesel pumps while 40% are either Solar or Electric powered
Hydrology & Water Resources Strategy 2020 - 2030	Approved by the National Water Resources Committee 2020	Requires dedicated resources and staff
Water Resources Act 2020	Enacted in November 2020	Requires 40 staff to implement the objectives and functions
National Water Resources Policy 2019	Draft to be endorsed by Cabinet	Requires dedicated staff
Water Resources Implementation Plan 2019	Draft to be endorsed by the National Water Resources Committee	Requires dedicated staff
National Water Sanitation and Climate Outlook (2016)	Ongoing Awareness Programs, Water Resources Act 2020, Regular Monitoring of Water resources	Lack of Resources Requires dedicated staff
Integrated Water Resources Management Plan	12 communities with IWRM Plans developed	Requires dedicated staff
JNAP 2 on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management 2018 - 2028	Target 10: Water security through integrated management and conservation. Provision of almost 4,500 water tanks throughout Tonga.	Financial support needs.
Tonga Long Term Low Emission Development Strategy 2020 - 2050	Water Security in all islands as a Disaster Risk Reduction Measure.	Awareness raising on communal water management

Tonga's (JNAP2 identifies water scarcity as both an environmental and security risk.[59] Water shortages undermine public trust and governance, linking climate resilience directly to national stability. Yet, as noted above, water governance in the country remains fragmented across agencies with uneven implementation, particularly in outer islands. Donor-funded rainwater systems often fail due to unclear ownership and maintenance responsibilities.[60] Moreover, limited data on water usage and quality further impede adaptive management. The absence of integrated water resource management (IWRM) frameworks further restricts coordination between ministries such as MEIDECC, Health, and Infrastructure.[61] Embedding water systems within national disaster and climate strategies is essential to treat

[58] World Bank. "The Case for Stronger Policy, Institutions, and Regulation to Achieve Water and Sanitation for All." *World Bank Blogs*, May 18, 2021. https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/water/case-stronger-policy-institutions-and-regulation-achieve-water-and-sanitation-all

[59] Government of Tonga. *Joint National Action Plan 2 on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management 2018–2028: Terms of Reference and Full Plan (JNAP2-TORS_Final-CLEAN_171121.pdf).* Nuku'alofa: Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change and Communications (MEIDECC), 2018. https://climatechange.gov.to/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/JNAP2-TORS_Final-CLEAN-171121-v3.pdf

[60] Simione Silapelu and Sione Faka'osi. *A Study of the Rain Water Harvesting of the Outer Islands Regions in Tonga (except Niua Fo'ou).* Nuku'alofa: Tonga Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (TANGO) and Tonga Community Development Trust (TCDT), 2012. https://tonga-data.sprep.org/system/files/Rainwater%20Havesting%20report%20for%20outer%20islands%20%28except%20Niua%20Fo%27ou%29%2C%20TANGO%2C%202012.pdf

[61] Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SOPAC). *National Integrated Water Resource Management Diagnostic Report: Tonga.* Suva, Fiji: SOPAC Division of the Pacific Community, 2007. https://library.sprep.org/content/national-integrated-water-resource-management-diagnostic-report-tonga-sustainable

water as a cross-sectoral security asset.

It is noteworthy that local communities, especially in Haʻapai and the Niuas, have developed their own adaptive practices such as the use of household tanks and traditional sharing systems that help with the storage and allocation of water resources within the community. However, inconsistent government support leaves these initiatives vulnerable, as seen in the delayed Niuatoputapu water tank project. Scaling community innovation requires institutional backing, sustained funding, and integration into national frameworks.

To conclude, water security is not only about having enough freshwater resources but is also fundamentally about managing a complex system. Water must, therefore, be institutionalized as a strategic national asset. Strengthening resilience requires improved data systems, regular infrastructure audits, and participatory planning that empowers communities. By integrating strategy to enhance coordination and maximise the economic benefits of resource sustainability, water security can be transformed from a technical goal into a resilient, longer-term national priority. By extension, embedding water governance within Tonga's national security framework can change a source of vulnerability into the foundation for resilience and sovereignty.

Chapter 3: Fiji: A Case Study

Overview of Fiji's Water Resources

Fiji is an archipelagic nation in the South Pacific, consisting of more than 300 islands, of which one-third are inhabited. With a total land mass of 18,300 square kilometers, its two largest islands, Viti Levu and Vanua Levu, account for nearly 87% of the total land area. Fiji's islands are predominantly volcanic, featuring rugged terrain and significant altitudinal gradients that influence rainfall patterns and hydrological processes.[62]

The islands are exceptionally fortunate to have an abundance of water sources. The water supply originates from plentiful rainfall, extensive river networks, subsurface aquifers, and engineered storage systems shaped by the country's tropical maritime setting and island geology.

Fiji's climate is governed by a hierarchy of interacting drivers that operate on a seasonal timescale. Atop this seasonal cycle are interannual fluctuations associated with El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO), which suppress cyclone formation and increase the likelihood of prolonged dry spells and water shortage. In addition, the South Pacific Convergence Zone (SPCZ) elevates sea-surface temperatures and drives above-average rainfall, river flooding, and a greater incidence of storms.[63]

Key Challenges in Fiji's Water Sector

Despite the vast water supply in Fiji, it also shares some of the same problems as Tonga. Challenges include that; 50% of the water provided through the distribution system gets lost before it reaches consumers due to leakages of old pipe systems and illegal connections. The quality of water is also questionable.[64] In 1986, more than 61% of Suva's population had a flush toilet, and wastewater was either retained in septic tanks or discharged into the local sewerage system. Septic tanks are problematic in Suva as much of the city's area is found on soapstone, which does not allow septic tank effluents to percolate properly.[65]Another problem is that with a limited waste water management system, over 60% use septic tanks and pit latrines, which perform poorly in Suva's low-permeability soils.[66] This causes overflow from the sewerage system and industrial discharges to drains, creeks, and the bay, which are causing environmental damage and posing a potential risk to public health.[67]

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[62] Fiji Bureau of Statistics. *2017 Population and Housing Census: Release 1 – Age, Sex, Geography and Economic Activity.* Suva: Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2018. https://spccfpstore1.blob.core.windows.net/digitallibrary-docs/files/15/1592831742c99180fb51d4fa9d21ee98.pdf

[63] CSIRO and Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP). *Current and Future Climate for Fiji.* Apia, Samoa: SPREP, 2021. https://www.met.gov.fj/media/documents/Country_Report_Fiji_ul6cujP.pdf

[64] Pierre Mukheibir, "Fiji Water Sector Strategy 2050" (Suva, Fiji: Water Authority Fiji, April 4, 2024), 11.

[65]Eberhard Weber, "Water in the Pacific Islands," https://www.researchgate.net/publication (University of the South Pacific, July 1, 2007), https://doi.org/10.1201/b10990-14,286.

[66] Eberhard Weber, "Water in the Pacific Islands," https://www.researchgate.net/publication (University of the South Pacific, July 1, 2007).

[67] Eberhard Weber, "Water in the Pacific Islands," https://www.researchgate.net/publication

Governance and Policy Frameworks

Fiji places water security within its National Development Plan (Transforming Fiji 2017–2036), which links infrastructure, health, and climate resilience as central development objectives.[68] The Water and Sanitation Policy (2019) provides the principal sector guidance, endorsing integrated water resources management (IWRM), decentralised delivery, community participation, and measures to safeguard water quality and coverage. The Climate Change Act (2021) and the National Adaptation Plan enshrine climate risk assessment and mainstream adaptation across sectors, directing actions to protect catchments, address sea-level rise and salinisation, and climate-related infrastructure.[69]

Responsibilities for water are distributed across multiple national ministries, statutory bodies, local government units, and community organisations. The Ministry of Organisations and Meteorological Services lead the water sector supply and sanitation policy. At the same time, the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) manages bulk supply, treatment, and urban distribution in its service areas.[70]

Integrated Climate Science and Hazard Planning

Fiji's governance framework explicitly integrates climate science and hazard planning into water policy.[71] Climate-driven variability and extremes affect seasonal water availability and the frequency of droughts and intense storms. Policies and adaptation planning prioritise source diversification, catchment protection, storage and redundancy in supply, and climate proofing of infrastructure. Including water actions within the National Adaptation Plan and climate legislation strengthens the institutional mandate to align investments with projected climate risks.

Lessons Learned for Tonga

Fiji was selected as the case study because it is regarded as one of the strongest economies and most developed nations in the South Pacific. It was therefore hypothesised that Fiji's water security challenges would differ significantly from those of Tonga, providing valuable lessons to inform Tonga's own water security development. However, the findings reveal that despite Fiji's rapid tourism growth and relatively advanced economy, both countries face remarkably similar challenges in achieving sustainable water security. This suggests that water security is not adequately prioritised, even within the more affluent Pacific Island states an issue of considerable concern.

Fiji has undertaken extensive policy reforms and governance improvements to strengthen its water management systems, representing an important step towards

(University of the South Pacific, July 1, 2007).

[68] Fiji, *Five-Year & 20-Year National Development Plan: Transforming Fiji (2017-2036)* (Suva: Government of Fiji, 2017), 25-30.

[69] Government of Fiji, "Fiji National Development Plan 2025-2029 and Vision 2050" (Suva, Fiji: Ministry of Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, 2024),173.

[70] Ministry of Public Works, Meteorological Services & Transport (Fiji), "Roles & Responsibility," accessed May 2025, https://www.mims.gov.fj/roles-responsibility

[71] Pierre Mukheibir, "Fiji Water Sector Strategy 2050" (Suva, Fiji: Water Authority Fiji, April 4, 2024),6.

resilience and sustainability. In contrast, Tonga's JNAP makes only a single reference to water, reflecting the government's limited prioritisation of this critical issue. This stands in stark contrast to the National Consultation Process (NCP) outcomes in local villages, where communities consistently identify water as their highest priority. This divergence underscores a clear disconnect between government policy and community needs.

Although Fiji demonstrates stronger governance and more comprehensive policy frameworks, both nations share persistent barriers to effective implementation. These include institutional fragmentation, resulting in overlaps and gaps in responsibilities for source protection, quality regulation, service delivery, and disaster response; and ongoing financial constraints, which hinder sustained investment in water infrastructure and maintenance. Careful consideration of recurrent budgets and operational funding is therefore essential.

While Fiji and Tonga differ in their economic capacities and governance approaches, both display strengths and weaknesses that offer mutual lessons. Neither system can be regarded as superior, but each provides insights that could contribute to the development of a more resilient and modern water security framework. By examining Fiji's experiences, Tonga can refine its strategies to enhance governance, improve coordination, and strengthen adaptive capacity in response to the growing challenges of climate change and environmental degradation.

Chapter 4: Regional Cooperation

Regionalism is vital to water security in Tonga because shared resources, climate threats, and technical expertise transcend borders only through regional cooperation, can small island states like Tonga access the funding, infrastructure, and resilience strategies needed to safeguard their limited and vulnerable water supplies.

The Imperative of Regional Cooperation

Given the inherent limitations faced by small island states, cooperation is not just a matter of convenience but an essential strategy for survival. As seen from the Boe Declaration, climate change is recognised in the Pacific region as a prominent non-traditional security threat with direct implications, especially on small island states' water security and governance.[72] It is broad in scope and impacts, transnational and directly challenges human security, which ultimately requires a comprehensive multinational response. Small island states must work together to combine their limited resources, share expertise, and amplify their voices on the international stage. Regional frameworks offer an opportunity to build solidarity, enhance influence, and pursue shared interests in a coordinated manner.

The importance of regional cooperation is not limited to economic and material benefits, the impact on a cultural level for Tongan citizens makes it one of the most important.[73] Engaging with regional frameworks is not solely focused on material gains; it also reflects a constructivist logic, where actors help create and foster regional norms, collective identity, and political legitimacy with initiatives such as the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP).[74]

Key Regional Frameworks

The Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) serves as the premier political and economic policy organization in the Pacific region, providing a platform for dialogue, cooperation, and collective action on issues of common concern. Tonga actively participates in PIF initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable development, climate resilience, and regional security. The PIF also serves as strategic forum that allows small island states to amplify their voices in global climate and water negotiations

The Boe Declaration on Regional Security adopted by PIF leaders in 2018, recognizes climate change as the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security, and well-being of the peoples of the Pacific. This declaration represents a pivotal shift in the regional security landscape, expanding the definition of security to encompass climate-related challenges. Active participation in these frameworks strengthens Tonga's political and regional agency, framing adaptation as a moral

[72] Volker Boege, "Climate Change, Conflict and Peace in the Pacific: Challenges and a Pacific Way Forward," *Peace Review* 14, no. 469-9982 (May 6, 2022): 1–10, https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2022.2023424, 2.
[73] Ministry of Finance and National Planning, "Tonga Strategic Development Framework 2015-2025" (Nuku'alofa, Tonga: Government of Tonga, 2015), 19.
[74] Joanne Wallis and Anna Powles, "Smooth Sailing? How Australia, New Zealand, and the United States Partner In-and With-the Pacific Islands" (Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2023), 6.

and regional imperative rather than an individual national struggle.[75]

The Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP) provides a regional roadmap for achieving resilient development in the Pacific, aligning climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and sustainable development goals. Tonga has integrated the principles of the FRDP into its national development strategies, prioritizing investments in climate-resilient infrastructure and community-based adaptation measures.[76]

Mobilizing Climate Finance and Technical Assistance

Regional cooperation enables Tonga to access climate finance and technical assistance from international sources.[77] Multilateral financing mechanisms such as Green Climate Funds, Adaptation Funds, and bilateral partnerships with Japan, Australia, China, and the US are shaped not only by financial opportunities but also by globally accepted norms of climate justice and shared responsibility. This also reflects and is shaped by regional support frameworks for disaster preparedness and response for small island nations and by supporting resilient infrastructure projects in the region. The key challenge here is this: Tonga needs to manage tensions between regional solidarity and donor-driven interests, particularly when external interests may not align with Tonga's sovereignty and resilience goals.[78]

Leveraging Normative Influence and Diplomacy

Regional cooperation enhances Tonga's capacity to influence international norms and mobilize support for climate action. Acting collectively with other Pacific Island states amplifies Tonga's voice in climate negotiations, enables advocacy for more ambitious emissions-reduction targets, and promotes recognition of climate-induced displacement as a security concern.[79] By mobilising regionalism, Tonga benefits from the strength-in-numbers effect, where the Pacific Islands states collective voice increases bargaining power with donor states and institutions, and helps ensure that adaptation priorities reflect regional needs rather than donor-driven agendas.[80]

Regional solidarity enables Tonga to frame adaptation as a shared value and a Pacific purpose, strengthening moral leverage and galvanising political support.[81]

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[75] Pacific Island Forum Secretariat, "Action Plan to Implement the Boe Declaration on Regional Security" (Suva, Fiji: Pacific Island Forum Secretariat, 2018),8.
[76] Jessica Lees et al., "Beyond Barriers: Tonga Case Study," in Beyond Barriers: How to Improve Humanitarian Action in the Pacific, ed. Campbell Aitken and Eleanor Davey (Melbourne, Australia: Humanitarian Advisory Group, 2022), 27.
[77] "Tonga's NDC Implementation Roadmap and NDC Investment Plan with Project Pipeline" (Nuku'alofa, Tonga: Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change, and Communications [MEIDECC], 2021), 100.
[78] Joanne Wallis and Anna Powles, "ASPI: SPECIAL REPORT Smooth Sailing? How Australia, New Zealand and the United States Partner In-and With-the Pacific Islands," 2023, 19.
[79] Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. Pacific Island Countries and Climate Change: Strengthening Regional Cooperation. Suva: Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2019.
[80] Jess Marinaccio, "Oceania Matters in Diplomacy," Asia Pacific Viewpoint 58, no. 3 (December 2017): 396–97 ,27, https://doi.org/10.1111/apv.12152.
[81] Joanne Wallis and Anna Powles, "ASPI: SPECIAL REPORT Smooth Sailing? How Australia, New Zealand and the United States Partner In-and With-the Pacific Islands,"

From a constructivist perspective, these regional narratives reshape global perceptions so that funding is perceived not as charity but as a responsibility grounded in justice. This perspective aligns with initiatives such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF), which helps small island states preserve national dignity and promotes equitable partnerships and cooperative engagement among stakeholders. From a constructivist perspective, leadership in water diplomacy is not solely a function of material power, but of the capacity to shape norms and set an agenda. Regional cooperation is a critical strategy for strengthening water security and advancing climate resilience. Through actively participating in regional frameworks, leveraging multilateral financing mechanisms, and exercising normative influence, Tonga can amplify its voice, secure vital resources, and help shape a more equitable and sustainable future for itself and the Pacific. Ultimately, Tonga's capacity to negotiate adaptive measures relies on its standing within regional institutions, its ability to mobilize multilateral finance, and its use of shared Pacific identities and transform vulnerability into political leverage.

2023, 6-7.

Chapter 5: External Aid and Geopolitical Risks

External aid and geopolitics are crucial to water security in Tonga because they determine access to the financial, technological, and diplomatic resources needed to build resilient water systems without them, Tonga lacks the scale and capacity to respond to climate-driven water crises on its own.

External Aid a Double-Edged Sword

External aid is vital to Tonga's development, in particular to its water sector. However, this reliance also creates pathways for donor influence that can constrain sovereignty. project visibility expectations, or even, conditionally, which can strain sovereignty.[82] As a small state with limited resources, Tonga depends on bilateral and multilateral assistance to finance water infrastructure and projects. This dependence creates opportunities for donor influence who may seek to prioritize projects that serve their interests such as visibility requirements or impose conditions that shape policy choices and implementation time frames.[83] The Chinese use cheque book diplomacy for example, when they made “aid payments” to Tuvalu and Nauru so they grant diplomatic recognition to the Russian breakaway states of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Therefore, careful diplomacy is needed to manage securing resources while protecting Tonga’s policy autonomy and national dignity.



Image: Department of Defence

Several countries in the Pacific, namely US, China, Japan, Australia and New Zealand each provide different strands of development assistance and support to

[82] United Nations Development Programme, Pacific Islands Sustainable Development Outlook (New York: UNDP, 2020), https://www.undp.org/pacific/publications.
[83] Mushtaq H. Khan, "Aid Dependency and Sovereignty: The Political Economy of Development Aid," Third World Quarterly 25, no. 2 (2004): 273-284.

the pacific islands, and the aid is well received. However, this strategic overcrowding creates a complex operation environment. The Hunga Tonga Hunga Haapai volcanic eruption is an example when responses from competing donor nations are not aligned.[84] Australia and New Zealand's response was coordinated with Tongan authorities. The Chinese also responded, with good intentions but with conditions that they will operate alone, and this obviously added pressure on the Tongan authorities who were already under duress to balance and deconflict the actions of the competing donors. This tension caused distractions and further complicated the situation, resulting in duplication of efforts and urgent requirements such as water reconnection and distribution were not given the attention it needed.[85] It also highlighted how aid is not provided according to the need of the nation but more the sponsor nation needs. In addition, these multiple strands need to be coordinated to ensure priority areas are identified and presented to donors to focus on.[86] And this is where Tonga's framing of the water security issue as a matter of survival should be raised, where a specific donor focuses on the water sector, because natural disasters will be a routine part of Tongan life.

Geopolitical Dynamics in the Pacific

Tonga's water security development aspirations are increasingly getting entangled in the great power competition between the US and China. The majority of the Pacific Island countries are traditionally aligned to its western partners mainly due to colonial ties and historical affiliations. Today the West and Chinese donors justify engagement partly as climate resilience and water-security assistance. This creates material benefits, in finance, technology, infrastructure and political incentives that affect domestic decision making.

Therefore, Tonga requires an integrated hedging strategy to ensure access to funding and technical options white limiting external reliance. For example, in 2019 the Solomon Islands switched diplomatic ties to China from Taiwan and this initiated a surge of high visibility infrastructure projects that in turn raised questions on debt sustainability and politically driven project selections.[87] On another note, the Chinese and Australia investments in Vanuatu ports and energy projects highlight similar coordination challenges and opposing project priorities. The Solomon Islands and Vanuatu are examples of how overlapping assistance can create duplication and governance strain if not closely coordinated.[88]

Tonga must prioritise water security as its engagements with external donors and development partners. Insisting on transparent needs criteria and strengthening

[84] Quentin Hanich, Joanne Wallis, and Michael Rose, "Statecraftiness: Australia's Defence Diplomacy in the Pacific Islands" (Adelaide, South Australia: University of Adelaide, November 2023), 10.
[85] "Inaugral Tonga Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Convention Report" (Nuku'alofa: Tonga Water Sanitation and Hygeine Convention, 2022),6-7.
[86] David Devlaeminck, Zafar Adeel, and Robert Sandford, The Human Face of Water Security (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2017),38.
[87] Joanne Wallis and Anna Powles, "ASPI: SPECIAL REPORT Smooth Sailing? How Australia, New Zealand and the United States Partner In-and With-the Pacific Islands," 2023,1.
[88] "Acting on Climate Change and Disaster Risk for the Pacific" (Washington, US: World Bank, 2013), 9-10.

regional coordination, this will ensure Tong strengthens rather than undermines external assistance to strive for access to reliable safe water.[89] A calibrated hedging strategy focused on water security that protects livelihoods, public health and national sovereignty.

Aid and Influence

Australia remains Tonga's largest bilateral development partner. Its 2025-26 bilateral allocation of official development assistance (ODA) to Tonga is estimated at AUD 27.1 million, contributing to a broader ODA total of about AUD 69.7 million that Australia gives to Tonga.[90] Australia's development partnership plan with Tonga for 2024-2029 explicitly links aid to strengthen Tonga's resilience to climate change, disasters, and to supporting fiscal stability and accountable governance. Whilst New Zealand's 'National Water Tank Project' implemented with Tonga's Ministry of Climate Change (MEIDECC), will install over 6,000 large rainwater tanks, prioritizing older adults, people with disabilities, women, and children to reduce seasonal harvesting and mitigate health risks.

Chinese-funded infrastructure provides an alternative source of finance and rapid delivery but often emphasizes high visibility projects tied to diplomatic exposure. Such projects can skew the selection process toward conspicuous and politically salient public works that do not necessarily meet local needs or priorities.[91] This raises concerns about long-term sustainability, debt implications, and alignment with national plans. These varied donor methods expand Tonga's options while creating coordination, fiscal and sovereignty risk. Managing these trade-offs requires a clear, transparent project criteria, strengthened donor coordination and the prioritization of locally identified water needs.

Mitigating Risks

Geopolitical risks to Tonga's water security are real and stem from patterns of external finance donor politics and shifting regional power dynamics. By strengthening internal resilience through robust local water systems, effective regional coordination, diversified funding sources, and calibrated diplomacy reduces exposure to external leverage.[92] The following strategies are pragmatic measures that reduce operational vulnerabilities. It also limits fiscal and political dependency and enhances Tonga's bargaining position with donors and partners without sacrificing sovereignty.

Tonga needs to reduce the reliance on externally funded water systems and invest

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[89] Ian White, Tony Falkland, and Tevita Fatai, "Vulnerability of Groundwater in Tongatapu, Kingdom of Tonga" (Canberra, ACT: Australia National University (ANU) Press, 2009), 6.
[90] Emma Newland, "Identification of Options for a Partnership Program to Strengthen Water Management and WASH Service Delivery in Tonga" (Melbourne, Australia: GHD Pty Ltd, August 13, 2021), 23.
[91] Graham Allison, Robert D Blackwill, and Ali Wyne, Lee Kuan Yew: The Grand Masters Insights on China, the United States and the World (US: MIT Press, 2013), Chapter 1, What is China's Strategy for becoming number 1.
[92] Lalit Kumar, Climate Change and Impacts in the Pacific (Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature Switzerland AG, 2020), 10.

in decentralised and diversified systems.[93] Provide support to community rain water harvesting and storage such as the New Zealand residential tank project in Niuafo'ou[94] and partake in the solar powered desalination project that has been tested in Kiribati and Tuvalu.[95] To ensure sustainability each project is guaranteed operations and management financing, local technical training and a robust water quality monitoring system. On the other hand, large scale systems can achieve economies of scale and professional maintenance, but they are costly and vulnerable to single point failures and particularly attractive to donors.[96] However an integrated approach of local decentralized systems for resilience plus a selective needs-based central investment offers a reliable and cost-effective option.

By building a sustainable and resilient water security strategy Tonga must adopt a two-pronged approach by empowering local communities and securing independent funding. Community empowerment is achieved through engaging village water communities in the management, financial oversight and infrastructure maintenance. Also, integrating traditional knowledge and governance by including chiefs and community leaders early in the planning process with an empowered role will strengthen internal resilience to external political shocks[97] that will ensure continuity community ownership in the projects. This local capacity building is a necessity and must be supported by securing sustainable and diversified funding sources such as the multilateral Green Climate Fund. That will enable independent investment and reduce debt dependency and impacts of geopolitical pressure.[98]

The reality for Tonga is that external aid presents both opportunities and risks for water security and sovereignty. To maximize the benefits of aid while mitigating potential downsides, Tonga must pursue a balanced and strategic approach by engaging with multiple partners in promoting transparency and accountability, and prioritizing its own national interests. Tonga's aid strategy demonstrates a pragmatic calculus of necessity, accepting external dependence as the price for survival in an unstable climate environment.[99] Therefore, while foreign assistance contributes to easing water scarcity pressure, it also puts Tonga into a position where it must balance protecting its sovereignty and ensuring that its people have consistent access to quality safe water.

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[93] Ian White and Tony Falkland, "Management of Freshwater Lenses on Small Pacific Islands," Hydrogeology Journal 18, no. 1 (2009): 227, 242, 244, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10040-009-0525-0.
[94] New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "Water Security: The National Water Tank Project," Youtu.be, 2022, https://youtu.be/SS7UR6BatcU.
[95] Solar Water Solutions,"Solar Desalination Brings Clean Water to Remote Pacific Islands in Tuvalu", April 2, 2025, https://solarwatersolutions.com/news/solar-desalination-brings-clean-water-to-remote-pacific-islands-in-tuvalu/.
[96] Lu'isa Tu'i'afitu Malolo et al., "Third National Communication on Climate Change Report" (Nuku'alofa, Tonga: Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change and Communications, 2019).
[97] Bruce Lankford et al., Water Security: Principles, Perspectives and Practices (Routledge, 2013), 280.
[98] Hag, Piango, and CFST, "Priorities next Steps for Greening Humanitarian Action in Tonga: Contextualising the Framework for Greening Humanitarian Action in the Pacific" (Melbourne: HAG: Humanitarian Horizons, 2024), 7.
[99] Lu'isa Tu'i'afitu Malolo et al., "Third National Communication on Climate Change Report" (Nuku'alofa, Tonga: Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change and Communications, 2019).177.

Chapter 6: Integrating Human Security and Economic Sovereignty

Integrating human security and economic sovereignty is essential for water security in Tonga because it ensures that access to safe, reliable water is not controlled by external interests or disrupted by political or economic pressures empowering Tongans to protect their people's basic needs without compromising national independence.

The Centrality of Human Security

Water insecurity is a direct and growing threat to human security and national security. The consequences extend beyond empty water tanks, it poses implicit risks to critical infrastructure and the core of society's fabric. All small developing island states (SDIS) are staring at this advancing threat, Kiribati and Tuvalu are facing potential forced relocation, as the ability to survive on these islands will be untenable.[100] The erosion of public trust, driven by the expectation that authorities are unable to to secure or manage the situation, will initiate internal displacement when people move to already strained urban locations. Urbanisation in Tonga is increasing on the main island not only adding pressure to support structures such as water, electricity, health and food, but also creating social tensions.[101] For instance, ground water supply is inconsistent, but water bills will continue to rise, and this discontent will continue to fester as water security and basic human security is at risk. Consequently, water security is central and entwined to human security, despite how the environmental dynamics evolve, water security will remain. However, addressing these complex dilemmas requires acknowledging the situation and recognizing that integrated solutions are demanded.

Therefore to effectively manage multifaceted risks to water security and subsequently human security, it is crucial to support and strengthen management and support projects such as WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) programs. However, these initiatives suffer from fragmented implementation and limited community engagement that undermines effectiveness. This problem could be due to policy misalignment and strategic direction or competing priorities. An example is the disconnect between Tongan government and local communities, where the former sees its priorities elsewhere and the latter sees water as an immediate priority.[102]It is fundamental that governmental bodies, non-governmental agencies and local populations foster shared ownership in addressing water related insecurity. It is only then can Tonga strengthen strategic planning and build enduring resilience.

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[100] Alexander Gillespie and William C.G. Burns, eds., Climate Change in the South Pacific: Impacts and Responses in Australia, New Zealand, and Small Island States, vol. 2 (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 235.
[101] Atu `o Hakautapu Emberson-Bain, "Country Briefing Paper Women in Tonga" (Manilla, Bangkok: Asia Development Bank (ADB), December 1998), 7-8.
[102] Ian White, Tony Falkland, and Taaniela Kula, "Meeting SDG6 in the Kingdom of Tonga: The Mismatch between National and Local Sustainable Development Planning for Water Supply," Hydrology 7, no. 4 (2020): 81, https://doi.org/10.3390/hydrology7040081,20.

Small State Theory

Tonga can address its water security challenges strategically by leveraging its status as a small island state. In taking advantage of its status to establish and influence relations because it poses no threat, which gives it sway to influence and shape multilateral platforms towards its security interests.[103] This can be achieved by generating trust and gaining diplomatic credibility through translating good governance into pragmatic policies and clear strategic direction. Also, and most importantly leadership and audience must have buy-in the purpose.[104] However, small state theory does have its limitations, which Tonga needs to be aware of and exercise strategic restraint and not slide towards external dependency.[105] In order to avoid this, Tonga can adopt a constructivist strategy by pursuing agency via multilateral forums and shaping the dialogue and promoting climate and water security.[106] The interplay between SST and constructivism demonstrates that they complement each other, providing Tonga with the ability to maintain long-term resilience and autonomy.

Economic Sovereignty

Water security plays a vital role in the national security of Tonga because key sectors like agriculture, fisheries, and tourism depend heavily on reliable water access. These sectors are increasingly important to the livelihood of Tongans because they are dependent on the agriculture, fisheries and tourism sector. Unfortunately, this is all under threat because key sectors like agriculture, fisheries, and tourism depend heavily on reliable water access. This becomes an increasing problem because contamination and reduced rainfall jeopardize agricultural productivity, leading to food shortages and increased import reliance. Erratic patterns also disrupt vital fisheries and aquaculture, impacting livelihoods and exports.

Agriculture

Agriculture forms the backbone of Tonga's economy, representing an estimated 20 per cent of the national GDP and directly supporting 75 per cent of the population.[107] This majority residing in rural areas face a dire threat, worsening water insecurity. As reliable access to water dwindles, the consequences are devastating, crop yields plummet and rural incomes collapse and the nation loses its ability to feed itself. The water driven agricultural crisis forces increased reliance on external aid, a pattern evident following the recent drought year, when many families turned to food imports or cash remittances from relatives overseas.[108] In addition, the water shortages

[103] Godfrey Baldacchino and Anders Wivel, Handbook on the Politics of Small States (London, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2020),7.
[104] John Curtis Perry, Singapore: Unlikely Power (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017),iiv.
[105] Cheng Guan Ang, Lee Kuan Yew's Strategic Thought (London; New York: Routledge, 2013),97.
[106] Jess Marinaccio, "Oceania Matters in Diplomacy," review of The New Pacific Diplomacy, by Greg Fry and Sandra Tarte, eds., Asia Pacific Viewpoint 58, no. 3 (December 2017): 396–97, 10-11.
[107] Atu `o Hakautapu Emberson-Bain, "Country Briefing Paper Women in Tonga" (Manilla, Bangkok: Asia Development Bank (ADB), December 1998),1-2.
[108] United Nations Office DRR, "Status Report: Disaster Risk Reduction in the Kingdom of

exacerbate mistrust between rural communities who are directly affected and government agencies, creating tensions and potential instability.[109]

Addressing Urban Vulnerabilities

The increasing urbanisation on Tonga's main island is exerting unprecedented pressure on the island's already scarce freshwater resources, leading to multifaceted crises beyond agriculture alone. The disjointed approach reveals critical gaps between governmental bodies, non-governmental agencies and local populations in recognising and addressing insecurity, which constrains strategic planning and weakens resilience.[110] These urban water insecurities jeopardise public health and ripple back to rural agricultural areas reliant on this scarce resource for irrigation, deepening food production weaknesses and compounding economic fragilities.

Water security challenges in Tonga need to be looked at through a holistic approach if a sustainable path to water security is to be achieved. To do so means there must be a connection between the long term and short-term goals.[111] Therefore, while foreign assistance contributes to easing water scarcity pressure, it also puts Tonga into a position where it must balance protecting its sovereignty and ensuring that its people have consistent access to quality water.

The Importance of Local Solutions

It has become vital that there is an integration with the local ecosystems and traditional farm techniques and to that to there must be consistent support from governmental agencies. As has been shown throughout, a failure to have strong support can easily break down national resilience and exposes an already fragile economy to shocks. Some points to note and to reflect upon, is that with low productivity and poor crop quality due to poor water quality, rural communities will be forced to turn to technological and artificial methods for better harvests. However, these technologies, such as multipurpose tractors, are costly to procure and have sustainable challenges. This will create a catch 22 effect where you have new systems that will negatively affect underground aquifers, which are already threatened by seawater intrusion, long-term effects on the well-being of Tongans, and the breakdown of national resilience that exposes an already fragile economy to shocks.

Tonga" (UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) and Asia Disaster Preparedness, 2022), 7.

[109] Maria Julia Trombetta, "Environmental Security and Climate Change: Analysing the Discourse," Cambridge Review of International Affairs 21, no. 4 (January 26, 2008): 585–602, https://doi.org/10.1080/09557570802452920, 102.

[110] David Devlaeminck, Zafar Adeel, and Robert Sandford, The Human Face of Water Security (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2017),8.

[111] Hal Brands, What Good Is Grand Strategy?: Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2015),4.

Chapter 7: Crafting a Long-Term Vision

A Resilience Approach

Tonga's strategy for securing its water future should prioritize building resilience at all levels: individual, community, national, and regional. This resilience-based approach involves integrating adaptive governance, climate-smart infrastructure, and community empowerment to enhance Tonga's capacity to withstand and recover from water-related shocks.

To ensure the safety of Tongans and in recognition of all factors, this will require a combination of methods which include investing in climate-resilient infrastructure, fostering community engagement, restructuring governance that sets the conditions for Tonga's adaptive capacity to protect its population and maintaining its national identity in the face of a worsening water crisis.

Community Empowerment and Traditional Knowledge

Community engagement is a critical component of Tonga's resilience strategy, as water insecurity is not a development issue but a direct threat to national security, a force multiplier that undermines public health, social cohesion, and resilience.

A helpful community-driven approach builds local resilience, instilling purpose and value while highlighting the need to integrate traditional knowledge with modern innovation. It is important that Tongan's village-level control of water systems be helpful for local maintenance and access and must be a strong consideration as authority is centralised under a more substantial framework that would enhance efficiency and sustainability. Therefore, integrating traditional water management practices, such as rainwater harvesting, water conservation, and sustainable agriculture, can enhance community resilience.

Building Capacity and Knowledge

Building local capacity and knowledge is essential for sustainable water governance. This includes training water managers, technicians, and community members to effectively manage water resources, monitor water quality, and maintain infrastructure. To achieve this, there must be action to enhance research and data collection efforts to provide the robust evidence needed to inform effective policies and programmes.

Promoting Economic Diversification

Promoting economic diversification can reduce Tonga's vulnerability to water-related shocks. This involves supporting alternative livelihoods, such as tourism, fisheries, and small-scale manufacturing, that are less dependent on water-intensive activities.

Strengthening Regional Partnerships

Regional partnerships can provide Tonga with access to expertise, technology, and financial support for building resilience. This means leveraging existing partnerships (that are already strong due to long term relationships) and looking for more

opportunities that strengthen its relationship for security, such as with Australia and New Zealand that will contribute to the broader ODA total and enhance resilience to climate change, disasters, and security challenges. It also means partnering in non-traditional partnerships for water and climate infrastructure that link to development assistance (e.g. China) for strategic influence.

Integrating Water into National Security

It is imperative that water policy development in Tonga be elevated and explicitly integrated into national strategic frameworks. The Tonga Strategic Development Framework (TSDF) 2015-2025, while acknowledging water-related priorities such as sanitation and waste management, it fall short in actions.[112] To bridge that strategic gap and to ensure that Tonga's policy architecture reflects the strategic importance of water security in the face of escalating climate threats.

Securing Sovereignty

Water and climate issues in Tonga are increasingly intertwined with great power competition between the US and China and therefore it is important that Tonga works to protect it's ability to secure resources. Tonga's survival under climate pressure will hinge on technical adaptation and whether it can manage water sustainably and strategically.[113] Tonga can turn a climate vulnerability into a pillar of resilience and sovereignty by enshrining water governance within national security architecture.

To help safeguard national security, public health and ensure its economic sovereignty, Tongans need to view climate change and water access as a strategic threat with direct and far-reaching ramifications for the country. By investing in resilience, promoting community empowerment, building capacity, integrating water into national security, promoting economic diversification, strengthening regional partnerships and securing sovereignty.

[112] Emma Newland, "Identification of Options for a Partnership Program to Strengthen Water Management and WASH Service Delivery in Tonga" (Melbourne, Australia: GHD Pty Ltd, August 13, 2021),7.
[113] Center for Excellence in Disaster Management & Humanitarian Assistance, Disaster Reference Management Hand Book Tonga (Hawaii: Center for Excellence in Disaster Management & Humanitarian Assistance, 2023),25.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated that water security in the Kingdom of Tonga is a multifaceted challenge, shaped by the interplay of climate change, complex governance structures, geopolitical considerations, and economic imperatives. Tonga faces existential threats from rising sea levels, erratic rainfall patterns, and extreme weather events, all of which exert profound pressures on freshwater resources. These pressures have cascading effects on agricultural productivity and community well-being, while simultaneously intensifying governance challenges. Addressing these vulnerabilities requires flexible, integrated, and community-driven solutions that are both resilient and adaptive.

While external aid remains critical to supporting water infrastructure and capacity-building, reliance on such assistance carries risks for national sovereignty. Strategic engagement, transparency, and normative leadership are essential to ensure that international support aligns with Tonga's national interests. Regional cooperation, incorporating both normative and instrumental mechanisms, offers opportunities to amplify Tonga's voice on the global stage and to share knowledge and best practices across Pacific Island nations.

Recommendations

The following recommendations represent the key conclusions and actionable insights derived from this thesis.

To strengthen water security in Tonga, it is essential to advance Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) through the development and implementation of a comprehensive National Water Security Strategy. Such a strategy must integrate climate resilience, economic planning, and social equity objectives, while prioritizing policies that enhance water-use efficiency, protect critical watersheds, and regulate water extraction. Central to this approach is the establishment of a National Water Council, comprising representatives from government agencies, local communities, and civil society organizations. This body would oversee the development of a detailed action plan with clear targets, timelines, and measurable indicators to monitor progress and ensure that objectives are met effectively.

Equally important is the enhancement of infrastructure resilience. Tonga must modernize and upgrade its water infrastructure, including rainwater harvesting systems, desalination plants, and distribution networks, while integrating nature-based solutions to safeguard water sources and mitigate flood risks. Achieving this requires conducting a comprehensive nationwide assessment of infrastructure needs, implementing climate-resilient design and construction practices, and ensuring that maintenance and rehabilitation are adequately funded and systematically managed. Such measures will strengthen the country's ability to withstand environmental stresses and sustain water supply for both urban and rural communities.

Empowering local communities is also a critical dimension of water security. Promoting community-based water management approaches that incorporate traditional knowledge and local expertise ensures that water resources are managed effectively at the grassroots level. Village-level water committees can play a central

role in overseeing and monitoring water resources, supported by training, technical assistance, participatory planning processes, and dedicated funding for community-led projects. These initiatives foster local ownership and enhance the sustainability of water management practices.

Strengthening leadership and strategic engagement is necessary for amplifying Tonga's voice on water security and climate action at both regional and international levels. By leveraging platforms such as the Pacific Islands Forum, Tonga can advocate for climate finance, technology transfer, and capacity-building initiatives. Establishing a dedicated water diplomacy task force and developing a strategic communications plan will facilitate Tonga's participation in international negotiations and enable the country to secure binding commitments on climate and water-related targets.

Finally, promoting transparency and accountability is indispensable for effective water governance. Implementing evidence-based, open governance mechanisms ensures that decisions are participatory and transparent, while legislation guaranteeing public access to information, independent monitoring and evaluation, and ethical procurement practices enhances the effectiveness and efficiency of water projects.

By prioritizing these integrated strategies, Tonga can transform existing vulnerabilities into strengths, building a resilient and sustainable water future. Such an approach safeguards human security, strengthens economic sovereignty, and upholds national dignity. Ultimately, a community-centered, adaptive, and forward-looking water management framework is essential to ensure the well-being of every Tongan family and the long-term sustainability of the nation's freshwater resources.

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Capstone Essays

Maritime security challenges for the South Pacific-Combatting drug trafficking in the region
Lieutenant Commander Ametisi Fonokalafi, Tonga

To what extent do geoeconomic issues affect strategic competition in Fiji? Do they complement, intensify or decrease strategic competition?
Major Rokoseru Uluitavaki, Fiji

To what extent should gender security concerns impact Papua New Guinea's National security?
Lakitonu Atomu, Papua New Guinea

How should Australia integrate force elements to project and protect its strategic interest in the Indo-Pacific?
Hosea Bandy, Papua New Guinea

Is the provision of foreign aid in the Indo-Pacific primarily strategic? A realist analysis of Sino-U.S. rivalry and recipient agency
Major David Kaloris, Vanuatu

How should the Solomon Islands Paramilitary be implemented?
Chief Superintendent Francis Ramoni, Solomon Islands

Capstone Essays

The Capstone Essay is the principal assessment activity of the ACSC, providing course members with the opportunity to demonstrate the knowledge, analytical skills and professional judgement developed throughout the program.

As the culminating assessment activity the Capstone Essay builds on the foundational concepts introduced in the Policy, Strategy and Capability unit, which examines the interrelationship between policy, strategy, operations and capability. Through the unit, course members develop essential research skills, including formulating a research question, conducting a literature review and annotated bibliography, collecting and analysing evidence, and constructing a well-supported argument in a long-form academic essay.

The Capstone Essay serves as an individual capstone to the ACSC learning journey, requiring course members to integrate learning from across the course and apply it to a significant contemporary issue relevant to the profession of arms and/or the national security community. Where appropriate, course members may align their research project with their chosen specialisation area.

Maritime security challenges for the South Pacific - Combatting drug trafficking in the region

Author

Lieutenant Commander Ametisi Fonokalafi, Tonga

LCDR Ametisi Anthony Fonokalafi was Seamen Officer at the Tonga Royal Navy of His Majesty's Armes Forces, he Graduated ACSC class of 2023. He make his way and become Commanding officer on Patrol boat and up to Chief of Staff of the Navy, In January 2026 he retired after almost 24 years dedicated his life to the King and the Country of the Kingdom of Tonga. Currently supporting his wife and family study in Australia.

Introduction

What actions should the Pacific state undertake to improve maritime security and strengthen borders to reduce the movement of drugs and illicit substances? This is the central issue I address in my paper because the Pacific region has a serious problem with drug trafficking. The Pacific region now has a reputation for being a transhipment site for drug smuggling. Drugs including cocaine, methamphetamine, and other illegal substances are moved by criminal syndicates across the Pacific to markets in Australia, New Zealand, and other nations. What are some of the reasons for this problem? What should Pacific State do?

In this paper, I, firstly, discuss the maritime security challenges for the Pacific in controlling its borders, especially, the movement of drugs and illicit substances by criminals. One major challenge is its geographic location and extensive maritime area makes. It is so vast and extensive that it is difficult for law enforcement authorities to monitor adequately and effectively, control, and secure its borders. Secondly, I discuss some actions governments in the Pacific have undertaken to improve maritime security to combat the movement of drugs and illicit substances. Thirdly, I conclude, noting that the challenge is complicated and that a multifaceted approach involving the cooperation of law enforcement and society is critical to collectively strengthening maritime security.

What are some of the maritime security challenges for the Pacific which is contributing to the problem of increased drug trafficking and movement of illicit substances in the Pacific? The challenges range from the natural setting of the Pacific geography and others are institutional.

- **Geographical setting:** Drug traffickers seeking to avoid discovery and law enforcement find the South Pacific's huge ocean and numerous isolated islands to be an alluring transit route.

- **Weak law enforcement:** Some South Pacific nations struggle with corruption, a lack of resources, and weak law enforcement, which makes it simpler for drug traffickers to operate.

- **Limited surveillance and monitoring**: Given the vastness of the area, it is difficult for police to properly patrol and monitor all potential routes for drug trafficking.

Others are social in nature.

- **High demand in target markets:** The popularity of the South Pacific as a transit region has been influenced by the high demand for drugs in nations like Australia and New Zealand.

- **Poverty and unemployment:** Due to socioeconomic problems, people in various South Pacific countries may turn to criminal activities, such as drug trafficking, to survive or make money.

- **Corruption:** Ineffective efforts to kerb drug trafficking might be hampered by corruption within government or law enforcement organisations.

What actions or measures have Pacific states undertaken to address their maritime security challenges? These actions have a whole of government-whole-of-society approach and a mixture of policy measures such as law enforcement, regional cooperation, and legislation.

Regional cooperation actions include:

- **Strengthening law enforcement:** To combat drug trafficking, regional governments have worked to improve the abilities and resources of local law enforcement organisations. In order to accomplish this, employees must be trained, given the appropriate equipment, and given access to specialised units devoted to drug interdiction.

- **Regional cooperation:** Pacific island countries have realised the value of cooperating to combat drug trafficking on a global scale. Countries have cooperated to share intelligence, carry out joint operations, and combat transnational crime through the efforts of regional organisations like the Pacific Islands Forum.

- **Maritime surveillance:** Due to the South Pacific's extensive marine area, maritime surveillance has been a top concern. To monitor marine operations and find suspected drug-trafficking vessels, some nations have invested in better radar and surveillance equipment.

- **International alliances:** Pacific island leaders have formed alliances with international bodies and nations with experience in drug-fighting initiatives. These collaborations frequently involve intelligence sharing, educational initiatives, and technological support.

Whole of society approaches include:

- **Community-based prevention initiatives:** Some leaders have backed community-based prevention and education initiatives because they understand how crucial it is to address the underlying causes of drug trafficking. These programmes seek to increase public knowledge of the risks associated with drug usage and assist local communities in building resistance to illegal drug activity.

- **Legislation measure:** Adopting or strengthening anti-drug trafficking legislation has resulted in tougher punishments for offenders and the ability for law enforcement to take assets obtained via drug-related operations.

- **Public awareness initiatives:** To inform people about the risks associated with drug usage and the value of reporting suspicious activity, governments have started public awareness campaigns.

- **Dealing with corruption:** Leaders have stressed the significance of fighting corruption in law enforcement and other government institutions in order to stop drug trafficking from flourishing.

Geographical setting

The South Pacific is indeed an enticing transit route for drug traffickers looking to avoid discovery and law enforcement due to its geographical environment, which includes a huge ocean and numerous isolated islands. The drugs were predominantly sourced from three major global supply chains, namely the Afghanistan network, the Golden Triangle network, and the Mexico-Columbia network, accounting for approximately 95% of the total supply.[1] Asian organised crime syndicates, as well as Mexican and South American cartels, perceive the region as a significant transit route and, on occasion, a production site. This strategic perspective is driven by the attractiveness of the Australian and New Zealand markets, which provide substantial profitability due to the exceptionally high street value of methamphetamine and cocaine.[2] The South Pacific region is situated between the primary places of origin and destinations of illegal commodities, as determined by its geographical location.[3] Traffickers have a distinct advantage due to the South Pacific Ocean's wide width because it is difficult for authorities to efficiently police and monitor all areas. Therefore, geographical characteristics may make the South Pacific appealing to drug traffickers as a location for the transhipment of drugs between source areas and target markets and allow locals to enter into drug marketing. As a result, Pacific Island countries have struggled to successfully combat drug trafficking, calling Pacific Island states for action for

[1] John Miltenburg, "Supply Chains for Iilicit Products: Case Study of the Global Opiate Production Networks," ed. Shaofeng Liu, *Cogent Business & Management* 5, no. 1 (January 8, 2018), https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2018.1423871.
[2] Jose Sousa-Santos, "Drug Trafficking in the Pacific Islands: The Imp. 000act of Transnational Crime," www.lowyinstitute.org, 2022, https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/drug-trafficking-pacific-islands-impact-transnational-crime, 3
[3] Baiq Wardhani, "Vulnerability of the South Pacific Region to Transboundary Crime," *International Journal of Advanced Scientific Research and Management* 2, no. 3 (March 3, 2017), https://ijasrm.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/IJASRM_V2S3_206_33_40.pdf, 38

increased regional and global cooperation to address the problem.

Weak law enforcement

Weak law enforcement has been a major issue in various South Pacific countries, frequently as a result of elements like corruption, a lack of resources, and poor infrastructure. Corruption in government or law enforcement organisations can hinder efforts to successfully tackle drug trafficking. Investigations may be tainted, criminals may be protected, and unlawful activity may be made easier. Due to inadequate government, pervasive corruption, and limited law enforcement capabilities. The islands' economic vulnerabilities and the resulting implications on infrastructure, poverty, and instability could potentially enhance the appeal of the islands to international criminal organisations.[4] The limited availability of resources like Inadequate transportation and communication systems might make it difficult Insufficiently developed law enforcement capabilities serve to further aggravate the problem.[5] According to Jose Sousa-Santos, there is a lack of confidence in the ability of local law enforcement to effectively mitigate drug trafficking. The absence of trust is exacerbated by the prevailing frustration that the Pacific region is frequently regarded as the origin of the issue at hand.[6] Several governments in the South Pacific region face constraints in terms of financial and human resources dedicated to their law enforcement organisations for law enforcement to react swiftly and effectively to drug trafficking activities. Efforts aimed at addressing the deficiencies in law enforcement about drug trafficking should be customised to suit the distinct problems and requirements of individual nations within the South Pacific region. The successful mitigation of drug trafficking in the region necessitates a continuous dedication to enhancing the capacities of law enforcement agencies, as well as effectively addressing and making it easier for traffickers to operate in the region.

Limited surveillance enforcement

Budgetary restrictions may prevent many South Pacific countries from investing in sophisticated surveillance equipment and technology, as well as the personnel needed to efficiently monitor broad maritime areas. According to Baiq's report, the obstacles include insufficient resources, lack of investigative techniques, and lack of coordination among law enforcement agencies, compounded by corruption and bribery.[7] The monitoring and


Image: Department of Defence

[4] Rob McCusker, “Transnational Crime in the Pacific Islands : Real or Apparent Danger?,” *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice* 308, no. 308 (March 1, 2006): 2
[5] Rob McCusker, 1
[6] Jose Sousa-Santos, 22
[7] Baiq Wardhani, 37

enforcement capabilities of the region primarily rely upon the utilisation of patrol boat assets and air surveillance, contributed by wealthier countries, which are observed both within and beyond the region.[8] The deficiency in maritime surveillance and enforcement resources is further exacerbated by limited regulatory oversight on land across various domains. [9]The presence of tough terrain might make surveillance activities even more difficult. Law enforcement may find it difficult to establish and maintain a presence in some places due to access issues. Drug trafficking is frequently a sophisticated, transnational business. Traffickers can quickly adjust to law enforcement efforts and alter their strategies to evade capture. As the traffickers know the limitation of surveillance enforcement, they count it as a benefit for them and increase the activities of criminal networks engaged in the illicit drug trade by addressing the issues linked to limited surveillance and monitoring.

High demand in the market

The South Pacific drug trade is significantly impacted by the increasing demand for medicines in target areas like Australia and New Zealand. The demand for illegal drugs in these nations is strongly related to the attractiveness of the South Pacific as a transit area. These two countries have a consumer base that faces some of the highest prices for such substances on a global scale.[10] Australia exhibits the largest per capita consumption of cocaine globally within these countries, along with the highest cost per gramme compared to other regions worldwide.[11] Due to their wealth and prosperity, both are fairly wealthy nations with higher disposable incomes, which makes them appealing marketplaces for drug traffickers looking to make money from the selling of drugs. Youth culture and nightlife in Urban areas in Australia and New Zealand have vibrant nightlife scenes, and certain youth subcultures include recreational drug usage, which raises the market for illegal drugs.[12] Drug traffickers have strong financial incentives to use the South Pacific as a transit route because of the high demand in the target markets. They seek to transport pharmaceuticals from drug production or source areas to markets with high demand. As a result, Pacific island countries must deal with the intricate problem of drug trafficking not just as a local concern but also as a component of a larger global drug trade network.

Poverty and unemployment

Significant socioeconomic reasons like unemployment and poverty might push

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[9] Robin Warner, "Joining Forces to Combat Crime in the Maritime Domain: Cooperative Joining Forces to Combat Crime in the Maritime Domain: Cooperative Maritime Surveillance and Enforcement in the South Pacific Region Maritime Surveillance and Enforcement in the South Pacific Region," 2008, https://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1182&context=lawpapers. 2

[10] Jose Sousa-Santos, 5

[11] Kate Lyons, "The New Drug Highway: Pacific Islands at Centre of Cocaine Trafficking Boom," *The Guardian*, June 25, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/24/the-new-drug-highway-pacific-islands-at-centre-of-cocaine-trafficking-boom.

[12] Adam O. Hill et al., "Illicit Drug Use among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Pansexual, Trans and Gender Diverse, Queer and Asexual Young People in Australia: Intersections and Associated Outcomes," *Drug and Alcohol Review* 42, no. 3 (December 5, 2022), https://doi.org/10.1111/dar.13585.

people in different South Pacific nations to engage in criminal activity, such as drug trafficking, in order to survive or make money and fast money. The climate created by these factors may make disadvantaged groups more likely to engage in illegal activity. Young individuals who are unemployed and migrate to metropolitan regions in the South Pacific exhibit similar levels of vulnerability. Engaging in illicit drug trade serves as a financial means for individuals, whereas drug consumption serves as a means to alleviate the ennui associated with idleness.[13] Economic prospects are lacking drug trafficking, despite the considerable risks involved, may be seen as a quick method to get money in nations with few job options and high unemployment rates. People who are in need are more likely to be taken advantage of by drug trafficking organisations. To lure victims, criminal organisations may provide monetary incentives or make promises of a better life. Young people with little opportunities for employment and education may turn to illicit enterprises, such as drug trafficking, as a way to get out of poverty or despair. The prevalence of extreme poverty, high unemployment rates, and persistent salary arrears render a significant portion of the population susceptible to engaging in corrupt practices. Consequently, the act of bribing local officials and authorities is relatively inexpensive.[14] In some places, poverty and unemployment can fuel a cycle of crime. Due to financial difficulties, some people may become involved in drug trafficking. Once involved in illicit activity, it can be difficult to leave criminal networks.

Corruption

Law enforcement or government Drug trafficking prevention is hampered by corruption. When police are corrupt, the system is at risk and drug traffickers go unpunished. Corruption of numerous kinds hinders drug trafficking fights. Narco-corruption in the Pacific has threatened customs, police, and immigration services and their employees. In 2019, Tonga's efforts to combat drug-related activities resulted in the apprehension of a high-ranking customs official and a police officer involved in the criminal transportation of methamphetamine, cocaine, and illegal guns originating from the United States.[15] There may be many more, family responsibilities, poor pay, and fear tactics make corruption simpler. Dishonest law enforcement personnel may defend drug traffickers or help them transport drugs for personal gain or criminal groups. The islands' social, economic, and cultural elements cause corruption and money laundering, while law enforcement causes identity and computer crime. Dishonest officials who spare drug dealers send a message that trafficking is permissible and weaken law enforcement. International crime groups are more likely to utilise corruption when it is perceived as a way to give gifts rather than receive favours. So it's simple for Corrupt officials may leak information about forthcoming raids or investigations, allowing drug traffickers to escape. The Pacific has several governments and outdated laws, reducing risk. Law enforcement is poor, and criminality is high. Travel costs aren't important because organised crime makes the greatest money with the fewest chances of being detected and prosecuted. Corruption can taint cases, acquit drug traffickers, or

[13] Sue Windybank, "The Illegal Pacific, Part 1: Organised Crime," *Policy: A Journal of Public Policy and Ideas* 24, no. 2 (2008): 32–38, https://doi.org/24/2.
[14] Neil Boister, "Regional Cooperation in the Suppression of Transnational Crime in the South Pacific: Threat Assessment by the Pacific Forum," January 2004. 21
[15] Jose Sousa-Santos,

lighten their sentences. Violence, criminality, and police corruption in Pacific Island settlements. Because traffickers are paid for drugs, local drug outlets may be increasing and receiving more drugs and they benefit from corruption in the region.

Pacific Island state leaders must take the following action to have a whole of government-whole-of-society approach and a mixture of policy measures such as law enforcement, regional cooperation, and legislation to fight against drug traffickers in the region.

Strengthening law enforcement

Regional governments must strengthen their capacities and provide more resources to local law enforcement to combat drug trafficking. Staff must be properly trained, equipped, and given access to drug-interception units to achieve this goal. The Australian-funded Pacific Transnational Crime Coordination Centre. The illicit Pacific has made some important illicit drug busts. Australia finances Transnational Crime teams in Fiji, Vanuatu, Samoa, Tonga, PNG, and the Solomon Islands. Liaison between Australian and Pacific police and regional police training efforts complete the picture. Future goals include improving agency collaboration and information base.[16] Regional governments are strengthening their capacities and providing more resources to local law enforcement to combat drug trafficking. Staff must be properly trained, equipped, and given access to drug-interception units to achieve this goal. Training and skill development for law enforcement employees must be extensive and ongoing. The training program should cover drug identification, investigation methods, evidence collecting, legal protocols, and human rights. Specialised drug-related training can improve police enforcement skills. Maritime Coordination Centres have been opened in Tonga and Fiji which coordinate with Police, fisheries, customs and Quarantine.[17] Effective law enforcement requires sufficient tools and resources. Modern communication technology, surveillance equipment, drug detection kits, protective gear, and patrol and reaction vehicles are included. Technology may help law enforcement in many ways. Data analytics, predictive policing, and automated databases help law enforcement find patterns, follow suspects, and predict drug-related events. Covert operations using undercover police and agents allow narcotics networks to be infiltrated and intelligence gathered. Therefore, this method increases the possibility of successful apprehensions and judicial actions.

Regional Collaboration

Pacific island governments value regional coordination to combat drug trafficking. Regional organisations like the Pacific Islands Forum have helped states share intelligence, conduct cooperative operations, and battle transnational crime. PIF members' Boe Declaration-committed national security strategies aim to connect domestic transnational crime focus with regional architecture. New national security strategies in Samoa, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu highlight transnational crime

[16] Sue Windybank, "The Illegal Pacific, Part 1: Organised Crime," *Policy: A Journal of Public Policy and Ideas* 24, no. 2 (2008): 32–38, https://doi.org/24/2. 37-38
[17] "Tonga's Maritime Coordination Centre Launched," Matangi Tonga, July 6, 2020, https://matangitonga.to/2020/07/06/tonga-s-maritime-coordination-centre-launched.

and drug misuse as threats to local populations. The three national security policies emphasise the need for regional and international counter-drug trafficking measures.[18] International alliances boost Pacific island nations' global impact through regional collaboration. These nations can work together to advocate for international aid, funding, and resources to combat drug trafficking. The national response of Tonga is an example. Tonga officially requested PIF support for its drug strategy in June 2019. Regional institutions like the Pacific Islands Forum facilitate intelligence and information cooperation among member countries. Knowledge of drug trafficking routes, criminal networks, and emerging patterns helps nations combat illegal activities. Australia, New Zealand, and the US are leading the Pacific drug war. In recent years, these states have increased their bilateral help with Pacific governments and international drug-busting efforts. Sharing resources and harmonising legal frameworks helps participating nations cooperate across borders by ensuring consistent legal frameworks and norms.[19] Harmonised legislation and extradition accords aid drug trafficking prosecution. Regional cooperation projects often include law enforcement capacity development. Seminars and skill development help people fight drug offences. Given the maritime nature of Pacific drug trafficking routes, coordinated maritime security operations are vital. Collaborative patrols, comprehensive surveillance, and good information exchange help stop marine narcotics shipments. Collaborative data-sharing platforms help analyse international drug trafficking trends, patterns, and actions. This communal knowledge aids tactic development. Regional cooperation projects that engage local communities can combat drug trafficking. Community awareness and education projects help people spot and report suspicious activity and support law enforcement. Regional cooperation is essential to combating drug trafficking and other transnational crimes on Pacific islands. Due to common challenges and the need for collaboration, some nations have formed alliances and collaborated across multiple disciplines. Regional cooperation activities have brought about beneficial impacts.

Maritime surveillance

Maritime surveillance has emerged as a significant issue of concern in the South Pacific region, given its vast expanse of sea territory. Several countries have made investments in enhanced radar and surveillance technology to effectively monitor marine operations and detect vessels suspected of engaging in drug trafficking. Numerous South Pacific governments have made substantial investments in sophisticated radar systems, surveillance equipment, and maritime technologies. These tools facilitate the monitoring of vessel movements and the identification of potentially suspicious activity over extensive maritime areas. The Automatic Identification System (AIS) is a technological tool utilised for monitoring and discerning the whereabouts of maritime boats promptly. By furnishing data on ship placements, course, and speed, it contributes to the augmentation of maritime domain awareness, enabling authorities to discern between lawful and potentially

[18] Jose Sousa-Santos, 8
[19] Jose Sousa-Santos, 7


Image: Department of Defence

unlawful vessels.[20] With the help of satellite-based monitoring systems provide a wide-ranging scope for observing maritime operations, hence facilitating the tracking of vessels even in geographically isolated regions where conventional radar coverage may be constrained. These can be monitored from the maritime coordination centre that has been opened in the South Pacific Islands.[21] Enhancing the legal frameworks about maritime surveillance, vessel tracking, and interdiction is of paramount importance in order to ensure the efficacy of enforcement measures. The establishment of integrated marine domain awareness centres is being pursued by countries in the region. These centres aim to consolidate data from a range of sources, including radar systems, satellites, and coastal sensors. The implementation of this comprehensive method enhances the level of situational awareness. Aerial monitoring improves coverage of the FFA's 15 nations' exclusive economic zones and high-seas areas, which total over 21 million square kilometres. Aerial surveillance and police boats can quickly probe unlawful fishing. Australia will pay $10-15 million yearly for the contracted model. Patrolling with civilian planes is advantageous. They should have lower running costs because military applications do not require complete functionality. Contract planes can provide more flexible and responsive support than military aircraft, which are normally tasked through donor-nation military procedures. A cost-effective additional surveillance capability will enhance Quadrilateral Defence Coordinating Group surveillance support from Australia, the US, France, and New Zealand.[22] Airborne surveillance is a critical component of maritime operations, wherein patrol aircraft equipped with advanced radar and surveillance equipment are employed to efficiently cover vast distances. There are few operations and Joint patrols implemented as a collaborative measure among neighbouring nations to conduct maritime surveillance and exercise authority over marine commerce, including Operation Kurukuru which has been running for almost 2 decades with a specific focus on regions that have a documented record of drug trafficking.[23] South Pacific states are expanding their marine surveillance capabilities and promoting regional collaboration to bolster their capacity in monitoring maritime activities, identifying drug-trafficking vessels, and promptly addressing potential security risks. Keeping an eye on the seas in the South Pacific is no easy task, necessitating not only advanced surveillance equipment but also widespread international cooperation. It is critical to the preservation of regional prosperity, safety, and ecological balance. Efficiently responding to changing marine

[20] Jose Sousa-Santos,
[21] Dhanjay Deo, “Australia to Fund Construction of Maritime Essential Services Centre in Fiji,” www.fijivillage.com, November 24, 2020, https://www.fijivillage.com/news/Australia-to-fund-construction-of-Maritime-Essential-Services-Centre-in-Fiji-x85f4r/.
[22] Scott Brady, “Pacific Air Patrols Will Do More than Combat Illegal Fishing,” www.lowyinstitute.org, November 24, 2017, https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/pacific-air-patrols-will-do-more-combat-illegal-fishing.
[23] Robert Iroga, “Operation Kurukuru Comes to an End — Solomon Business Magazine,” October 29, 2022, https://sbm.sb/operation-kurukuru-comes-to-an-end/.

threats requires ongoing investment in surveillance capabilities and international coordination.

International alliances

Pacific island leaders have established worldwide alliances with several international organisations and states that possess expertise in drug-fighting activities. These collaborative efforts often encompass the exchange of intelligence, implementation of instructional programmes, and provision of technology assistance. International alliances play a vital role in the endeavours of Pacific island states to address the challenges posed by drug trafficking and transnational crime. Establishing collaborations with international organisations and nations with prior expertise in tackling analogous situations offers significant benefits in terms of accessing valuable resources, specialised knowledge, and comprehensive support. International partnerships play a significant role in contributing to these endeavours. [24]The act of intelligence sharing enables Pacific island governments to effectively tap into a wider range of intelligence resources about drug trafficking networks, routes, and patterns by collaborating with international counterparts. The exchange of information among individuals or organisations improves the capacity to identify and mitigate unlawful activity. Pacific Patrol Boat project is the main Capacity building is a common practice within international alliances, wherein programmes are implemented to enhance the capabilities of law enforcement agencies in Pacific island countries through the provision of training and resources.[25] This encompasses the exchange of optimal methodologies, specialised knowledge, and instructional resources to augment their competencies. Collaborating with governments that possess sophisticated technological capabilities can afford Pacific island states the opportunity to acquire cutting-edge monitoring, detection, and communication technologies, which are crucial in their efforts to combat drug trafficking. Diplomatic pressure can be exerted by international partners through diplomatic channels to address the issue of drug trafficking in regional and worldwide forums. This approach aims to enhance awareness and foster coordinated efforts towards addressing this problem. The aforementioned collaborations have a significant role in enhancing regional security, promoting stability, and fostering the general welfare of the communities situated in the South Pacific region. These multinational coalitions help Pacific island states address drug concerns comprehensively. These countries may defend their populations and promote regional stability by using the expertise, resources, and support of experienced nations and organisations.

Community-based prevention initiatives

Community-based prevention and education projects have garnered support from certain leaders due to their recognition of the paramount need to address the root causes of drug trafficking. These initiatives aim to enhance public awareness of the hazards linked to drug consumption and support local communities in developing

[24] “Pacific Partnerships,” Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, n.d., https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/pacific/pacific-partnerships.
[25] Russell, ACT, “Department of Defence,” Defence.gov.au, 2022, https://www.defence.gov.au/news-events/releases/2022-07-01/statement-guardian-class-patrol-boats#:~:text=The%20PMSP%20is%20a%20%242.1%20billion%20program%20to.

resilience against illicit drug-related endeavours. The community policing approach implemented by the Tonga Police encompasses a range of targeted crime prevention initiatives, enhanced criminal intelligence gathering, and comprehensive practices for conducting investigations and prosecutions. These efforts are undertaken with the overarching objective of mitigating criminal behaviour in Tonga, with a specific emphasis on reducing instances of violent offences, exploitation and violence directed towards women and children, corruption, and serious organised crime.[26] Community support is enhanced through the implementation of awareness programmes, which serve to cultivate a collective consciousness and a shared feeling of obligation. Community-based prevention and education programmes make significant contributions towards achieving these objectives Community-based initiatives offer reliable and easily accessible knowledge about the hazards and repercussions associated with drug utilisation. The dissemination of knowledge regarding the negative consequences linked to drug use enables individuals to make well-informed choices. Youth Empowerment program by Fili Tonu in Tonga provides drama and action songs in main events.[27] These efforts frequently prioritise the empowerment of young individuals by equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively counteract peer pressure and make informed decisions that promote their well-being. Peer education is the provision of training to young individuals to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to serve as peer educators programme in Tonga is carried out by the Alcohol and Drugs Awareness Centre of The Salvation Army.[28] This approach effectively facilitates the dissemination of information and awareness regarding the potential hazards associated with drug consumption among their peers. Interactive programs encompass a range of engaging activities such as workshops, and seminars, and the promotion of school engagement entails the collaborative effort of educational institutions and external entities to include prevention messaging in the existing curricula. Leaders and organisations empower communities to resist illegal drugs by tackling the root causes of drug trafficking and abuse through community-based preventive efforts. These programmes are essential to reducing drug use and fostering drug-free societies.

Legislation measure

Drug trafficking laws have increased fines and allowed law enforcement to take drug-related assets. Adopting or strengthening drug trafficking laws is essential to addressing this issue. This statute gives law enforcement the power to combat drug trafficking. Its main goals are to punish criminals and give authorities the tools to dismantle criminal networks. Drug trafficking prevention relies on legislation. In June 2018, an Australian was found guilty of smuggling cocaine into Fiji on his luxury yacht. The person and his spouse were arrested in June after Fijian border authorities found almost $A20 million in illicit drugs and two firearms on their sailboat, Shenanigans, in Port Denarau. After a trial in Suva, the man was convicted of narcotics importation, possession, and failing to report firearms and ammunition to

[26] Tonga Police, “Tonga Police Corporate Plan & Budget 2020/21 - 2022/23,” 2020, https://pmo.gov.to/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Tonga-Police.pdf.
[27] “Reproductive Health through Drama - in Tonga,” UNFPA Pacific Island Countries, April 2, 2017, https://pacific.unfpa.org/en/news/reproductive-health-through-drama-tonga.
[28] Jose Sousa-Santos,

customs. The High Court in Suva in March 2019 indicted the individual. For the following crimes, he was sentenced to 23 years in jail with an 18-year non-parole period.[29] Legislation encourages law enforcement, judiciary, and other relevant bodies to work together to combat drug trafficking. A 45-year-old Tonga man was sentenced to life for exporting methamphetamine. The defendant received a life sentence in 2021 for smuggling 29.7 kg of methamphetamine. The prohibited chemical was secretly brought to New Zealand in a refrigerated container. NZ authorities arrested 5 persons and are investigating and awaiting trial.[30] This is the first time such a harsh penalty has been imposed under strict drug laws. Extraterritorial jurisdiction laws allow nations to punish drug traffickers regardless of where they commit the crimes. This helps address global drug networks holistically. Legislation can provide law enforcement authorities with more surveillance, investigation, and evidence collection power, helping them build stronger legal cases. Governments adopt or strengthen anti-drug trafficking laws to give law enforcement the power to stop drug traffickers and reduce drug-related offences. Fiji and Tonga are boosting drug charges, which is excellent for the future.

Public awareness initiatives

Public awareness campaigns play a crucial role in comprehensive endeavours aimed at addressing drug trafficking and substance misuse. Campaigns of this nature serve a vital role in disseminating knowledge within communities regarding the perils associated with substance abuse, advocating for the adoption of wholesome decisions, and fostering a culture of vigilance in reporting dubious behaviours. The current drug awareness, recovery, and rehabilitation programs are either lacking or not prepared to address the significant rise in drug addiction. The Alcohol and Drugs Awareness Centre (ADAC), operated by The Salvation Army, is the sole provider of a recovery and rehabilitation program in the ported area. This program specifically targets those who are involved in alcohol and drug-related offences, with a focus on addressing the average age of this population. Between the years 2018 and 2019, the Samoan addiction services program, which received funding from the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, successfully engaged with a total of 330 clients.[31] Educational messaging initiatives aim to disseminate precise and unambiguous information about the potential hazards and repercussions associated with drug consumption. The authors emphasise the adverse effects on the physical, mental, and social well-being that are linked to drug consumption. The provision of training by the United States Drug Enforcement Administration to Fijian police and customs officers, as well as the involvement of agents from the United States embassy in Suva, facilitated by the US Diplomatic Security Service, in conducting drug awareness workshops with schoolchildren and parents, has been seen. Operation Aiga involved the deployment of a cutter by the United States Coast Guard to Samoa for six months.[32] Numerous initiatives are

[29] Lice Movono, "Australian John Nikolic Sentenced to 23 Years in a Fiji Jail for Drug Smuggling," *ABC News*, March 8, 2019, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-03-08/john-nikolic-sentenced-to-18-years-of-jail/10882234.
[30] "Tonga's Maritime Coordination Centre Launched," Matangi Tonga, July 6, 2020, https://matangitonga.to/2020/07/06/tonga-s-maritime-coordination-centre-launched.
[31] Jose Sousa-Santos,
[32] Jose Sousa-Santos, 22

designed to specifically target the demographic of young individuals, who are deemed particularly susceptible to the impacts associated with drug-related activities. The significance of making well-informed judgements and exhibiting resistance to peer pressure is underscored. Public awareness campaigns serve the dual purpose of educating individuals about the hazards associated with substance abuse and fostering a shared feeling of accountability and attentiveness across communities. These initiatives foster a climate of consciousness that plays a crucial role in combating drug trafficking and substance misuse.

Dealing with corruption

Addressing corruption is a crucial component in effectively combating drug trafficking and transnational organised crime. The presence of corrupt law enforcement and government institutions can facilitate the unhindered operation of criminal networks, weakening the principles of the rule of law and hindering endeavours to tackle issues related to drugs. The rule of law is preserved through addressing corruption within law enforcement and government institutions, thereby safeguarding the integrity of legal systems against the influence of special interests. In the Pacific, narco-corruption has hurt the rule of law by putting institutions and people in key agencies like customs, police, and immigration at risk. Tonga's "war on drugs" in 2019 arrested a top customs official and a police officer who were smuggling methamphetamine, cocaine, and illicit firearms from the US. There may be many more. Corruption is made easier by family ties and responsibilities, low wages, and ways to scare people.[33] The establishment of a law enforcement and government system that is free from corruption enhances credibility, hence fostering public trust and confidence. This, in turn, promotes citizen cooperation with authorities in the reporting of drug-related activities. Law enforcement agencies that are free from corruption can carry out comprehensive and impartial investigations, resulting in more robust legal proceedings against those involved in drug trafficking. The absence of corruption within a given context effectively communicates a strong stance against drug trafficking, dissuading prospective offenders. The implementation of ethics training programmes for law enforcement officers and government officials serves the purpose of enhancing their ability to identify and effectively counteract instances of corruption. Tackling corruption necessitates a comprehensive strategy encompassing legal reforms, transparency endeavours, procedures for accountability, and a dedicated effort to cultivate a culture centred on integrity. Through the elimination of corruption, leaders establish a favourable atmosphere that facilitates the efficacy of law enforcement endeavours and impedes the expansion of drug trafficking networks. Implementing accountability, transparency, and internal investigative procedures can help detect and address corrupt practices. Protection of whistleblowers By protecting and rewarding law enforcement corruption whistleblowers, we encourage accurate reporting and discourage misbehaviour. Education against corruption and informing law enforcement on integrity and the consequences of corruption can promote ethics and professionalism. Independent institutions or commissions can ensure objectivity and fairness in corruption investigations. Anti-corruption efforts can work through raising public awareness of corruption's harms and involving civic society. To fight corruption, governments, law enforcement, civic society, and international partners

[33] Jose Sousa-Santos,

must collaborate. By fighting corruption and encouraging honesty, law enforcement can break up drug trafficking networks more effectively.

Conclusion

Securing maritime security is a complex problem and the challenges are multifaceted in scale and scope. Regional and national leadership is necessary to manage all these different actors to improve maritime security. Regional collaboration and law enforcement activities must be sustained and implement measures that recognise the complexity and multifaceted nature of the problem and focus on areas where the impact of criminal activity is minimised. Actions taken must have long-term considerations because the problem of drug trafficking and the movement of illicit substances will be an ongoing one as criminals improvise and adapt measures to thwart law enforcement efforts. Continual collaboration, intelligence sharing, and focused actions are necessary at national, regional and international levels.

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Images: Department of Defence

To what extent do geoeconomic issues affect strategic competition in Fiji? Do they complement, intensify or decrease strategic competition?

Author

Major Rokoseru Uluitavaki, Fiji

Major Uluitavuki is an Army Officer in the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) and a graduate of the Australian Command and Staff Course (ACSC) Class of 2025. He currently serves as Commanding Officer, Land Force Command Battalion, and Chief Staff Officer Service Support at Headquarters Land Force Command in Suva. In these appointments, he supports command, operational readiness, administration, and service support across the RFMF Land Force.

Introduction

In recent years, a trend has become prevalent in the Indo-Pacific: the concept of geoeconomics in relation to strategic competition. As the strategic lens zooms in on this vast region, small island states also emerge as active arenas for geoeconomics. Fiji, in particular, the South Pacific archipelago, with its 900,000 inhabitants[1] presents a significant case study. The island country's strategic value as a hub in regional diplomacy and development has attracted intensified attention from major powers.[2]

Strategic competition in this research involves the long term and purposeful contest among great powers over influence across security, economic and diplomatic fields aimed at shaping rules and access in their favour. In the period, before the 2010s, when geoeconomics was less prominent, major power visibility in Fiji was relatively calm. Economic relations rested with Australia and New Zealand, while the United States (US) and other long standing partners played a secondary role. Also, economic and infrastructure ties were non-political. The influx of Chinese investments and Western responses, however, transformed this once-stable

[1] 'Population and Demographic Indicators', Government, *Fiji Bureau of Statistics*, n.d., accessed 1 September 2025, https://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/statistics/social-statistics/population-and-demographic-indicators/. Fiji's last population census was conducted in 2017, resulting in a count of 884,887, with a national projection of 900,869 for the year 2025.
[2] Xin Zhang, 'COMPETITION IN CONVERGENCE US–China Hegemonic Rivalry in Global Capitalism', in *Hegemony and World Order Reimagining Power in Global Politics* (Taylor & Francis, 2021), 204.

landscape into a competitive geoeconomic arena.

Whilst a deep divide exists over the discourse of geoeconomic statecraft between China and the West, on the one hand, some view China's economic outward push and Western countermeasures as a tussle for global influence.[3] On the other hand, some argue that the attention on China, seeking to avoid friction, is drawn toward filling development gaps through joint relief efforts, paralleled by complementary investments.[4] A plethora of research, however, tends to focus on the discourse of broader regional trends, marginalising the understanding of how small Pacific countries shape their engagements with major powers.

Fiji, as a case study, would be significant due to its historically flexible diplomacy between traditional allies and emerging partners. However, analytical literature, particularly for one which highlights the potential to increase, decrease, or complement geopolitical competition, remains understudied.

Although a small island developing state, Fiji's international profile is a notable case study. Much of its prominence is attributed to its leadership in climate change and its contribution to international peacekeeping. Given its strategic geography alongside critical Pacific transit routes, it also houses a significant number of regional organisational headquarters, a leverage which is disproportionate to its population. On the global stage, the Pacific Island state has carried the region's political voice with prominence, heading the G77 summit in 2013[5] and presiding over climate negotiations at COP23 in 2017, prompting increased engagement across all its partners.[6] Fiji's leverage also extends to its support for major powers, yielding

[3] Mingtang Liu and Kellee S. Tsai, 'Structural Power, Hegemony, and State Capitalism: Limits to China's Global Economic Power', *Politics & Society* 49, no. 2 (2021): 250, https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329220950234. The authors contend that China's ambitions to expand its economic strategy abroad have rendered the West cautious. Shaped by scepticism over Chinese firms' political neutrality, countries including the EU, the US, and Australia are implementing strict regulatory frameworks for foreign investments involving China.

[4] Miranda Booth, 'Competing with China in the Pacific Will Backfire | Lowy Institute', Think Tank/Policy Research Institute, Lowy Institute, 1 June 2022, https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/competing-china-pacific-will-backfire. The author highlights China's move to increase its volume of bilateral trade and economic partnership by two-fold under its proposed "China-Pacific Island Countries Common Development Vision" and "Five-year Plan of Action (2022-2026)". The author also highlighted that the Chinese Foreign Minister prioritised consensus with Fiji among the 10 Pacific Island Foreign Ministers, focusing on cooperation in areas such as agricultural centres and disaster relief.

[5] Department of Information, 'FIJI CHAIRS LAST UN CLIMATE CHANGE MEET AS G77 HEAD', Government, Fiji Government – Media Centre, 11 November 2013, https://www.fiji.gov.fj/Media-Centre/News/FIJI-CHAIRS-LAST-UN-CLIMATE-CHANGE-MEET-AS-G77-HEA?rss=news; Government of Fiji, 'Statement by His Excellency Ratu Inoke Kubuabola, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Fiji, Chair of the Group of 77 for 2013, at the Handover Ceremony of the Chairmanship of the Group of 77 and China', International intergovernmental organisation, G77 (Group of 77), 8 January 2014, https://www.g77.org/statement/getstatement.php?id=140108c.

[6] United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), 'Meet the Conference Hosts (UN Climate Change Conference November 2017)', International intergovernmental convention / official UN website, UNFCCC — Conferences / Past Conferences, 2017, https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/conferences/past-

diplomatic dividends, from votes in the international fora to legitimising regional initiatives.

This study argues that the effects of geoeconomic engagement on strategic competition in Fiji are contingent upon sector and time period solely for the sake of benefiting the country's national interest without risking its sovereignty. Specific evidence will demonstrate that Sino-Fiji relations in areas of infrastructure development and Fiji's BRI engagements have essentially intensified strategic competition. Trade relations and multi-donor aid programs, in contrast, have often demonstrated complementarity in meeting Fiji's development needs, thereby reducing direct strategic rivalry.

Meanwhile, since the election of Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka in 2022, newly invigorated Western alternatives (such as Australia's "Pacific Step-up" projects and multilateral financing) have begun to decrease the exclusivity of China's influence, subtly diluting strategic rivalry.

In short, geoeconomic forces in Fiji neither heighten nor erase strategic competition across the board. The study will present their impact varying by sector and over time coupled with the risks narrative and rhetoric associated with autonomy and debt entrapment versus Fiji's opportunities for enhanced agency, faster delivery, diversified partnerships as well as leveraging for better options suited to Fiji's survival.

Literature Review

The conventional definition of geoeconomics is the use of economic tools by states to pursue geopolitical power and influence.[7] Contrary to much of the literature on geoeconomics, this research will contextualise geoeconomics based on the perception of the small island state.

For the infrastructure sector, Fiji's case offers one of the most distinctive illustrations of how swiftly geoeconomic power can shift. Following the 2006 coup and the imposition of smart sanctions by Australia and its Western partners, China seized the opportunity.[8] Not only did China provide capital through the Belt and Road initiative, but its timely delivery also made a significant difference for Fiji's recovering economy under the Bainimarama military government. The capital comprised the construction of roads, bridges and government buildings, which were highly symbolic of China's strategic intent to be a reliable partner when others withdrew.[9] The

conferences/un-climate-change-conference-november-2017/about/meet-the-conference-hosts; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Fiji, 'Statement from Attorney-General & Minister Responsible for Climate Change on Accomplishments from COP23', Government, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Fiji, 23 November 2017, https://www.foreignaffairs.gov.fj/statement-from-attorney-general-minister-responsible-for-climate-change-on-accomplishments-from-cop23/.

[7] Robert D. Blackwill and Jennifer M. Harris, *War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft* (Harvard University Press, 2016), 24, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1c84cr7.

[8] Michael O'Keefe, 'The Implications of Australia's "Smart Sanctions" Against Fiji 2006 to 2014 for Geopolitical Contest in the South Pacific', *East Asia* 39, no. 1 (2022): 72, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12140-021-09368-9.

[9] O'Keefe, 'The Implications of Australia's "Smart Sanctions" Against Fiji 2006 to 2014 for Geopolitical Contest in the South Pacific', 72.

discourse also revealed that Fiji's pivot had undertaken realistic alternatives beyond the West.

The momentum of Beijing's infrastructure backing, by 2010, was not only impressive but raised concerns for Australia and New Zealand.[10] The rate of construction was not simply a matter of physical assets, but rather a reflection of China's geopolitical foothold for influence. In addition, China's swift delivery sharply contrasted the deliberate and time-consuming red tape which existed with multilateral banks and Western donors. The result is a developmental gap that sparks fears of strategic erosion and a zero-sum mindset on the Western front.[11]

Western actors initiated countermeasures by the mid-2010s, with Australia and New Zealand launching the "Pacific Step Up" program and "Pacific Reset", respectively.[12] Others, including the US and Japan, also moved toward deeper overall coordination efforts in programs guaranteed with alternatives which are sustainable and transparent in comparison to Beijing's lending. [13] However, the Western partners' intent was perceived as more geopolitical, aimed at curbing non-Western dominance of the sub-regional economic space. The changing gear shifts were also viewed as an unprecedented outpouring of enthusiastic states competing for presence to finance high-impact infrastructure and influence goodwill.

The geopolitical competition took on a symbolic charge in 2018, when Fiji signed a memorandum of understanding on BRI cooperation. Although a few projects were incorporated into the MOU, with many others on the way, the MOU signalled Fiji's endorsement, validating the BRI's global connection. Szadziewski highlighted the development as a drive which was compatible with Bainimarama's "Look North"

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[10] International Institute for Strategic Studies, 'Chapter 4: China's Belt and Road Initiative a Decade On (Asia-Pacific Regional Security Assessment 2023)', Think tank, IISS — Strategic Dossiers / Asia-Pacific Regional Security Assessment 2023, 2023, 4, https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-dossiers/asia-pacific-regional-security-assessment-2023/aprsa-chapter-4/.

[11] Greg Fry and Sandra Tarte, eds, *The New Pacific Diplomacy*, Pacific Series (ANU Press, 2015), 388.

[12] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'Stepping up Australia's Engagement with Our Pacific Family', Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, September 2019, https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/stepping-up-australias-engagement-with-our-pacific-family.pdf; Meinita Hasya Eka Wulandari, 'Australia's Pacific Step-Up Foreign Policy as a Response to the Increase of China's Influence in the Pacific', *Insignia: Journal of International Relations* 10, no. 2 (2023): 243, https://doi.org/10.20884/1.ins.2023.10.2.9246; New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'New Zealand's Pacific Engagement: From Reset to Resilience', Official government department website, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (New Zealand), 11 November 2021, https://www.mfat.govt.nz/assets/Cabinet-papers/Cab-Paper-NZ-Pacific-Engagement-From-Reset-to-Resilience.pdf.

[13] Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Fiji, 'Japanese Ambassador to Fiji Pays a Courtesy Call to Prime Minister Rabuka: Support Reaffirmed', Government, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Fiji, 26 January 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.gov.fj/japanese-ambassador-to-fiji-pays-a-courtesy-call-to-prime-minister-rabuka-support-reaffirmed/; Fiji Government, 'UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR DEVELOPMENT (USAID) TO INCREASE ASSISTANCE FOR FIJI AND PACIFIC', Government, Fiji Government – Media Centre, 5 October 2022, https://www.fiji.gov.fj/Media-Centre/News/UNITED-STATES-AGENCY-FOR-DEVELOPMENT-(USAID)-TO-IN.

policy on diversification and autonomy.[14] Further, Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama contrasted Western lecturing by appraisingly complementing China's assistance as non-intrusive.[15] Such statements assert Fiji's sovereignty with the right to choose partners,[16] in addition to China's visible infrastructure footprint.

The analogy prompted immediate reactions, accelerating Australia's Step-Up program[17] along with other partners, including deepened engagements with the US, NZ, and Japan. The reactions to Fiji's engagements extended to a narrative in which Chinese projects were perceived as tilting the country's strategic alignment.

The Bainimarama-led government capitalised on this dynamic, welcoming Chinese infrastructure and the BRI label to harness an effective lever, drawing higher offers from the country's traditional development partners. Although the hedging-like manoeuvre resonates with Fiji's principle of "friends to all, enemies to none", it carried a more adversarial tone with Canberra and Wellington during the years of political fallout.[18] China's presence, as evident in its visible projects, prompted Australia and others to re-engage, demonstrating both a material and a strategic bargaining chip. While Fiji appeared to be slipping into Beijing's sphere of influence externally, Bainimarama maintained relations with all powers practically. Nevertheless, the perception of Fiji's actions was adept at heightening strategic rivalry.[19]

In December 2022, there was another shift in the strategic landscape with the newly led Sitiveni Rabuka government. The new administration briefly rebalanced its foreign policy, reaffirming ties with Fiji's long-standing alliances. Additionally, Rabuka

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[14] Henryk Szadziewski, 'Converging Anticipatory Geographies in Oceania: The Belt and Road Initiative and Look North in Fiji', *Political Geography* 77 (March 2020): 4, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2019.102119.

[15] Lidia Kelly, 'Fiji PM Accuses Australia's Morrison of "insulting" Pacific Island Nations', World, *Reuters*, 17 August 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/world/fiji-pm-accuses-australias-morrison-of-insulting-pacific-island-nations-idUSKCN1V704A/. The article refers to former PM Bainimarama's remarks in response to Australia's lecturing the Pacific Islands regarding how much it invests into the region compared to China's non-intrusive assistance. Such rhetoric amplified the resurgence of Chinese infrastructure.

[16] Adrien Rodd, 'A Road to Island Sovereignty and Empowerment? Fiji's Aims within the Belt and Road Initiative', *Island Studies Journal* 15, no. 2 (2020): 108, https://doi.org/10.24043/isj.128. The author states that the capacity to decline assistance from a state and choose to cooperate with another instead, without alienating the former in the process, has strengthened Fiji's sovereignty, freeing it from a constraining dependence upon one particular partner.

[17] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia) (DFAT), 'Fiji Aid Program Performance Report 2018 19', Government agency / Official government publication, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia, September 2019, https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/fiji-appr-2018-19.pdf.The report highlighted that Fiji, in 2018-19 received $51 million in official development assistance, on top of the $145million commitment (2016-17) making Australia as the largest donor, followed by the EU institutions, New Zealand and Japan.

[18] Fry and Tarte, *The New Pacific Diplomacy*, 113. The author highlights deepened ties between Fiji and China, symbolised by Chinese assistance culminating in the meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama in 2013, since Fiji's expulsion from the Pacific Island Forum in 2009.

[19] Fry and Tarte, *The New Pacific Diplomacy*, 376.

imposed strict measures, tightening the rules of infrastructure financing based on transparency, climate resilience, and sustainable debt, which were fundamentally the Western model. The pivot was evident in 2023 when Fiji deepened economic relations with Australia's Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific. In doing so, Rabuka sidelined previous interest from China, siding with Australia to support its maritime needs, including major port upgrades and cybersecurity cooperation.[20] Canberra welcomed the strategic move, as it was crucial in denying Beijing a foothold in the Pacific Island nation's maritime infrastructure.

Fiji's infrastructure partnership, however, has diversified without severing ties to Beijing. It continues to accept Chinese grants, for instance, financing the Vanua Levu Road upgrading Project.[21] However, the significant change is the context in which Fiji has diversified its partnerships with Australia, Japan, and the EU, thereby reducing Fiji's overreliance on Beijing. Thus, the approach has weakened China's geopolitical edge, enabling Fiji greater agency in navigating its development path.

The infrastructure landscape in Fiji vividly illustrates how development and geopolitical competition intertwine. The Chinese projects, along with the 2018 BRI MOU agreement signed with support from Bainimarama, triggered a head start that went beyond roads, as the engagements carried significant influence, prompting Canberra and its allies to respond with urgency. Today, even as Fiji, under Rabuka's leadership, seeks balance, every new road or port remains potent through a strategic lens of geopolitical competition.

Methodology

Research Design: To interpret geoeconomic interactions, the research design captures the varied effects of China and Western initiatives by assessing how they fuel, diffuse, or complement strategic competition, particularly in the infrastructure, trade, and aid sectors, as well as the recalibration of Fiji's relations.

Data Collection

The analysis relies on triangulated sources to achieve balance and reliability, drawing materials from policy statements, data from the Fiji Bureau of Statistics, the Reserve Bank of Fiji, and the World Bank. Supplementing its collations are sources including political statements from Fijian Leaders, such as Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka and former Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama, as well as PIF Communiqués. Secondary sources, such as think tank reports from the Lowy Institute and development studies, offer context and alternative analyses of

[20] Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Fiji, 'Fiji's Elevated and Updated Vuvale Partnership with Australia', Government website, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Fiji, 20 May 2024, https://www.foreignaffairs.gov.fj/fijis-elevated-and-updated-vuvale-partnership-with-australia/.

[21] Office of the Prime Minister, Fiji, 'Prime Minister's Ministerial Statement on the Vanua Levu Roads Upgrade Project (22 05 2024)', Government website (official government ministry), Office of the Prime Minister, Fiji, 22 May 2024, https://www.pmoffice.gov.fj/prime-ministers-ministerial-statement-on-the-vanua-levu-roads-upgrade-project-22-05-2024/. The Vanua Levu Road Upgrading project is estimated for AUD 201.7million, projected under the BRI in Fiji.

newspaper articles. The diversity of the sources provided reinforces the credibility of the findings.

In terms of the research's limitations, however, due to the in-depth analysis focusing on a single-case design, the research does not claim cross-regional validity or generalisation. However, it is reflective only of Fiji's unique geopolitical experience.

Thematic Case Analysis

Infrastructure (Intensify)

Infrastructure, in Fiji, has been observed as one of the most recognisable and strategically competitive spaces of geoeconomic competition. This section demonstrates how infrastructure has catalysed strategic contention across three areas whilst maintaining Fiji's autonomy, resilience, and development outcomes: first, by enabling China to gain early access during Fiji's diplomatic isolation, shaping the initial landscape; second, by prompting Western partners, including Australia and New Zealand, to a cascade of strategic recalibration; and third, by a split development trajectory tied to geopolitical competition under the Rabuka administration.

China's Head Start in the Contesting Dynamics

Commencing in the late 2000s, under the Bainimarama administration, China's funding of infrastructure increased significantly. China committed over AUD $639.2 million in loans and grants to Fiji between 2008 and 2017, primarily through the Export-Import Bank of China.[22] Among many other development efforts, projects comprised road upgrading of the Nabouwalu-Dreketi route (AUD $174.2 million),[23] the construction of Stinson Parade and Vatuwaqa Bridges (AUD $8.9 million),[24] and the road improvement project, Buca Bay/Moto roads project (AUD $78.7 million).[25] As O'Keefe pointed out, not only were these projects about development, but they were also perceived by many as strategic implications that bolstered China's presence during a period of diplomatic isolation of Fiji from its Western partners, following the 2006 coup.[26] China, as a first mover, gave itself a preliminary edge which shaped the narrative of Beijing as a dependable partner. In addition, the 2016 Defence White Paper openly acknowledged China's growing influence in the South Pacific, raising concerns about regional discourse as a challenge to the power

[22] Lowy Institute, 'Map', Lowy Institute Pacific Aid Map, accessed 28 September 2025, https://pacificaidmap.lowyinstitute.org/map/?to=2017&donors=china&recipients=fiji.
[23] Lowy Institute, 'Major Projects', Lowy Institute Pacific Aid Map, accessed 28 September 2025, https://pacificaidmap.lowyinstitute.org/project/?id=CHN-Loan-FJI-40-20-210-21020.
[24] Lowy Institute, 'Major Projects', Lowy Institute Pacific Aid Map, accessed 28 September 2025, https://pacificaidmap.lowyinstitute.org/project/?id=CHN-Grant-FJI-28-20-210-21020.
[25] Lowy Institute, 'Major Projects', Lowy Institute Pacific Aid Map, accessed 28 September 2025, https://pacificaidmap.lowyinstitute.org/project/?id=CHN-Loan-FJI-53-20-210-21020.
[26] *The Strategic Context of the New Pacific Diplomacy*, ed. Michael O'Keefe, Pacific Series (ANU Press, 2015), 73. The author highlights China's instrumental engineering of its position to undermine Australian influence during Fiji's diplomatic sanction period by supporting the regime with "indeterminate levels of financial support".

dynamics close to Australia.[27]

Recalibration by Western Partners

China's increasing visibility prompted a recalibration of foreign policy by other geopolitical players. The strategic void left by Australia and New Zealand was swiftly filled by China, leading to a more deliberate and coordinated policy response, as embodied in Australia's Pacific Step-Up program. The release of the 2020 Strategic Update clarified this urgency, casting the Pacific as central to Australia's national security interests, linking infrastructure as a strategic lever.[28]



Image: Department of Defence

In practice, Australia established the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific (AIFFP) in 2019 to roll out funds for high-visibility projects worth AUD $1.5 billion, complemented by AUD $500 million in grants. The funds included Fiji's $71.8 million for the construction and restoration of 9 high-quality critical bridges, with at least 1.5 million square meters of road surface,[29] as well as supported funding for Fiji's rural electrification, worth AUD $8.23 million.[30] Other major players, including

[27] Government of Australia, Department of Defence, '2016 Defence White Paper', Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Defence, 2016, https://www.defence.gov.au/about/publications/2016-defence-white-paper.
[28] *2020 Defence Strategic Update* (Australian Government, Department of Defence, 2020).
[29] Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific (AIFFP), 'Restoring Roads and Bridges across Fiji — AIFFP DSN Fact Sheet #1', Government / public infrastructure financing agency, AIFFP (Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific), 2 September 2025, https://www.aiffp.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-09/AIFFP_DSN_Factsheet_%231_Restoring%20roads%20and%20bridges%20across%20Fiji_20250902.pdf.
[30] Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific (AIFFP), 'Pacific Climate

the EU, committed funds of AUD $20.33 million to target sustainable infrastructure and climate adaptation programs, while the New Zealand government up-scaled its engagement from the Pacific Reset to a Pacific Resilience Framework.[31] By anchoring infrastructure support, Fiji's Western partners presented a compelling alternative to China's approach, based on the principles of transparency, climate resilience, and sustainable practices.

Dual Track Development and Persistent Competition

Regardless of shifts in political leadership, infrastructure competition remains a pivotal point of geopolitical rivalry. Since taking office, the incoming Rabuka administration has renewed its attention to prioritising greater transparency, sustainable debt, and environmental resilience in its infrastructure policies, aligning with the expectations of Fiji's traditional partners. For example, his government vowed to renew and elevate the Vuvale-Partnership, emphasising a deepened economic partnership that prioritises reforms towards high-quality infrastructure to support Fiji's growing economy.[32] Although ties with traditional partners have strengthened, it has not translated to a total eclipse of its cooperation with China. In 2023, the Rabuka administration accepted Chinese grants worth AUD $200 million to rehabilitate rural transport routes, including road and bridge construction in Vanua Levu.[33] These ongoing initiatives demonstrate the persistence of Beijing's relevance, even with the scaled-up initiatives involving Western and multilateral partners on climate-friendly projects such as the ADB-Japanese Government-backed Nadi River flood alleviation project costing AUD $270 million[34] alongside Australia's AUD $75 million AIFFP-funded community-scale renewable energy investment.[35]

The differing pathways of infrastructure delivery reflected in the split between China's swift visibility and the West's commitment to resilience and sustainability is a reflection of a deeply politicised space where each side competes to configure Fiji's roles within the regional dynamics.

In summary, Fiji's infrastructure engagements operate as a subtle yet impactful

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Infrastructure Financing Partnership', Government / public infrastructure financing agency, AIFFP (Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific), n.d, https://www.aiffp.gov.au/pacific-climate-infrastructure-financing-partnership#support-to-the-fiji-rural-electrification-fund.

[31] New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'Pacific Engagement Reset Resilience'.

[32] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia) (DFAT), 'Australia's Development Partnership with Fiji', Government / official government site, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia), October 2023, https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/fiji/development-assistance/development-partnership-with-fiji.

[33] Office of the Prime Minister, Fiji, 'Vanua Levu Roads Upgrade Statement'.

[34] Felix Chaudhary, 'Preparing the Nadi Flood Alleviation Project Workshop Underway', *The Fiji Times*, 11 September 2019, https://www.fijitimes.com.fj/preparing-the-nadi-flood-alleviation-project-workshop-underway/.

[35] Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific (AIFFP), 'Solar Power Transforms Learning for Primary School Students on Fiji's Remote Rabi Island', Government, Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific (AIFFP), 22 May 2025, https://www.aiffp.gov.au/news/solar-power-transforms-learning-primary-school-students-fijis-remote-rabi-island.

geoeconomic apparatus disseminated under the pretext of development cooperation. Even where specific projects overlap, their deeper competitive undercurrent exists. China's rapid delivery of observable infrastructure has elevated its profile, triggering competitive initiatives by Australia, New Zealand, the EU, Japan, and multilateral agencies. Hence, rather than framed as advancing development, infrastructure has increasingly become a stimulus for long-term geostrategic competition and most importantly beneficial for Fiji's development.

Belt and Road Initiative Diplomacy (Intensify)

This section contends that Fiji's engagement with the Belt and Road initiative (BRI) intensified competition in three ways: first by supporting China's BRI early on, Fiji sent a strong diplomatic signal of diplomatic convergence to Beijing's leadership in the region; second, by igniting diplomatic repositioning from Western allies to adapt to shifting regional dynamics; and third, through intensifying debates over national autonomy, debt diplomacy and influence which inflamed geopolitical competition.

Rhetorical Alignment and Strategic Signalling

Much of the BRI attention has been construed through a geopolitical lens, which cannot be covered extensively in this monograph. Nevertheless, a crucial scholarly work to consider is Mingjiang's argument, which suggests that rather than being a grand strategic agenda, the BRI is Beijing's model for easing the challenges of China's domestic surplus industrial capacity by opening up engagements with neighbouring states.[36]

In support of China's solution to industrial overcapacity, Fiji became one of the initial Pacific Island countries in 2018 to sign a memorandum of understanding, thereby entering the BRI network.[37] In promoting the BRI cooperation, Prime Minister Bainimarama not only publicly welcomed its development benefits but also described the BRI as a great initiative despite the scepticism surrounding it.[38] While the agreement had yet to secure any tangible project commitments, it sent a strong signal of Fiji as a willing strategic partner, validating China's Pacific engagement. Viewed through this lens, the BRI's presence weighed more on rhetorical foreign policy signalling than on the deepening of economic ties amid a period of increasing

[36] Li Mingjiang, 'The Belt and Road Initiative: Geoeconomics and Indo-Pacific Security Competition', *International Affairs* 96, no. 1 (2020): 174, https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz240. The author highlights that the problem of industrial overcapacity, primarily in the steel, coal, cement, electrolytic aluminium, and flat glass sectors, was widely understood as the main risk to China's economy. Later on, the author highlights that the Chinese policing community acknowledged that funding infrastructure projects transnationally would be a significant solution to ease the overcapacity challenges, as domestic consumption, particularly in the infrastructure area, is expected to stagnate in the economy.

[37] Fonua Talei, '5 Key Areas Of Interest: MOU Between Fiji And China', News Website, Fiji Sun, 13 February 2019, https://fijisun.com.fj/news/nation/5-key-areas-of-interest-mou-between-fiji-and-china; Xinhua (news agency), 'China, Fiji Ink MoU on Belt and Road Initiative Cooperation - Xinhua | English.News.Cn', State run news agency, Xinhua News / XinhuaNet English, 12 November 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-11/12/c_137601722.htm.

[38] Fonua Talei, 'BRI-Breathing New Hope In Fiji', News Website, Fiji Sun, 25 April 2019, https://fijisun.com.fj/news/business/bri-breathing-new-hope-in-fiji.

major power rivalry in the region.

Western Counter-Responses

The timing of Fiji's participation emerged during a period marked by the resurgence of Western engagement in efforts to counterbalance Beijing's strategic foothold in the region. Wulandari states that Australia's Enhanced Pacific Step Up, launched in 2018, and New Zealand's Pacific Reset were widely perceived as deliberate counterinvestments to China's growing diplomatic influence.[39] Likewise, at the White House, where the 2023 PIF summit was hosted by the US, the Washington delegation reasserted its Pacific engagement through increased development assistance and enhanced defence partnerships.[40] Furthermore, the 2016 Defence White Paper had outlined Chinese engagements in the Pacific, including Fiji, as carrying a strategic risk, while the 2020 Defence Strategic Update further reinforces this view.[41] In view of these responses, arguably Fiji's participation in the BRI, although not accompanied by major investments, still added weight to the prevailing perception of the region as a contested strategic space.

Debt Discourse and Geoeconomic Concerns

While Fiji's BRI engagement was initially framed as a symbolic gesture, it also raised broader concerns over the transparency and sustainability of China's lending practices. For instance, Chellaney warned of debt-trap diplomacy, highlighting that Beijing's lending activities have left small states vulnerable to debt.[42] Similarly, the concerns resonated with former US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who expressed concerns over Chinese funding that imposed long-term debt distress on smaller states.[43] However, empirical findings suggest the debt trap narrative is comparatively insignificant. For example, a more nuanced view by Singh showcased that the internationally acclaimed Hambantota Port debt represented less than 10% of Sri Lanka's overall foreign borrowing.[44] Comparably in the Pacific, with Fiji included,

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[39] Wulandari, 'Australia's Pacific Step-Up Foreign Policy as a Response to the Increase of China's Influence in the Pacific', 251.

[40] The White House, 'U.S.-Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Statement on Reaffirming U.S.-Pacific Partnership', The White House, 25 September 2023, https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/09/25/u-s-pacific-islands-forum-leaders-statement-on-reaffirming-u-s-pacific-partnership/.

[41] Government of Australia, Department of Defence, 'Defence White Paper 2016', 42; *2020 Defence Strategic Update*, 11. Both documents imply that China's policies and activities have a major
Impact on the stability of the Indo-Pacific to 2035.

[42] Jamie Linsley-Parrish, 'Debt-Trap Diplomacy', JSTOR Daily, 20 May 2024, https://daily.jstor.org/debt-trap-diplomacy/. The author highlights Chellaney's views on China's neocolonial designs through its financial emphasis, emphasising that debt over small countries is directly proportional to China's leverage. In other words, the greater the debt, the greater China's leverage becomes and the greater the risks to a state's sovereignty.

[43] Nicole Gaouette, 'Tillerson Raps China as "Predatory" Rule Breaker | CNN Politics', CNN, 18 October 2017, https://www.cnn.com/2017/10/18/politics/tillerson-china-rebuke-speech.

[44] Ajit Singh, 'The Myth of "Debt-Trap Diplomacy" and Realities of Chinese Development Finance', *Third World Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (2021): 244, https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2020.1807318. The author uses the Sri Lankan case study to correct the factual inaccuracies in the presentation of the "debt for equity" swap. The

Pryke reported that although the International Monetary Fund (IMF) acknowledges the struggles for economic growth with Pacific Island countries, it has yet to find evidence of any entrapments stemming from Beijing's assistance.[45] Building on these contrasting positions surrounding Chinese activities, Fiji's experience suggests a lack of synergy between BRI initiatives and Western engagements, which often intensifies strategic competition. This friction only further interpreted Fiji's BRI engagement as a shift toward Beijing's sphere of influence, particularly in Canberra and Washington. In essence, while the strategic effects of the BRI in Fiji may seem modest, the repercussions are substantial enough to intensify strategic contests in Fiji's strategic front.

In summary, Fiji's BRI engagement demonstrates how strategic contention could intensify not through the scale of the projects, of which many predated the BRI MOU, but through diplomatic signalling, calculated responses, and the battle of narratives that surround the silk road initiative. The signing of its MOU by Fiji increased perceptions of China's influence, prompting a repositioning by traditional partners and amplifying the narrative of debt entrapment and strategic autonomy. In this way, the BRI cooperation with Fiji illustrates how geopolitical tensions are often overstated by political messaging rather than the economic significance that such discourse actually provokes.

International Trade and Aid (Complement)

The section highlights that, in contrast to the geopolitical tensions often involving infrastructure and the BRI-led initiatives, evidence presented here suggests that Fiji's trade relations demonstrated a considerable potential for complementarity. The nature of complementarity emerges as beneficial for Fiji in three ways: first, Fiji's multifaceted trade engagement aligns with multiple economic spheres; second, its acceptance of aid is deliberately segmented to avoid duplication or overlap; and third, its involvement in joint responses to crises underpins the values of collaboration.

Trade Diversification

Fiji's international trade structure reveals its pragmatic and productive ties with China and its long-standing traditional partners, aimed at lessening geopolitical tensions. In 2021, trade data indicated that China's trade with Fiji expanded, accounting for 16% (AUD $449.8 million) of its imports, predominantly in petroleum bitumen and rice, while reciprocating 6.3% (AUD $52.1 million) of its exports in niche commodities such as timber.[46] Simultaneously, Australia, New Zealand, and the US maintained

authors' findings established that there was no cancellation of debt in exchange for China's control of the Hambantota Port. Instead, the Sri Lankan government sought to increase foreign exchange to support repayment of mature, higher-interest international bonds.

[45] Jonathan Pryke, *China Is Not Conducting Debt Trap Diplomacy in the Pacific—At Least Not Yet*, Research Report (Honolulu, 2020), www.jstor.org/stable/resrep24984.

[46] Fiji Bureau of Statistics, Economic Statistics Division, *International Merchandise Trade Statistics 2021*, Annual Statistical Report Release No. 99, 2023, International Merchandise Trade Statistics (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2023), 36–37, Fiji Bureau of Statistics Digital Publications Archive (International Merchandise Trade Statistics Series, 2021 Edition), https://www.statsfiji.gov.fj.

their status as key economic lifelines to Fiji, accounting for 89% (equivalent total of AUD $1.18 billion in visitors' spending) of total visitors,[47] whilst hosting more than 20,000 scheme labourers as well as the Fijian diaspora producing remittances of close to AUD $384.51 million,[48] from the post-COVID-19 2022. In practical terms, unlike the high-profile competition associated with infrastructure and the BRI engagement, diversification in trade segmentation functions as a complementarity.

Segmented Donor Niches

The organisation of aid flow in Fiji embodies a segmented system that has fostered complementarity rather than intensifying strategic competition. Australia, as Fiji's largest bilateral donor, channels over AUD $65 million each year aimed at health, institutional capacity building, and climate resilience. In addition to addressing Fiji's social needs, New Zealand reinforces the cooperative landscape with assistance donations to agriculture and community resilience. Beijing also provided aid assistance with a comparatively lower average of around AUD $12.28 million annually, through initiatives such as the Navua Hospital and Raiwai Low-Income Housing Project.[49] Contributions from Japan focused on maritime facilities and disaster mitigation, amounting to at least AUD $3.7 million. Under the Pacific Region Infrastructure Facility, multilateral lenders, including the EU and the World Bank, co-funded large-scale financing that underpins Fiji's development.[50] The presence of diverse actors in Fiji's aid sector overall prevents undue concentration of influence. It has fostered a space for shared responsibility, offering different strengths in the nation's development trajectory.

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[47] Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism & Transport (MCTTT), Fiji, *Fiji International Visitor Survey(IVS) 2022 vs 2019 Report*, Comparative Statistical Report MCTTT (Fiji), International Visitor Survey Reports (Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport (MCTTT), 2023), 29–45, MCTTT Digital Publications Archive (International Visitor Survey Series, 2022 vs 2019 Edition), https://mcttt.gov.fj/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/FIJI-IVS-2022-vs-2019-Report.pdf.

[48] Reserve Bank of Fiji, 'International Remittances and Fiji's Unsung Heroes Abroad', Reserve Bank of Fiji, 24 December 2020, https://www.rbf.gov.fj/international-remittances-and-fijis-unsung-heroes-abroad-24-december-2020/.

[49] AidData, 'Chinese Government Provides RMB 12.5 Million Grant — via ETCA — for New Navua Hospital Relocation and Construction Project', Research/data portal, China.AidData.Org, accessed 28 August 2025, https://china.aiddata.org/projects/39339/; AidData, 'Chinese Government Provides FJD 9.3 Million Grant for Raiwai Public Rental Housing Project (Linked to Project ID#62721 and Project ID#62719)', Research/data repository, China.AidData.Org, accessed 28 August 2025, https://china.aiddata.org/projects/85704/.

[50] Pacific Regional Infrastructure Facility, 'European Union', Regional infrastructure/development organisation website, Pacific Regional Infrastructure Facility, accessed 29 August 2025, https://www.theprif.org/partner/european-union; DevNadkarni, 'EU Commits €21.8m to Climate Resilient Infrastructure in Pacific Islands', *Australia Pacific Islands Business Council*, 5 December 2023, https://apibc.org.au/news/eu-commits-e21-8m-to-climate-resilient-infrastructure-in-pacific-islands/; European External Action Service, 'Global Gateway: European Union Enhances Rural Electrification in Six Pacific Countries — FJD 40 Million', Official inter-governmental / diplomatic / EU external relations, European Union External Action / EU Delegation to Fiji, accessed 29 August 2025, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/fiji/global-gateway-european-union-enhances-rural-electrification-six-pacific-countries-fjd-40-million_en?s=139.

Joint Crisis Response Encouraging Cooperative Outcomes

The aid response to Cyclone Winston recovery demonstrates a period of national crisis where Australia and New Zealand led humanitarian relief assistance worth AUD $39.7 million and AUD $4.13 million, respectively.[51] In parallel China contributed AUD $11.51 million in rehabilitation funds and equipment.[52] These concerted efforts signify complementarity in Fiji's national recovery framework, rather than intensifying strategic competition, as demonstrated by China's provision of public buildings, which complements Australia's increased educational and health aid. Though these patterns carry competitive undertones, the broader implications have been beneficial for Fiji.

In summary, Fiji's diversification of trade flows and segmented aid proves that they can function as complementary forces that counteract wider competition.

Western Alternatives and New Alignments (Decrease)

This section argues that since 2019, Fiji's geoeconomic landscape has experienced reduced strategic competition, particularly under the Rabuka administration. The three developments from which this moderation stems include: the surge of Western-led alternatives that diluted China's pull, the recalibration of Fiji's security and diplomatic alignments, and dampening rivalries through the institutionalisation of collective donor coordination.

Western Alternatives and Expanded Partnerships

In acknowledging the risks of isolating Fiji's heavy reliance on Beijing's initiatives, Western partners expanded their footprint with new funding and development initiatives. Signed in 2019, the Fiji-Australian Vuvale Partnership committed the countries to deeper engagements across security, economic development, and interpersonal relations, presenting the bond in the familial concept of "Vuvale" or



Image: Department of Defence

[51] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia), 'Tropical Cyclone Winston – Support to Fiji', Government, DFAT – Crisis Hub, 2016, https://www.dfat.gov.au/crisis-hub/tropical-cyclone-winston-support-to-fiji; New Zealand Government, 'NZ Boosts Fiji Cyclone Aid to $4.7 Million', Government, Official Site of the New Zealand Government, 2 March 2016, https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/nz-boosts-fiji-cyclone-aid-47-million.

[52] AidData, 'Chinese Government Grants US$1 Million USD to Fiji Prime Minister's National Disaster Relief and Rehabilitation Fund after Cyclone Winston (Project ID 49141)', Research/data repository, China.AidData.Org, accessed 1 September 2025, https://china.aiddata.org/projects/49141/; ReliefWeb, 'China Pledges $15 Million in Relief Supplies – Fiji', Humanitarian/relief information portal, ReliefWeb, 4 March 2016, https://reliefweb.int/report/fiji/china-pledges-15-million-relief-supplies.

family.[53]Along with Australia's increased AIFFP- infrastructure finances,[54] the US opened its USAID regional office in Suva in 2023.[55] This trend was further reinforced by Japan through its disaster response efforts[56], alongside the EU's refined aid strategies to support Fiji's priorities.[57] Taken together, these alternatives offered Fiji a more balanced portfolio of support.

Rabuka's Diplomatic Recalibration

The political change of government in 2022 marked a watershed moment in Fiji's foreign engagement, as Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka reinforced value-driven partnerships with Fiji's long-standing partners, including Australia, New Zealand, and the US. Fiji's decision in 2023 to cancel its police training agreement with China stood as a significant signal of concerns for democratic values and sovereignty.[58] Fiji, instead, reaffirmed its policing partnership with Australia and New Zealand, drawing attention toward their shared commitment to democratic norms. [59]

Institutionalised Coordination and Collective Engagement

Another element reducing strategic competition is the greater degree of coordination among Western actors. The 2022 formation of the Partners in the Blue Pacific was launched to facilitate synergy among initiatives between Australia, New Zealand, the US, the UK, and Japan, delivering assistance aligned with Pacific priorities. [60]Simultaneously, the PIF remains the region's paramount platform, providing Fiji with a space to integrate external assistance into its regional strategies. In addition, the Pacific Resilience Facility now secures multi-donor pledges, including from China, of up to AUD $246.62 million, [61] illustrate a shift from fragmented rivalry to

[53] Prime Minister of Australia (Scott Morrison) / Prime Minister of Fiji, 'Joint Statement with the Prime Minister of Fiji (Transcript 42061)', Official government transcripts repository, PM Transcripts, 18 January 2019, https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-42061.
[54] Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific (AIFFP), 'Pacific Climate Infrastructure Financing Partnership (or PCIFP)'.
[55] Fiji Government, 'USAID TO INCREASE ASSISTANCE FOR FIJI'.
[56] Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Fiji, 'Japanese Ambassador Courtesy Call Fiji'.
[57] DevNadkarni, 'EU Commits €21.8m to Climate Resilient Infrastructure in Pacific Islands'.
[58] The Guardian, 'Fiji Rethinks Police Deal with China amid Rising Pacific Tensions', Online news, The Guardian, 7 June 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jun/07/fiji-rethinks-police-deal-with-china-amid-rising-pacific-tensions; Lice Movono, 'Fiji PM Orders Chinese Police out of Country, Saying No Need for Them in Pacific Police Force', Online news, ABC News, 28 March 2024, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-03-28/fiji-orders-chinese-police-to-leave-the-country/103640992.
[59] Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Fiji, 'Fiji Continues to Benefit from Cooperation with Australia and the Pacific', Government, Foreign Affairs Fiji, 28 August 2024, https://www.foreignaffairs.gov.fj/fiji-continues-to-benefit-from-cooperation-with-australia-and-the-pacific/.
[60] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia), 'Joint Statement on the Announcement of the Partners in the Blue Pacific Initiative', Government, DFAT — Media Release & News, 25 June 2022, https://www.dfat.gov.au/news/media-release/joint-statement-announcement-partners-blue-pacific-initiative.
[61] Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 'PRF Factsheet (May 2025)', Regional intergovernmental organisation, Forum Secretariat, May 2025, https://forumsec.org/sites/default/files/2025-05/PRF%20Factsheet%20%28May%202025%29.pdf. "The PRF has raised circa

shared responsibility. These actions reassured Western partners, demonstrating Fiji's agency in reducing competition through cooperative alignments.

In sum, the development of Western alternatives, Rabuka's diplomatic realignment and structured donor coordination have lessened the zero-sum tendencies of the 2000s and the 2010s. Although Chinese initiatives were perceived as direct setbacks for Western partners, Fiji's diplomatic diversification has softened the competition. By encouraging multilateral engagements, Fiji's inclusive diplomacy led Beijing to adopt a less assertive approach, demonstrating how capable small states can be in reducing strategic competition.

Synthesis. Across these themes, Fiji's case demonstrates that geoeconomic engagements can have varying impacts on strategic competition, contingent on the sector and timing. Chinese-led infrastructure projects and the political symbolism of Fiji's BRI alignment clearly intensified competition, especially during the 2010s, by expanding China's profile and provoking reactive strategies from others. In contrast, routine trade relations and multi-donor aid engagement often complemented Fiji's development in parallel, rather than in conflict – a reminder that not all external involvement is zero-sum. Finally, the emergence of coordinated Western alternatives and Fiji's foreign-policy rebalance has begun to decrease the exclusivity of great-power rivalry in Fiji, illustrating that small states are not just arenas for competition but can actively shape the terms of engagement. In Fiji's experience, geoeconomics has neither uniformly heightened nor eliminated strategic competition; its effects are conditional and have evolved over time.

Findings

The research reveals that geoeconomic engagements in Fiji's strategic competition have generated varying sectoral differences and evolved across different time frames. Overall, the evidence affirms that some form of geoeconomic activities in Fiji can either escalate, diminish or complement strategic competition with clear benefits for Fiji's national developmental interest over those rhetorical risks associated with strategic competition:

Intensification. Strategic competition has been heightened, given China's backing of infrastructure initiatives alongside Fiji's embrace of high-profile initiatives such as the BRI. These initiatives increased China's leverage in Fiji, provoking counteractions from Australia, New Zealand and the US. For most of the 2010s, such development entrenched a zero-sum outlook, in which China's rise was equated with Western decline, thereby intensifying strategic competition.

Complementarity. Unlike more contentious areas, such as infrastructure and the BRI, trade relations and aid programs tended to operate in forms that often progressed as non-zero-sum. Working with multiple economic partners contributed positively to Fiji's development. China and traditional donors provided assistance that collectively filled Fiji's development needs. No single donor could monopolise Fiji's alignment due to the presence of multiple partners in fields such as health,

USD$159m as at December 2024 in capitalisation pledges from the Governments of Australia, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United States, New Zealand, Nauru, Germany, Japan and the People's Republic of China."

humanitarian aid, and education. External engagement was often complementary, with Fiji deftly ensuring that no single source was excessively relied upon.

Reduction. The rollout of Western alternative initiatives and Fiji's constructive reception to them in the late 2010s and early 2020s has begun to soften the strategic competition in Fiji. While Western partners furnish the Pacific Island country with expanded opportunities in concessional funding alongside security arrangements, China's unique leverage has been lessened. Under Rabuka's government, Fiji's renewed ties with its traditional partners have tempered the perception of competition for Fiji's allegiance. The presence of strategic competition remains, but it has been moderated by coordinated efforts by Fiji's Western partners and Fiji's own balanced diplomacy.

These findings indicate that Fiji's case has a clear demonstration that strategic competition can generate significant benefits when accompanied by transparency, accountability and balanced partnership. Whether strategic contention becomes detrimental, depends not plainly on the rivalry itself, but also on the quality of policy governance, statecraft and leadership.

Policy Implications

For Fiji

The government can continue benefiting from geoeconomic engagement, but its approach must be managed with deliberate caution. Fiji should maintain a broad diplomatic portfolio, keeping close relations with Australia, the US, Japan, and others, while engaging China in constructive relations. Such diversity equips Fiji with leverage and avoids overdependence on a single patron, while also requiring thorough assessments of loans and projects to guard against debt risk or infrastructure misaligned with national needs. By emphasising transparency in procurement and project decisions, Fiji can avoid vulnerabilities while maximising gains, anchored in its "friends to all" principle of inclusiveness that values sovereignty and economic balance. Through such measures, Fiji can gain from multiple benefits while avoiding strategic debt and diplomatic coercion.

For Western Partners

Fiji's longstanding traditional partners from the West must recognise that aid viewed as a zero-sum contest with China is counterproductive. Instead of fragmented effort, they should enhance partnership and collaboration exemplified by the Partners in Blue Pacific, to present Fiji (including its neighbours) with a credible and unified partnership. Tangible progress will result from targeted investment in high-impact initiatives that meet national needs, including climate-resilient infrastructure and service improvements in health and education. For financing to be competitive against Chinese offers, it must be extended on flexible and concessional conditions. In addition, Western partners should demonstrate respect for Fiji's agency by refraining from using rhetoric or ultimatums about choosing sides. A more successful approach would mean acknowledging Fiji's national priorities, such as those set out in the National Development Plan, and climate strategies, especially when Western support is demonstrated with consistency and strategic cultural sensitivity, thus reinforcing trust. In summary, the most constructive arrangement is one in which

Western partners aim to deliver quality projects and an authentic partnership that meets Fiji's national needs, thereby diminishing strategic competition.

For China

While China remains a significant player in Fiji's development, sustaining this status and alleviating concerns over its role will require adjusting its engagement. First, China should begin by strengthening transparency and accountability in its projects, which follows international norms, respect for standards and local participation in decision-making. Taking this approach would ease the suspicions that Chinese projects are secretive and skewed; instead, it redirects focus on China to deliver outcomes that benefit Fiji. Second, by tailoring projects to Fiji's genuine needs with sustainable outcomes, China's perception will gain more value among other international partners. Third, Beijing must refrain from actions such as exclusive security agreements that Pacific states perceive as undermining regional solidarity. Through consistent engagement with multilateral lenders such as the ADB or working with PIF guidelines, this cooperative approach will also benefit China's growth, as well as Fiji and other PIF members. In essence, the perception that China's engagement serves Fiji's development needs without hidden agendas will lessen resistance and confrontation.

Overall, external partners should ensure that engagements with Fiji are inclusive and needs-based, driven by a commitment to long-lasting relations. Approaches and strategies grounded in respect for Fiji's agency and reciprocity will promote Fiji's progress and reduce the likelihood of strategic rivalry tensions. By skillfully navigating its external relations, Fiji signals that its best partnerships stem from actors who safeguard its independence and reinforce its national needs.

Conclusion

Fiji's case affirms that geoeconomic interactions can yield effects by intensifying, complementing, or reducing strategic competition, contingent upon specific contextual conditions. The findings indicate that geoeconomic issues influencing strategic competition for Fiji are sector-specific and temporal shifts according to the period under review. Fiji navigated the geoeconomic landscape to advance its development needs without compromising its strategic autonomy. Specific forms of engagements, such as infrastructure finance and BRI-linked diplomacy, particularly in the 2010s, often acted as accelerators of strategic rivalry, provoking pushback. Other forms of interaction, notably trade and diversified aid relations, demonstrate that support can be complementary and non-confrontational despite the persistent strategic competition of major powers. In recent years, Fiji's diplomatic repositioning with Western alternatives has lessened strategic rivalry, proving that strategic competition is not static and can be moderated.

These findings demonstrate that geoeconomic impacts are conditional, shaped by sectoral and temporal factors rather than being consistently competitive or cooperative. Fiji's case demonstrates that a pragmatic small state can carefully balance relations to navigate the landscape of strategic competition while safeguarding its own national goals. The study also confirms that Pacific Island countries, such as Fiji, influence great power behaviour by exercising agency through the employment of hedging and normative leadership in climate advocacy

platforms. By adopting this approach, Fiji has achieved tangible benefits while resisting the pressures of aligning with binary power structures.

The study's contribution lies in demonstrating how applying the analytical viewpoint of a small state can reshape the understanding of geoeconomic issues in the Indo-Pacific. By examining a single case in depth, this research provides insights into sectors and temporal variations that broad approaches often overlook. Fiji's case demonstrates to policymakers that strategic competition in the Pacific is not fixed, as outcomes are shaped by how small states respond to domestic policy and external engagement. Ultimately, the trajectory of Fiji's experience is most clearly one of agency and adaptation. Despite the presence of strategic competition, Fiji has demonstrated that small states can retain autonomy by maintaining agency, engaging widely, and seizing development opportunities. In the years ahead, small Pacific island states will continue to be at the crossroads of great power rivalry. However, cases like Fiji provide insights into how small state actors can harness geoeconomics to serve sustainable development, ensuring their destiny is self-determined.

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To what extent should gender security concerns impact Papua New Guinea's National security?

Author

Lakitonu Atomu, Papua New Guinea

Lakitonu Atomu is currently the Team Leader, Asset Management, with the Department of Defence, Papua New Guinea. She is a graduate of the Australian Command and Staff College (ACSC) in 2024 at the Australian War College, Canberra. In her role, she coordinates and manages Defence cataloguing and assets, provides sound knowledge and effective advice to the First Assistant Secretary on planning and resource management, and develops, formulates, and implements policies relating to cataloguing and asset management.

This essay will evaluate the extent to which gender security concerns impact Papua New Guinea's (PNG) national security by specifically focusing on addressing gender-based violence (GBV), socio-economic inequality and the exclusion of women from political and economic participation framed through Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) framework. Papua New Guinea is a developing nation struggling with significant challenges that have hampered its progress since independence in 1975. At the top of the list are law and order problems, coupled with a lack of economic and human resource development. To achieve long-term stability and development, Papua New Guinea must expand its national security approach by investing in human rights and addressing gender security issues. Recognising challenges like gender-based violence, socio-economic inequality and political instability is crucial for ensuring domestic and national security.

The O'Neil/Dion government (2012-2017) began to outline and formalise what it considered Papua New Guinea's primary national security concern by drafting the nation's first-ever national security policy, the 2013 Papua New Guinea National Security Policy (NPS). This policy was intended to provide a strategic policy framework for security oversight, coordination, alignment and guidance for all key security agencies. For all Government Departments and Agencies, the NPS intended to coordinate the security of Papua New Guinea's national interest through mobilising efforts across government agencies.

However, to successfully achieve long-term stability and development, it is important to understand the concept of national security beyond traditional concerns and acknowledge that the concept has evolved to include the Boe Declaration, which presents an expanded understanding of national security by including non-traditional

issues such as human rights.[1] In broader terms, investing in human rights as non-traditional national security is theoretically to have a positive effect on domestic security by addressing social stability and equality and confirming it to be a legitimate national security concern. The issue of gender security is a concern in Papua New Guinea and is linked to the country's overall stability and safety. Addressing gender-based violence (GBV), socio-economic inequality and political instability is important to ensure there is stability, peace and development in Papua New Guinea.

This paper will argue that addressing gender security challenges is essential for strengthening national security in Papua New Guinea. Firstly, it will explain the definitions of gender, gender security and national security while examining the interrelations of gender security and national security. Secondly, the literature review on the global perspectives on gender and security uses case studies to highlight the successful integrations of the three-gender security into national security frameworks. Thirdly, it will further explore the challenges faced in the Pacific Islands specifically focusing on Melanesian countries. It will also provide a historical context of gender roles, the current gender issues and how culture influences gender norms. Fourthly, the paper will elaborate further on how gender security concerns impact national security in Papua New Guinea. Finally, it will provide four recommendations such as creating a standalone Gender-Based Violence (GBV) task force unit with effective training and funds, strengthening legal frameworks and improving support services and engaging community leaders.

Definition

There is a vast array of discussions on gender security therefore, this essay will use the following definitions provided by the United Nations. Gender refers to the social attributes, roles and opportunities associated with being male and female in a society.[2] These attributes, roles opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialisation[3]. They conform to a society's value system and vary by context and time.[4] Gender also defines power relations in society and determines what is socially expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man within a given context.[5]

The above definition is important to this paper because it demonstrates that gender is not fixed but is shaped by cultural norms, expectations and power relationships. Gender security can be easily assessed if gender is understood by this definition because it shows how societal structures can create inequalities that affect security. Therefore, using this definition this paper will show how gender roles impact access

[1] "Boe Declaration on Regional Security," United Nations Network on Migration, accessed September 29, 2024, https://migrationnetwork.un.org/policy-repository/boe-declaration-regional-security.

[2] Department of Peace Operations Gender Equality and Women, Peace and Security Resource package"Gewps19_respack_v7_eng_digital.Pdf," accessed September 9, 2024, https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/gewps19_respack_v7_eng_digital.pdf.

[3] "Gewps19_respack_v7_eng_digital.Pdf."p9

[4] "Gewps19_respack_v7_eng_digital.Pdf."p9

[5] "Gewps19_respack_v7_eng_digital.Pdf."p9

to security, opportunities and resources which affect PNG's security concerns.

Gender security refers to the protection and empowerment of women and gender minorities.[6] They should be safe from discrimination, violence, and poverty, access to proper healthcare and education while having equal opportunity and having the right to live without fear.[7] In Papua New Guinea, traditional beliefs about gender roles and patriarchal norms are very strong which makes it harder for women to achieve security.

National Security refers to state sovereignty and military defence which is a traditional concern and non-traditional concerns such as human rights, socio-economic and well-being of the population/citizens of a country.'[8] This essay will also consider the concept of national security outlined in the 2018 Boe Declaration, an ''expanded concept of security inclusive of human security, humanitarian assistance, prioritising environmental security and regional cooperation in building resilience to disasters and climate change.''[9]

Continuing from the definitions, this paragraph expands on the significance of gender security and national security and elaborates further on how they interact effectively to address gender issues in Papua New Guinea. This analysis also identifies how the interrelationship between gender security and national security becomes evident in a country like Papua New Guinea. Gender-based violence, discrimination and lack of access to education and healthcare weaken society and prevent women and gender minorities from fully contributing to and taking part in the economy and politics. This exclusion slows down national development and can create more instability in the country. When gender security is compromised it often leads to higher rates of poverty, social unrest and inequality. All of these can negatively influence the drivers of conflict and undermine national security. In a country like PNG, gender roles and patriarchal norms can entrench gender inequalities, further complicating efforts to build resilient and stable societies. In Papua New Guinea, where gender-based violence is widespread, addressing gender security is important to achieve broader social and economic well-being which can contribute to national security. Increasing access to education, healthcare and legal protections to empower women and promote gender equality is critical to address broader national security. For example, promoting gender equality and women's participation in peace and security efforts are essential to sustaining peace.[10]

Literature review

To understand and perceive national security through the lens of gender, it is important to first recognise that the traditional concept of national security has been

[6] True,Jacqui, ''The political Economy of Violence Against Women.'' New York. Oxford University Press,2012

[7] Jacqui, T, p29

[8] Roland Paris, "Human Security: Paradigm Shift or Hot Air?," *International Security* 26, no. 2 (2001): 87–102.

[9] "Boe Declaration on Regional Security."

[10] United Nations Security Council. ''Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security." S/RES/132, October 31,2000,2.

heavily military focused-national security has been seen as protecting a country's borders and sovereignty from external threats through the projection of force. This is the "realist" approach to international relations which disregards the role of women and gender. Realist theory in international relations, particularly on national security, focuses on power, state behaviour, and the anarchic nature of the international system. Realism conceptualises national security through the lens of military capability, state sovereignty, and the preservation of the nation-state against external threats.[11] However, by applying the lens of gender we can see that men and women experience insecurity in different ways.[12]



While men might be directly involved in combat, women face threats such as economic exclusion from the nation's affairs, displacement, food insecurity, political marginalisation, and gender-based violence (GBV). Economic inequality can lead to the instability of a nation. In addition, addressing political marginalisation is better to strengthen a nation's democracy and national security.[13] Feminist scholars such as Natalie Hudson believed that national security should take into account the protection of women and girls who are going through the threats of GBV.[14] Women and girls frequently encounter violence that is not well addressed in traditional security frameworks.[15] Recognising and addressing GBV is important for a country's national security. Expanding the concept of national security to include this broader perspective is known as ''human security'' and places greater emphasis on the importance of addressing non-traditional security issues such as economic inequality, political marginalization and gender-based violence (GBV).[16]

One of the fundamental theories in the expanded national security concept is the ''feminist security theory'' which argues that gender hierarchies play a critical role in shaping both domestic and international security. Feminist Security Theory can be

[11] Mearsheimer, J, (2001).The Tragedy of Great Power Politics. W. W. Norton & Company
[12] Natalie Hudson, "Gender, Human Security and the United Nations: Security Language as a Political Framework for Women," *Gender, Human Security and the United Nations: Security Language as a Political Framework for Women*, January 1, 2009, 1–186, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203869901.
[13] Laura Sjoberg, ed., *Gender and International Security: Feminist Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2009), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203866931.
[14] "Gender and Security," *Atlantic Council* (blog), accessed September 15, 2024, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/security-defense/gender-and-security/.
[15] "Gender, Violence, and Human Security: Critical Feminist Perspectives | NYU Press Scholarship Online | Oxford Academic," accessed September 15, 2024, https://academic.oup.com/nyu-press-scholarship-online/book/19408.
[16] Sjoberg, *Gender and International Security*.

defined as being primarily concerned with the security of individuals, particularly women and marginalised groups, instead of focusing on the security of the nation. It focuses on addressing issues such as gender-based violence (GBV), socio-economic inequality and the exclusion of women from political and economic participation.[17] First, the gendered notion of security has framed traditional security concepts as masculine traits including aggression, control and protection.[18] Feminist security theories argue that this framing has shaped how military and political institutions rule, and shaped how security issues are perceived and practised.[19] Secondly, the exclusion of women because of these masculine traits leads to the majority of women and girls being left out of security considerations and leading them to experience greater insecurity during and after conflicts, including sexual violence and economic instability.[20]

As such, the impact on women and girls in conflict and post-conflict is profound but unrecognised. Referring to Feminist security theory contends that to create a better understanding of security these insecurities need addressing.[21] Therefore, the broader definition of security is ''Feminist scholars have identified human security, social security and recognises that the security of the state can lead to the insecurity of women and girls.''[22] These broader theories of security are relevant in Papua New Guinea, given the high rates of gender-based violence, significant socioeconomic inequalities and less participation of women in political processes. The traditional militaristic view of national security fails to address these very important issues impacting Papua New Guinea's development and stability.

A call from the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), for the inclusion of women in peacebuilding and security efforts was the right direction in recognising the connection between gender and security. The UNSCR 1325 urges countries to include gender perspectives in security strategies in National Action Plans (NAPS).[23] Despite the implementation of UNSCR 1325 there are key challenges faced such as lack of political will, insufficient resources and institutional barriers.[24] This has caused countries to struggle to meaningfully include women in

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[17] Laura Sjoberg, "Feminist Security Theorizing," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*, 2010, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.437.

[18] Sjoberg.

[19] "Feminist Security Studies," obo, accessed September 15, 2024, https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199743292/obo-9780199743292-0205.xml.

[20] Jacqui True, "Securitizing Feminism or Feminist Security Studies?," ed. Laura Sjoberg, *International Studies Review* 14, no. 1 (2012): 193–95.

[21] "Feminist Security Theorizing | Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies," accessed September 15, 2024, https://oxfordre.com/internationalstudies/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.001.0001/acrefore-9780190846626-e-437.

[22] "Feminist Security Theorizing | Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies."

[23] "Fact-Sheet-and-Key-Messages-Global-Study-EN.Pdf," accessed September 15, 2024, https://wps.unwomen.org/resources/fact-sheets/Fact-Sheet-and-Key-messages-Global-Study-EN.pdf.

[24] "UNSCR 1325 at 20: Achievements and Remaining Challenges in Implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda | NATO PA," accessed September 15, 2024, https://www.nato-

the security decision-making process.[25] For instance, a global study has shown that despite the robust frameworks in place the actual implementation on the ground is often weak due to these challenges.[26] Additionally, the a need to engage men as partners in the Women, Peace and Security agenda is important for broader societal benefits.[27] In 2014, Papua New Guinea made efforts to align with UNSCR 1325, including the development of a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. However, implementation remains a challenge due to a lack of resources and institutional obstacles.

The UN Women reports on gender equality and the Women, Peace, and Security agenda emphasise that gender security requires a comprehensive approach to addressing the structural inequalities that contribute to the insecurity of women. For example, in Papua New Guinea, these structural inequalities are severe. Women and girls faced huge barriers in education, with only 12.4% of girls completing secondary school compared to boys and about 15% of women represent the formal workforce.[28] These are not limited to women in security institutions but include issues such as economic disparity, lack of education, legal protection and health services. For instance, economic disparity is a huge issue around the world that shows women being paid less than men. This is a clear indicator that perpetuates gender insecurity.[29] Accessing education and health services can also be a limitation for women due to structural barriers that can discourage them from being empowered and secure. Another example of girls in Africa facing challenges in accessing education and sexual reproductive health services resulting in ''four out of five new HIV infections among 15-19-year-olds are in girls according to UNAIDS 2019 estimates.''[30] Finally, restrictive gender norms not only restrict women from opportunities to participate in political and economic events but also perpetuate the cycle of inequalities and insecurity.[31]

Researchers have shown that when countries prioritise gender equality and women empowerment, there is a greater chance of longer-lasting peace and stability because gender equality leads to the inclusion of women and girls in good governance and delivers better economic and long-lasting peace outcomes after conflict.[32] Therefore, integrating gender security into national security strategies is

pa.int/news/unscr-1325-20-achievements-and-remaining-challenges-implementing-women-peace-and-security.

[25] Clara Fisher et al., "UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in Peacekeeping Challenges and Opportunities," n.d.

[26] Fisher et al.

[27] "UNSCR 1325 at 20: Achievements and Remaining Challenges in Implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda | NATO PA."

[28] "UN Women Papua New Guinea," UN Women – Asia-Pacific, accessed October 3, 2024, https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/png.

[29] "Gender, Justice and Security: Structural Challenges, Feminist Innovations and Radical Futures," The Gender Hub, accessed September 16, 2024, https://thegenderhub.com/publications/gender-justice-and-security-structural-challenges-feminist-innovations-and-radical-futures/.

[30] UNAIDS. Women and HIV: a spotlight on adolescent girls and young women 2019. https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/2019_women-and-hiv_en.pdf

[31] "Gender, Justice and Security."

[32] "Facts and Figures: Women, Peace, and Security," UN Women – Headquarters, July 15, 2024,

the necessary approach, to achieving sustainable security for women and girls but also to achieving more improved peace and security outcomes overall. The Centre for a New America Security (CNAS), has noted that countries prioritising gender equality enhance social stability and economic growth, emphasising that promoting gender equality can lead to a stronger GDP in advancing gender equality.[33]

The connection between gender and security has been explored by researchers in other contexts such as in the case of the ongoing conflict in Rwanda and Liberia. The two countries have experienced worse conflicts in the past and in the aftermath of these conflicts the countries have sought to integrate gender security into their national security strategies. Before 1994 in Rwanda, women were marginalised, their power and influence were restricted and they were excluded from political life and their rights.[34] The 1994 Rwanda genocide resulted in millions of deaths and widespread displacement. This conflict prompted more women to take leadership roles and help to rebuild the nation.[35] Rwanda has made remarkable progress in integrating gender equality across government and society. In 2008, the Rwanda Chamber of Deputies was the first elected national parliament in which female parliamentarians held the majority with the number of women MPs sitting at 61.25% well above the current global average of 26.4%.[36] With such a positive outcome the Rwanda government has realised that empowering women is critical to national stability and development and has taken steps to ensure that women play an important role in national security and governance. Rwanda has also implemented United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 into their National Action Plan, including women in decision-making processes at every level of security and governance. By creating and supporting women's participation, the country aims to elevate women's participation to enhance stability and support development goals for all regardless of gender.

Highlighting the effectiveness of Rwandan actions is a case study from Liberia on gender security in action. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is the first female to be appointed as an African head of state in 2006. She played an important role in promoting gender equality addressing gender-based violence and establishing a unit within the national police to combat high rates of sexual violence.[37] Recognising the four pillars of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security,

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https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-women-peace-and-security.

[33] "Gender Equality as a National Security Priority," Center for a New American Security (en-US), accessed September 16, 2024, https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/gender-equality-as-a-national-security-priority.

[34] Abby Gonzalez et al., "Women's Impact in a Post-Genocide Rwanda: Efforts Towards Reconciliation and Progress," accessed September 17, 2024, https://pressbooks.claremont.edu/gws183transfemtheories2024/chapter/petra-romero-womens-movements-in-post-genocide-rwanda/.

[35] "How Women Helped Rebuild Rwanda — Inclusive Security," accessed September 17, 2024, https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/how-women-helped-rebuild-rwanda/.

[36] "How Did Rwanda Become No.1 for Gender Equality?," Inter-Parliamentary Union, September 17, 2024, https://www.ipu.org/news/voices/2022-10/how-did-rwanda-become-no1-gender-equality.

[37] "Gender and Social Inclusion | Fact Sheet | Liberia," U.S. Agency for International Development, August 19, 2022, https://www.usaid.gov/liberia/fact-sheets/gender.

Elen Johnson Sirleaf advocated for the inclusion of women in peacebuilding processes. These two case studies from Rwanda and Liberia highlight the transformative roles that women can play in the peace process and post-conflict recovery, and the value of women's inclusion in security processes.

Gender Security Challenges in Papua New Guinea

This section provides a broader perspective on gender security challenges in the Pacific Islands before focusing specifically on Papua New Guinea. In the Pacific, gender security is shaped by complex regional socio-cultural dynamics from the impacts of colonialism. Today, the patriarchal norms remain very strong. This limits women's roles in society and traditional customs often prioritise men in decision-making and in leadership roles. Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji and Vanuatu have a high rate of gender-based violence (GBV) and very low female inclusion in governance and security processes. Around two-thirds of women and girls in Papua New Guinea are facing domestic violence physically or sexually with limited opportunities for political participation.

There are ongoing and growing efforts to include women in peacebuilding and governance. However, the cultural norms have resisted the succession of the efforts. The exclusion of women from the decision-making processes is an additional limitation on female participation in the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea governance process with fewer women being voted into parliament. The Solomon Islands have seen some progress, but women still struggle to enter parliament seats. The same challenge is facing another Melanesian region Vanuatu, facing similar challenges with high rates of GBV and a lack of female participation in government.[38] However, whilst regional efforts are ongoing organisations like the Pacific Islands Forum are advocating for the inclusion of women in the security processes. These organisations highlight the benefits of including women in the security space and the challenges to improving gender security in the Pacific.

In addition, this section narrows its focus to gender and security in Papua New Guinea within the historical context. Research shows that average survivors of the conflict have more health problems and more frequent visits to the hospital emergency department and significantly higher healthcare costs throughout their lives than those without a history of abuse. The same is also true for victims of gender-based violence. This is of growing concern when day-to-day life for so many girls and women is already inherently dangerous. While traditional threats like border disputes and resource management remain, Papua New Guinea is increasingly confronted by internal vulnerabilities among which gender security has emerged as a critical issue. The findings from a Law Reform Commission in 2004, have shown the same result as the findings that were gathered using a validated World Health Organisation (WHO) instrument in 1999.[39] The WHO survey was carried out

[38] "Gendered (In) Security – A Pacific Reality," Australian Institute of International Affairs, accessed September 19, 2024, https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/gendered-in-security-a-pacific-reality/.

[39] Margit Ganster-Breidler, "Gender-Based Violence and the Impact on Women's Health and Well-Being in Papua New Guinea," 2010, https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Gender-based-Violence-and-the-Impact-on-Women%27s-and-Ganster-

throughout Papua New Guinea's rural and urban areas of the highlands, coastal and Island provinces surveying two hundred women. This survey concluded that two-thirds of these women had been victims of GBV.[40] Considering the longer-term implications of quality of life for these survivors who suffer from reduced health, income inequality may mean a decrease in life expectancy. This is an issue and a challenge to the Papua New Guinea government to create a safe space for women and girls to bring peace, development and stability.

Gender security issues in Papua New Guinea are influenced by its history through tribal customs and internal conflict. Traditional practices have influenced gender relations as well to an extent, once a bride price is exchanged women are often viewed as property. In the Papua New Guinea Highlands region, a bride price involves a huge amount of money straining family resources and placing pressure on women to conform to roles as wives reinforcing gender inequality. Tribal conflict also contributes to gender inequality and violence against women. During inter-tribal conflict, women and girls are forcefully raped and forced into marriage. These inhumane acts often go unpunished under traditional customs and laws. Tribal laws place men at the top as both decision-makers and leaders which prevents women from seeking justice and help from society in which they have very little voice.

The Papua New Guinea tribal customs contribute to gender inequality in many ways. Additionally, internal conflicts such as tribal wars and political instability have also contributed to gender-based violence and made it more difficult for women to be recognized and achieve equality.[41] The gender security issue is compounded by the remaining influences of historical colonization which impacted tribal customs and internal conflicts. Colonisation brought significant changes to Papua New Guinea's social structures, disrupting the traditional degree of power and worsening the state of gender inequality. The missionaries reinforced the patriarchal values of promoting men into leadership and decision-making roles.


Image: Department of Defence

The Bougainville crisis in 1988-1998 had a huge impact on gender dynamics in Papua New Guinea. Women and girls were displaced and affected by the widespread sexual violence causing physical and psychological harm and long-term mental issues. The displacement of women and girls resulted in much loss of life. The conflict led to a breakdown of social systems such as healthcare, education, and community groups leaving women and girls vulnerable to disease

Breidler/8a6690ee417a0afb31239b5386aed84bc85c8823.

[40] Ganster-Breidler.

[41] Dr Joseph Mullen says, "A New Era for Gender-Based Violence Response in PNG | East Asia Forum," September 18, 2021, https://eastasiaforum.org/2021/09/18/a-new-era-for-gender-based-violence-response-in-png/.

and stranded without help from these services.[42] Despite all these challenges and issues, after the crisis, Bougainville women have played a very important role in the peacebuilding process. A group formed called Grassroots Activism (GA), which represents women and girls to advocate for peace and reconciliation. The GA group were so instrumental in negotiating and were at the forefront of every peace talk process around Bougainville.[43] In addition to the GA group were the Civil Society group which were also advocating for the peace process. This group organised meetings and dialogues between and provided counselling and support to conflict-affected communities. As a result, in 2016, the Autonomous Bougainville Government's office passed a Community Government Act for Gender Equality to recognise women's roles in peacebuilding. Despite this work, continuous challenges such as societal unrest and gender inequality still exist. Women continue to face challenges in accessing education, health and economic opportunities.

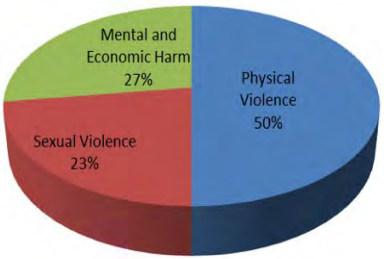
In Papua New Guinea gender security is linked to national security. Viewing national security concerns through the lens of gender, and addressing issues like domestic violence, sexual violence and inequality can lead to good governance, stronger socio-economic development and community cohesion all of which can lead to national stability. Gender-based violence and sexual violence have been major societal problems. Almost two-thirds of women in Papua New Guinea experience some form of sexual or gender-based violence including human trafficking. Gender-based violence (GBV) has reached epidemic proportions and has severely impacted women's wellbeing, safety and participation in society.

Gender security issues also impact Papua New Guinea's national security through its effect on socio-economic development. Formal employment opportunities for women and girls can be very limited, with only 15% of women engaged in formal employment in rural areas. Women and girls face higher rates of poverty with gender inequality impeding Papua New Guinea's overall economic development. The majority of women work in the informal sector such as fisheries and subsistence agriculture in rural areas limiting their participation in development processes

According to a 2016-2018 demographic and health survey by the Papua New Guinea National Statistics Office, 56% of women aged 15-49 had experienced physical violence by the age of 15 and 28% had experienced some form of sexual violence.[44] The below pie graph illustrates a summary of the common types of violence in society during the survey period.

[42] Amie Kirkham, Sophia Close, and Zahbia Yousuf, "Gender in Political Transition: Bougainville's Peace Process," n.d.
[43] Kirkham, Close, and Yousuf.
[44] "Gender-Based Violence Is a Growing Concern in Papua New Guinea," accessed September 21, 2024, https://pngnri.org/index.php/blog-release/352-gender-based-violence-is-a-growing-concern-in-papua-new-guinea.

Table 1: Common forms of violence (PNG National Statistics Office 2016-2018)



These astonishing statistics show how serious violence against women is in Papua New Guinea. GBV not only causes personal suffering but also prevents women from fully participating in economic and social activities. This widespread violence perpetuates gender inequality limiting Papua New Guinea's overall economic development. Even though the scale of GBV in Papua New Guinea is alarming it is important to assess the underlying factors contributing to GBV and what efforts and action has been taken to address it.

Papua New Guinea's rich cultural diversity, while a source of national pride, often reinforces gender inequality and contributes to the pervasive issue of gender-based violence. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "The gender inequalities experienced by women in the Papua New Guinea often stem from interpretations of traditional customs and culture that reinforce male dominance and entitlement to positions of leadership. Priority in wealth creation and distribution and resource management"[45] This cultural context creates a very difficult environment to address gender issues in Papua New Guinea. While the country's diverse cultural heritage is valuable it presents challenges in promoting gender equality. Traditional customs and norms legitimise male dominance making it difficult for women in leadership roles and decision making which then contributes to the acceptance of gender-based violence as a norm in most societies in Papua New Guinea. The association of culture and gender inequality creates a problem that requires a cultural approach to solve the issue. It is important to understand the cultural aspects to develop better and more effective strategies to address gender-based violence and identify the root causes of security issues faced by women in Papua New Guinea.

Impact of Gender Security Concerns on National Security in Papua New Guinea.

The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) framework serves as the theoretical foundation for this paper which examines gender security in Papua New Guinea and highlights how gender inequality and women's exclusion from society participation pose risks to the country's national security by addressing GBV, socio-economic inequality and exclusion of women from economic and political involvement. These

[45] "Gender | United Nations Development Programme," accessed September 21, 2024, https://www.undp.org/papua-new-guinea/gender.

gender securities represent significant risks to Papua New Guinea's long-term stability and security which are not isolated social issues affecting individuals or communities but are deeply connected and influence comprehensive issues of Papua New Guinea's national security.

Papua New Guinea faces significant socio-economic and political challenges including law and order problems alongside human resources. The O'Neil/Dion government (2012 to 2017) drafted Papua New Guinea's first-ever 2013 National Security Policy which aimed at securing the country's national interest through the coordination of security efforts across government agencies but the policy critically failed to address the important role of gender security ensuring the long-term national security.

Firstly, gender-based violence (GBV) has far-reaching consequences that go beyond individual victims, significantly impacting the community while destabilising families. Gender-based violence creates instability and erodes trust within society, particularly when justice fails to address and punish these reported crimes. The United States Institute of Peace has reported that 1.5 million Papua New Guinean girls and women experience gender-based violence each year and this violence is linked to continuous intercommunal conflict, domestic abuse, and political intimidation.[46] These acts of violence damage public health and deeply impact the socio-economic by way of weakening community security and national security as a whole.

Secondly, socio-economic inequality affects women in Papua New Guinea who have disproportionately negative access to formal employment opportunities and education. These women are limited to only 15% of women engaged in formal employment in rural areas. They face poverty and gender inequalities impeding overall economic development while the majority of women work in the informal sector such as fisheries and subsistence agriculture in rural areas limiting their participation in development processes. This exclusion has bad consequences for Papua New Guinea's overall economic stability. The economic marginalisation of women such as being denied equal economic opportunities results in a lack of financial resources necessary to participate in effective political processes, thereby, impacting long-term stability and national security.

Thirdly, the exclusion of women from political and economic participation in Papua New Guinea significantly impairs the country's overall stability. The role of women in governance and peacebuilding is important and their exclusion can undermine political stability and governance effectiveness. For instance, the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) has recognised the importance of integrating gender perspectives into their operational strategies by implementing annual gender focal point training yearly held by USPACOM.[47] This training is about 'understanding

[46] "Addressing Gendered Violence in Papua New Guinea: Opportunities and Options," United States Institute of Peace, accessed September 30, 2024, https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/03/addressing-gendered-violence-papua-new-guinea-opportunities-and-options.

[47] "Papua New Guinea Defense Force Completes Gender Focal Point Training with U.S. DoD Support," U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, accessed September 23, 2024, https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-

gender as a core component of sustainable human security outcomes for Papua New Guinea.'[48] However, social norms and culture have hindered women from fully participating in governance a very important aspect of national security. Moreover, community security is also important to women's safety from gendered-based violence and is a very important pillar in Papua New Guinea's long-term stability.

Recommendations

It is understood that gender security concerns have implications for Papua New Guinea's national security. Gender-based violence, socio-economic inequality and women's exclusion from political processes contribute to the already existing challenges that directly impact Papua New Guinea's stability and development. To address these challenges requires a better approach that integrates considerations into all aspects of national security policy. To effectively address gender security issues and their impact on national security. There are several recommendations that Papua New Guinea should consider.

1: Create a standalone GBV task force unit and training funding: The Papua New Guinea security institution mainly the police force is understaffed with only 1 officer per 1,845 people. This number is far below the United Nations' expected number. Adding to this critical issue is the involvement of these police officers as the perpetrators of domestic violence, rape and abuse. To address these issues, Papua New Guinea should increase the inclusion of women in the police force. Currently, 13% of women are representing the police force in Papua New Guinea. When more women are included, it can result in diverse perspectives of the police force which can bring different perspectives and approaches to problem solving. In addition, women officers tend to achieve better outcomes for victims of sexual assault. Secondly, the family and sexual violence units within the police force exist but need strengthening and include women's participation in the leadership roles within the unit while providing specialised training for policemen and women on handling gender-based violence cases.

2: Strengthen legal frameworks: While Papua New Guinea has made progress in developing policies on women's rights, implementing these policies continues to be a significant challenge. The National Security Policy 2013, does not indicate gender security as a key component however, it does adopt a traditional view of national security primarily focused on state sovereignty, military defence adoption and law and order. Therefore, the government should enforce the Family Protection Act, of 2013 which explicitly criminalises domestic violence, enforce gender-based violence policy to prevent and respond effectively to reduce high rates of violence, and introduce initiatives to increase women's representation in parliament recognising that their exclusion from political processes hinders different views in decision making.

3: Improve support services: According to a 2023 Human Rights Watch report,

View/Article/3793552/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.pacom.mil%2FMedia%2FNews%2FNews-Article-View%2FArticle%2F3793552%2Fpapua-new-guinea-defense-force-completes-gender-focal-point-training-with-us-do%2F.

[48] "Papua New Guinea Defense Force Completes Gender Focal Point Training with U.S. DoD Support."

1.5 million women and girls experienced gender-based violence every year in Papua New Guinea a place regarded as the most dangerous place for women and girls.[49] The Papua New Guinea government should take this seriously and re-establish effective support services such as legal aid, counselling and safe shelters for women and girls, and provide free and efficient health care services to address the high maternal mortality rate. However, the United States Institute of Peace's (USIP) report has effective approaches for peacebuilding programming to minimise gender-based violence.

4: **Engage community leaders:** The government should partner with local leaders and clans to address gender norms and tribal violence. Papua New Guinea's cultural diversity and its system of clan and tribal leadership have existed it just needs to be recognised and strengthened to be more effective to prevent gender-based violence. These traditional and local leaders, particularly those located in the tribal zones have more experience in handling such issues and have been influenced by societal norms and related gender issues.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has argued that addressing gender security issues is important for strengthening Papua New Guinea's national security. The issues of gender-based violence, socio-economic inequality, and exclusion of women from political and economic processes can undermine the country's long-term stability and development. Papua New Guinea can address the root causes of insecurity by integrating gender security into national security policies. By addressing GBV, and including women in decision-making, Papua New Guinea can achieve a more stable, secure and prosperous society. This approach of prioritising human security and focusing on individual well-being alongside state security will lead to sustainable development and peace.

[49] Human Rights Watch, "Papua New Guinea: Events of 2023," in *World Report 2024*, 2024, https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/papua-new-guinea.

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Images: Department of Defence

How should Australia integrate force elements to project and protect its strategic interest in the Indo-Pacific?

Author

Hosea Bandy, Papua New Guinea

Hosea Bandy is a senior Policy and Intelligence analyst with the Papua New Guinea Department of Defence, specialising in strategic intelligence, policy research and development. He currently serves as Acting Assistant Secretary in the Policy Division and has held multiple leadership roles across Defence's Strategic Policy and Intelligence divisions. Hosea graduated from the Australian Command and Staff Course in December 2023.

Introduction

It has been widely published that the shift in Australia's defence and security commitments from the Middle East into the Indo-Pacific demands the restructure of Australian force elements. This research paper argues for the integration concept. Studies have shown that there is a need to move from the current joint force model to an integrated force model if the ADF is to harness the potential of its warfighting capabilities in an increasingly contested maritime security environment.[1] Therefore, this paper argues that Australia should transform from a joint model to an integrated force element through a maritime-centric environment, strategy, capability, and training to project and protect its strategic interest in the Indo-Pacific (archipelago) region. To do so, the paper recognizes the current Defence Strategic Review's (DSR) recommendation that directs ADF to evolve into a genuine integrated force with specific consideration on naval capability that contributes effectively to the ADF's ability to shape Australia's strategic environment, deter potential adversaries and deny their ability to achieve objectives contrary to Australia's national interests.[2] Such organizational changes are required to enhance the ADF's ability to produce multi-domain effects within its immediate region of strategic interest.

Although a frequent component of Australia's Defence Force reprioritization

[1] Mark Gilchrist, "Is the Australian Defence Force Joint Enough?," *Australian Army Journal* XVIII, no. 1 (2022), https://search.informit.org/doi/pdf/10.3316/informit.804770993583573#:~:text=In%20short%2C%20the%20ADF%20is%20still%20not%20joint,result%20of%20increasing%20geopolitical%20tensions%20in%20the%20Indo-Pacific..

[2] *National Defence: Defence Strategic Review* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2023).

literature has been the claim that the force composition is evolving from joint services to an integrated force, the pieces of literature reviewed have indicated that the integration of force elements is too broad and should be conditioned within the context of a clearly defined maritime environment, strategy, capability, and training to achieve the strategic objectives. However, it is also argued that the journey to a fully integrated force is not that easy to complete, nor has it been entirely straightforward.[3] This is because of the existing differences between the services relationship and their individual cultures and the unique requirements of their environmental focus. While such cultural and other areas of fragmentation in each service will continue to challenge the efforts to carefully strike the balance in fully integrating the force elements, the purpose of this research is to focus on the recent strategic objectives that expand Australia's interest into the Indo-Pacific, a region that is maritime-centric, and examine potential areas that enable integration in the maritime defence domain.

Structure and Scope

This paper begins by recognizing the research limitations and constraints and further provides context on Australia's changing strategic environment and what it means to transform the force composition from joint force elements into an integrated model. This will highlight how significant that transformation is and further provide context to examine how Australia should integrate force elements into the maritime security architecture of the Indo-Pacific region of strategic interest. It is then structured around what the literature reviewed has identified to shape the undertaking of the research to argue certain areas of force elements that could be integrated. The research concludes by identifying other critical areas in ADF that may potentially challenge the concept of force integration and its narrations and what are the potential implications to policy and economy with recommendations for other researchers undertaking similar studies in the future to address other service issues.

Research Limitations/Constraints

In the approach to transforming joint force into an integrated model, the research has identified the strong individual service cultures, values and designs that make defence a complex organisation. This complexity will require more time and wider research to provide arguments on how to address these underlying challenges. The question this study sought to explore, however, is specifically to examine the potential areas of initiating the process of force integration through the relationship between shared strategic environment, strategy, capability, and training. Due to the limited timeframe to widely conduct interviews to obtain primary data on the specific thinking around the current developments of the force integration model, the paper will only focus on specific elements that can be integrated without being overly detailed. This is because the research will rely only on secondary resources and publications that are available through open sources and libraries within reach. More studies on how those individual service cultures; values and designs might best be integrated will be the important research elements to progress and a cornerstone for

[3] Peter Dean, Brendon Taylor, and Stephen Fruehling, *Australia's Defence: Towards a New Era?* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Publishing, 2014).

undertaking the transformation of force in the long term.

Background (Context)

Australia's force projections and security policy have always been consistent with its commitments to the national security strategy of superpower dependency and self-reliance. The genesis of this commitment was reliance on the British and later the US during World War Two and thereafter. It is noted that due to the Indo-Pacific becoming the centre of economic expansion, which has been greatly fuelled by commercial maritime activities and the assurance of security on the global commons, the region's geostrategic construct has recently gained importance.[4] Given the rising security dynamics within Australia's zone of strategic interest, the call to move to an increased level of force integration is required for the 'Defence of Australia' and national security. Therefore, as recommended in the ADF's First Principal Review, there is a need for a transformational change to the way Defence does business so it can operate as one integrated system to deliver its outcome more effectively and efficiently in a "One Defence approach.5 When Australia first articulated the strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific construct in the National Security Strategy document of 2013, it constituted two big oceans.6 Such a shift in strategic priorities highlights the significance of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) as a stakeholder and participant in maritime security operations in the region and how best it can be used to integrate the entire force elements.

The expansion of Australia's strategic role into the Indo-Pacific region was the result of the recent geostrategic rivalry within the region compounded with other existing maritime security challenges which present uncertainties for Australia's security developments. Therefore, the 2020 Defence Strategic Update (DSU) strategically directs to project and protect (shape, deter, and respond) Australia's strategic environment (interest).[7] This calls for the restructuring of the force elements to be integrated within the maritime domain. It is widely established that a navy-centric force integration strategy will enable Australia to defend national sovereignty and identity, protect and advance its specific interests, influence others' thinking and, when necessary, compel them to share it, prevent war, and influence the very rules that govern the maintenance of international order.[8] To project and protect its strategic interest in the highly contested maritime environment, this paper examines the relevant approach required to transform the ADF from its current state of joint force to an integrated force model.[9] It is focused on the maritime domain to support the whole-of-government effort in projecting sea power and protecting Australia's

[4] Prakash Gopal, "Maritime Security in the Indo-Pacific: The Role of the US and Its Allies," *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India* 13, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 27–40, https://doi.org/10.1080/09733159.2017.1321208.
[5] Tim BRIG Mckenna and Tim Mckay, "Australia's Joint Approach," September 2015, https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1003115.pdf.
[6] Gopal, "Maritime Security in the Indo-Pacific."
[7] *2020 Defence Strategic Update* (Canberra: Australian Government, Department of Dfence, 2020).
[8] Ken Booth, ed., *Critical Security Studies and World Politics*, Critical Security Studies (Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005).
[9] Tim BRIG Mckenna and Tim Mckay, "Australia's Joint Approach," September 2015, https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1003115.pdf.

strategic interest in an archipelago region.

Transformation from Joint Model and Integrated Model

It has commonly been noted in the body of literature reviewed that the changing character of wars, operations and security dynamics within Australia's strategic environment demands a transformation of force structure from a joint model to an integrated model. In recent years, there has been an increase in defence strategic reviews and force restructure that recommend the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to evolve from joint to integrated force elements to project and protect its strategic interest in the Indo-Pacific region. There are several topics in the recent academic research and analyses that shed light on how ADF restructure should depart from the joint elements to an integrated approach which will be covered in the main discussion of this paper. Before that, it is important to understand the differences between the two models and why transformation from one to the other is required.

The term joint refers to a military force that includes elements from more than one service such as the Army, Navy, and Airforce.[10] It combines the instruments of power to respond to an immediate threat environment. Although such is the emphasis on ad hoc arrangement and maybe a successful principle that focuses on warfighting operations and is strongly centred on a specific service operational environment, it might not be practical in peacetime operations that require a whole-of-government approach. Whilst the joint operation still holds the record of being a winning concept since World War Two (WWII) Pacific Campaign, it is more focused on war-fighting operations and needs to be transformed. On the other hand, studies have shown that integration is the force multiplier that enables a relatively small force like the ADF to sustain a faster operational tempo, ideal agility, and better manoeuvrability.[11] It encompasses both warfighting operations and other non-combat security operations. Therefore, this paper recognized it has the advanced part of the joint model that should remain at the front of the ADF's thinking in terms of capability development and force design processes.

In view of the current geostrategic rivalry that presents complex security challenges that go beyond the character of warfighting operations, there is a need to transform the force elements from its joint structure to an integrated model. The call to transform the force was also reinforced by Commonwealth Australia in the 2013 Defence White Paper, the policy to continue the development of the ADF as an integrated whole.[12] A similar direction has been echoed in the Defence Strategic Review 2023 that recommends ADF to rapidly evolve from the current joint force status into an integrated force.[13] While several related studies within this period have attempted to identify how to integrate the force, other scholars have also suggested that the force should transform from the principle of joint forces with an individual

[10] Thomas Crosbie, "Getting the Joint Functions Right," 2019, https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/jfq/jfq-94/jfq-94_108-112_Crosbie.pdf?ver=2019-07-25-162025-397.
[11] Ray Griggs, "Building the Integrated Joint Force," The Strategist, June 7, 2017, https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/building-integrated-joint-force/.
[12] *2013 Defence White Paper* (Canberra: Australian Government, Department of Defence, 2013).
[13] *National Defence*.

service environment focus to an integrated force with an integrated environment focus.[14]

Therefore, this paper affirms that the evolving security circumstance in the Indo-Pacific requires Australia to transform its force elements into an integrated model. Despite there being potential differences between researchers and defence institutional reviews on 'how' force elements should be evolved from a joint model to an integrated model, the findings from the literature reviewed support the notion that a maritime defence strategy is paramount for Australia to project and protect its strategic interest in the Indo-Pacific region. However, to design the force structure from a joint to an integrated model, there are also existing challenges within the traditional design of the military institution from individual force elements that need to be modernized. This means the concept of force integration requires a transformation of capability (amphibious) and training in the maritime domain. There may also be a number of contributing factors that need to be further researched in order to better understand some of the approaches required for the transformation of force integration to project and protect Australia's strategic interests. However, this paper will examine how different elements of armed forces are integrated with a specific focus on the maritime environment, maritime strategy, amphibious capability and education and training programs.

Discussion of Findings

Maritime Environment Focus

Although the notion of ADF's evolution from joint forces to an integrated force model has focused heavily on the complete redesigning of all defence entities to become one defence, this paper argues that the integration of force elements needs to be projected within a specific environment of strategic interest to Australia. The strategic environment is defined as the area where the nation engages in internal and external interactions with other states or actors to improve the state's well-being. It is further amplified that the internal and external context of the environment comprises the conditions, relationships, trends, issues, threats, opportunities, interactions, and effects that influence success.[15] Other studies have also shown that the growing tensions between powerful state players contesting within the Indo-Pacific environment have necessitated the need for ADF to improve its function by integrating force elements within a specific integrated environment[16] While the concept of ADF modelling its joint force elements supports the notion of

[14] Thea Clark and Terry Moon, "Interoperability for Joint and Coalition Operation," scholar.google.com, December 2001, https://interoperability+for+joint+coalition+operation+by+thea+clark+and+dr+terry+moon&btng=.

[15] Harry R. Yarger, *Strategy and the National Security Professional: Strategic Thinking and Strategy Formulation in the 21st Century* (Westport, Conn: Praeger Security International, 2008).

[16] Mark Gilchrist, "Is the Australian Defence Force Joint Enough?," *Australian Army Journal* XVIII, no. 1 (2022), https://search.informit.org/doi/pdf/10.3316/informit.804770993583573#:~:text=In%20short%2C%20the%20ADF%20is%20still%20not%20joint,result%20of%20increasing%20geopolitical%20tensions%20in%20the%20Indo-Pacific..

environmental focus, it is more focused on the operational context of each service-oriented environment. The works of literature have shown that the current joint operational model requires further development into an integrated environment that whole-of-government can engage with.

In addition to that, this paper argues that the force elements must be integrated within the maritime environment as directed by the recent strategic reviews and policies. While it appears that researchers have identified the shift in ADF's focus to Australia's immediate region as Middle East Commitments were drawn down,[17] other defence-related studies and reviews categorically term the Indo-Pacific region as Australia's zone of strategic interest. In response to the changing geostrategic environment, there are articles suggesting that the integration of force elements should be defined as sea, air, and land operations involving force entry from the sea, undertaken in a maritime-integrated environment.[18] Australia itself is a maritime nation and its sphere of strategic interest and influence is also within the maritime region. Hence, the security architecture of the area has a unique maritime flavour due to the region's littoral geography and the crucial role that the oceans play in supporting the free flow of trade and commerce.[19] Moreover, the shared commitment to a stable, secure, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region announced in the AUKUS treaty and other defence strategic reviews also expressed broader considerations on maritime dominance or sea power.[20] Therefore, it is important that the integration of force elements is focused within the maritime environment to project sea power into the Indo-Pacific region.

Furthermore, this paper recognizes the existing environmental command (theatre command) structure employed within the joint force operations as a staging point to initiate the concept of integration. This will ensure that the force integration is framed with consideration of the command and control (C2). This paper also recognizes the importance of environmental command as a potential means to integrate sea, air, and land elements to have command and control of sea power.[21] Although the projection of the environment is expended with the changing character of the operation, the similar consciousness around the theatre and strategic objective to defend and secure Australia's strategic interest denotes that maritime environment command is a suitable framework to integrate the force. This means the theatre command and control framework is still relevant but requires an integrated approach. Therefore, in order to integrate force elements within current strategic directions, the composition of force elements must be integrated into the maritime environment or maritime theatre command focus.

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[17] Nicole Brangwin and David Watt, "The State of Australia's Defence: A Quick Guide," Aph.gov.au, 2023, https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/library/prspub/8697707/upload_binary/8697707.pdf.

[18] Jonathan Gackle, "Deployment Integration of United States Marine Corps and Royal Australian Air Force F/A-18 Squadrons: Is it a viable Concept?" 2000, https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA383885.pdf.

[19] Gopal, "Maritime Security in the Indo-Pacific."

[20] Taylor and Francis , "Contemporary Security Policy," Taylor & Francis, March 17, 2023, https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/fcsp20.

[21] Sean M. Judge, "The Pacific War, 1941–45," JSTOR, 2009, http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep13942.9.

Maritime Defence Strategy

In this section, this paper argues that the concept of integrating force elements requires a clearly defined and consistent maritime defence strategy to project and protect Australia's strategic interest in the Indo-Pacific region. While military strategy can be generally defined as the process that converts military power into policy effects, it is critical to determine how to integrate the force with a clear focus on what to achieve.[22] To provide specific context into maritime defence strategy, research has categorized maritime strategy as more expansive and may include all of the country's maritime purposes, including both defence and economic ones.[23] Therefore, it is argued in this paper that the formulation of an effective maritime defence strategy provides flexibility and adaptability to ensure that the development of force integration is tailored to meet the more immediate circumstances and respond to unanticipated security challenges to Australia's strategic interest in the Indo-Pacific. How to develop and justify a defensive force in the absence of a threat was the central issue for Australian defence policy in the 1980s. This gave rise to the "Defence of Australia" strategy, which allowed Australia to combat immediate and minor threats while collaborating with the US abroad in the event of a more serious one.[24] However, with the recent threat to Australia's strategic interest projected within the maritime domain, the Defence of Australia model requires a maritime strategy to drive the concept of force integration to achieve total self-reliance.

Additionally, this paper argues that Australia's national and regional security hinges on the ability to integrate force elements into a maritime strategy. Research has established that Australia as a maritime trading nation, requires a maritime defence strategy to have military power over the ocean.[25] It is further argued that an effective maritime strategy will be the foundation of Australia's military strategy for integration, and serve Australia well, into the 21st century.[26] While studies have shown that the application of land power strategy is a military force against military force, sea power strategy exists to serve in a broader context which is inherently linked to maritime activities beyond that of navies; global trade, economies and national wealth, international cooperation and rivalry. Therefore, the existing concept of joint elements needs to be integrated through a maritime defence strategy to have control over the sea power to pursue Australia's strategic interests. The Indo-Pacific construct is a maritime environment that requires an integration of force elements into a clearly defined maritime defence (naval) strategy. Therefore, a maritime defence strategy is required to integrate the force to project sea power in this era of geo-strategic and geo-economic contestation within the region of Australia's

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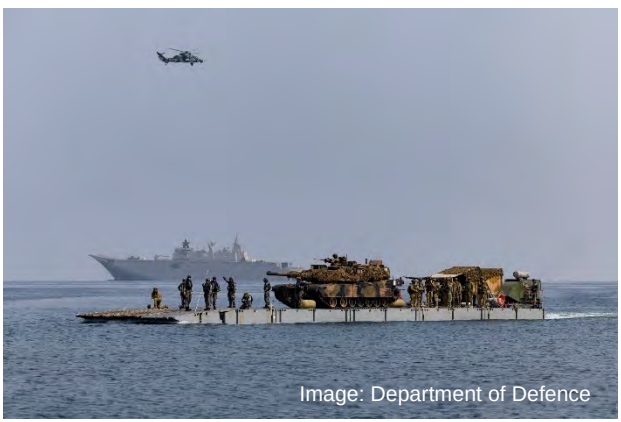
[22] David Jordan et al., *Understanding Modern Warfare*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
[23] Hew Strachan, *The Direction of War: Contemporary Strategy in Historical Perspective*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2013), https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107256514.
[24] Andrew Carr, "Australia's Archipelagic Deterrence," *Survival* 65, no. 4 (July 4, 2023): 79–100, https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2023.2239058.
[25] Rory Medcalf, "In Defence of the Indo-Pacific: Australia's New Strategic Map," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 68, no. 4 (August 8, 2014): 470–83, https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2014.911814.
[26] Rebecca Strating, "Strategy at Sea: A Plan B for Australian Maritime Security?" *Security Challenges* 16, no. 2 (2020): 58–70, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26910352.

interests.

Noting that maritime strategy is considered a more expansive strategy, this paper further argues that designing and applying of naval-centric strategy is the prerequisite to bridge the concept of force integration into a bigger maritime strategy. The naval strategy is identified as part of a much bigger whole, which can serve as the conduit to integrate force elements. Although many scholars who wrote about war on land give limited or no attention to the war at sea, it is argued that the evolution of naval strategy into maritime strategy associated with the concept of war at sea is economical and legal, and supported and prevented land operations through an integrated approach.[27] The notion that understanding the environment in which a strategy will be applied shapes its formulation affirms this argument that designing a naval-related strategy will pave the way to integrate force into the wider maritime strategy.[28] It is also affirmed through the strategic direction recommended in the 2023 defence strategic review which focuses on the success of effecting denial strategy in Australia's northern approaches. This effect will depend on the ability of an integrated force through a naval approach.[29] This and other similar recommendations seem to echo the significance of how naval strategy can be used to integrate forces elements to have control over the sea to project and protect Australia's strategic interest. It is highly likely that the evolution of force elements into an integrated model requires a navy strategy. Therefore, ADF must develop a naval strategy to integrate force elements into a broader maritime strategy to project and protect its strategic interests in the maritime region.

Amphibious Capability

This section of the paper focuses on the development of amphibious capability as one of the very important maritime defence capabilities to integrate force elements with individual service capabilities to project power at the ocean. Although there are arguments from the perspective of self-reliance suggesting that Australia requires more capability to sustain the evolving integrated force elements, there is no clear indication of which specific capability to do so in the service of the direct defence of Australia.[30] To identify a specific capability that has the capacity to integrate the force elements to project sea power, it was first envisioned in the Defence 2000 White paper for ADF to prepare for the introduction


Image: Department of Defence

[27] Strachan, *The Direction of War*.
[28] Yarger, *Strategy and the National Security Professional*.
[29] *National Defence*.
[30] Robbin Laird, "Hi-Intensity Operations and Sustaining Self- Reliance," January 5, 2019, https://hub.williamsfoundation.org.au/resources/Documents/Sustaining-Self-Reliance-Full-Report.pdf.

of the new amphibious ships and the Australian Amry forces to embark on them. This has been a massive undertaking, requiring significant energy and attention from across the Australian defence establishment.[31] Also, the study on Australia's geography and its role in regional security has supported the strategic narration on amphibious capability. It states that the geography of Australia's near region and the Indo-Pacific; and its role from humanitarian assistance to high-end warfighting; are important contexts within which to consider the development of the Australian amphibious capability.[32]

In addition, this paper also argues that an amphibious capability is an equal space required by all three services to integrate and effectively operate within the Indo-Pacific maritime domain. It is important to note from the research that an amphibious capability can provide logistics support to deployed forces; and military support to non-warlike operations such as Humanitarian Assistance Disaster Relief (HADR). It is an important part of Australia's overall force projections in capacity building. Studies have shown that service combat capabilities can be integrated through the amphibious capability to provide the best coordinated effects in the sea, land, and air environments.[33] It is further affirmed that ADF's moves to integrate service capabilities and manoeuvre operations in the littoral environment will be aided by amphibious capabilities.[34] Although there might be challenges in the initial combination of force and additional support capabilities, it can be developed within a clearly defined timeframe and budget.

To further support the above claims, this research paper suggests that the individual Service equipment, doctrines, and cultures can certainly be designed to integrate with the amphibious concept, doctrine, and personnel models. Scholars have widely established that such integration of services into amphibious capability is vital for the control of sea power.[35] When considering what capability to integrate the force element into the maritime domain, the article has demonstrated the strategic context within the maritime environment requires Australia to consider developing an amphibious capability. Research has further identified the development of capability and training as fundamental steps that need to be integrated that defy individual service oriented to an integrated whole.[36] Therefore, in order to transform individual service doctrines, cultures and capabilities into an integrated defence amphibious capability, it will require a proper design of education and training exercises.

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[31] Maren Leed, *Advancing U.S.-Australian Combined Amphibious Capabilities* (Washington, DC : Lanham, MD: Center for Strategic and International Studies ; Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).
[32] Tim BRIG Mckenna and Tim Mckay, "Australia's Joint Approach," September 2015, https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1003115.pdf.
[33] Tim BRIG Mckenna and Tim Mckay, "Australia's Joint Approach," September 2015, https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1003115.pdf.
[34] Jonathan Gackle, "Deployment Integration of United States Marine Corps and Royal Australian Air Force F/A-18 Squadrons: Is it a viable Concept?" 2000, https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA383885.pdf.
[35] Sean M. Judge, "The Pacific War, 1941–45," JSTOR, 2009, http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep13942.9.
[36] Sanu Kainikara, *"Capability Born Joint": Towards a Seamless Force* (Tuggeranong, A.C.T.: Air Power Development Centre, 2007).

Education and Training

Despite the fact that there are joint education and training that focus on individual service skills and knowledge, it appears that the benefit of such joint activities does not necessarily encourage the development of force integration. Therefore, this paper argues that joint education and training should be tailored especially to focus on the integrated maritime environment, strategy, and amphibious capability to integrate the force elements. Although research has identified that there is a need for more education and training to enhance the ADF's preparedness for operations within Australia's regional environment through maritime approaches, this paper argues that the regular training conducted should be designed and delivered with a focus on maritime security and vital asset protection.[37] The development of the concepts and doctrine of force integration will become useful if there is regularly rigorous intellectual scrutiny through integrated education and training. Research has established that the appropriate domain for this scrutiny to occur is within the Joint Professional Military Education and Training system.[38] The military organization is a very complex organization to be developed into an integrated model. Therefore, such developments in the education and training programs will surely build knowledge and a sense of oneness.

To add on, it is noted from the research that education and training received a significant boost since 1997, with one of the defence-enabling programs being Joint Education and Training (JET).[39] Studies have also suggested that as ADF become an integrated force, it must do so in a manner that does not weaken the great strength that comes from professional mastery such as experience, education and training.[40] Some training such as; TALISMAN SABRE, INDO-PACIFIC ENDEAVOUR, PITCH BLACK, and INDOPACOM's PACIFIC PATHWAYS are designed to transform force engagements from interoperability to an integrated operation.[41] Also, other existing joint military education such as Australia Defence College, Australian Defence Force Academic, and Royal Military College are the existing military education institutions that can be tailored to achieve the force integration model. Transforming from joint to integration requires redesigning education and training models as a fundamental program in the construct of integrating force elements. The training and education should be flexible and adaptable to the changes and challenges across all levels of civil-military engagement.

Furthermore, this paper suggests that the military education and training that are designed towards achieving force integration should be programmed in all levels of

[37] Allan Hawke and Ric Smith, "Australian Government AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCE POSTURE REVIEW," 2012, http://ict-industry-reports.com.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2013/07/2012-Australian-Defence-Posture-Review-DoD-March-2012.pdf.
[38] Michael Evans, "The Closing of the Australian Military Mind: The ADF and Operational Art," *Security Challenges* 4, no. 2 (2008): 105–31, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26459144.
[39] Tim BRIG Mckenna and Tim Mckay, "Australia's Joint Approach," September 2015, https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1003115.pdf.
[40] Chief of Defence Force, "Joint Operations for the 21st Century," apps.dtic.mil, May 2007, https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA494534.
[41] Jane Hardy, "Integrated Deterrence in the Indo-Pacific: Advancing the Australia-United States Alliance," *Apo.org.au*, October 15, 2021, https://apo.org.au/node/314582.

exercises across all services. Research has shown that, to be capable of harmonious conduct of operations as a single entity, the evolution to force integration must be conceptually, materially, and operationally 'born' and trained together. This means that the training and education programs are designed and delivered at all levels of the military. Also, to be consistent with the projected strategic interest, the training and education imparted would also have to focus on maritime defence strategy and amphibious capability to meet the strategic policy directives.[42] While it is further supported by the argument that tailoring such integrated training and exercise will certainly support the concepts of integrated operations, it will also help to increase the likelihood that the command authorities determine that operational collaboration is efficient and effective.[43] This is the fundamental step to integrate the force within amphibious capability and maritime strategy and operate within a maritime environment to produce strategic effects. Therefore, the design of the training and education should display elements of integrating Air, Army and Navy operations supported by combined capabilities that are integrated within Australia's maritime environment. The existing differences in the service cultures, design and doctrines identified in the literature reviewed can be integrated through learning and modelling a common element and be tested through integrated training and education that focus on achieving the strategic interest.

Conclusion

Summary of the Arguments and Findings

The discussions of the findings in this study reveal that the changing security dynamics within Australia's strategic interest require a transformation of the ADF from a joint model to an integrated whole. Although there are individual service cultures, doctrines, values, and a sense of strong service command identified in the findings, this paper argued that force integration can happen in areas such as environment/theatre command, maritime defence strategy, amphibious capability and integrated training and education programs. The integration of force elements needs to be projected within a specific environment of strategic interest to Australia. It is also discussed in this paper that the Indo-Pacific is a maritime environment and ADF force elements must be integrated into a maritime defence strategy. The naval strategy within ADF is arguably the essential pathway to integrate the force elements into the broader maritime defence strategy. This supports the lessons learned that the military strategy that links operations to achieve strategic/policy objectives. It also confirms the notion that strategy converts military instruments into strategic effects. This paper has shown in the argument that the security concerns of the Indo-Pacific regional construct demand a whole-of-government effort and force integration into the maritime domain will help build the capacity and capabilities required to project and protect Australia's strategic interest.

This paper supports the notion that consequent to implementing a maritime strategy, the ADF may be required to undertake amphibious operations in the littoral and surface operations at sea as well as over land.[44] In essence, Australia's security

[42] Kainikara, *"Capability Born Joint."*
[43] Leed, *Advancing U.S.-Australian Combined Amphibious Capabilities*.
[44] Sanu Kainikara, *Australian Air Power in a Maritime Strategy* (Canberra: Air Power

depends on its maritime strategy, which combines air and sea control in a strategic manner while maximising the use of amphibious, marine, and air power. Customizing the Military education and training exercises is essential in integrating the force elements into amphibious capability and maritime strategy so that it can operate within the maritime environment to produce strategic outcomes. Australia's strategic environment/circumstances dictate Australia adopt a maritime-defence strategy, integral to amphibious capability and operations supported through integrated training and education programs. This will encourage the integration of force elements to project military power from the sea to project and protect Australia's strategic interest in the Indo-Pacific region.

Implications for Findings for the Literature and/or Policy

Australia's strategic directions for force elements to evolve into an integrated whole to project and protect its strategic interest in the Indo-Pacific is critical in the context of the geopolitical environment within the archipelago region. Over time, Australia's strategic policy has shifted between two main outlooks (great-power dependency and self-reliance) as the best approach to protect Australia's security interests. While Australia's security sensibility was of the colonial legacy and has become more self-assured in time, scholars often argued under the rubric of 'defence of Australia', that Australia should not risk depending on the will of others for its ultimate defence, but instead pursue a greater degree of self-reliance. Given the complex security environment within Australia's strategic interest, the recent recommendation in the Defence Strategic Review and other similar reviews to integrate the force to project and protect strategic interest is critically important to the policy related to the defence of Australia (self-reliance). The move to an increased level of force integration is deemed a necessary requirement to cope with the demands of a 'self-reliant' defence of Australia and National Security.

The concept of force integration has complex layers of institutional issues to address and will take more time to undertake studies and develop policy objectives. This paper recognized the financial implication of the policy directions to integrate the force through amphibious capability. The pace and scope of developing amphibious force capability will be largely determined by available budgets, at a time when Australian defence spending is competing with other domestic priorities.[45] Although this paper has discussed that there is a bit of jointness in the composition of different services, it requires a clear policy direction for more integration which was reflected in the DSR and DWP 2013. Therefore, it is recommended that more research and findings are required to guide the policy and reviews to further address other institutional issues to fully integrate the force elements in the future.

Development Centre, 2013).

[45] Leed, *Advancing U.S.-Australian Combined Amphibious Capabilities*.

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Images: Department of Defence

Is the provision of foreign aid in the Indo-Pacific primarily strategic? A realist analysis of Sino-U.S. rivalry and recipient agency

Author

Major David Kaloris, Vanuatu

Major Kaloris is a career officer in the Vanuatu Mobile Force (VMF), currently serving as Officer Commanding the Special Service Company at Cook Barracks. A graduate of the prestigious Australian Command and Staff Course (ACSC), Class of 2025, Major Kaloris brings advanced operational, leadership, and strategic planning expertise to Vanuatu's security landscape. His career reflects a commitment to strengthening national resilience, fostering professional discipline within the VMF, and integrating international best practices with Vanuatu's unique cultural and security context.

Introduction

The Indo-Pacific region, encompassing South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Pacific Islands, and parts of East Africa, is a major theatre of contemporary aid politics. As a region of growing economic dynamism and escalating geopolitical rivalry, particularly between China, and the United States, it has become a focal point for strategic aid. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the United States' Indo-Pacific Strategy all involve increased aid flows related to foreign policy objectives. At the same time, the region also face pressing humanitarian and developmental challenges including vulnerability to climate change, infrastructure gaps and health crises. This complex environment raises hidden questions on what truly is the motive behind aid. Is it always strategic or are there moments where aid genuinely reflects recipient needs and shared global responsibilities?

However, international relations theory, particularly realism, cautions against accepting aid at face value. Realists argue that aid is scarcely neutral or benevolent, instead, it functions as an extension of state power and national interest.[1] From this lens, aid is not a gift but a transaction, rather an investment that serves political, economic, and security objectives.[2] The concept of foreign aid refers to assistance

[1] Hans Morgenthau, "A Political Theory of Foreign Aid," *American Political Science Review* 56, no. 2 (June 1962): 301–9, https://doi.org/10.2307/1952366.
[2] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 1st ed (Boston, Mass: McGraw-Hill, 1979).

that is explicitly or implicitly intended to advance the donor's national interest.[3] It may be employed to foster political alliances, facilitate access to markets for trade and investment, secure military basing rights or project soft power through diplomatic channels. Modern research have further affirmed that donor governments frequently channel aid towards countries with geostrategic value such as access to trade routes, proximity to rivals, or voting influence in international institutions.[4]

The Indo-Pacific provides a compelling stage to examine these dynamics. As China expands its influence through the BRI[5] and the United States counters with its Indo-Pacific Strategy[6] and renewed Compacts of Free Association (COFA), aid has become a strategic instrument in great-power competition. Recipient nations, such as the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and Micronesia, are not passive in this process, they engage in aid shopping and diplomatic hedging. Nevertheless, their autonomy is constrained by the structural realities of Sino-U.S rivalry.

This essay examines how far realism can explain foreign aid in the Indo-Pacific, evaluating its strengths in accounting for great-power rivalry while acknowledging where it fails to anticipate recipient agency and alternative drivers. It first establishes the theoretical framework of realism, contrasting it briefly with alternative lenses. It will then examine China's BRI and the U.S. COFA agreements as case studies of strategic aid. Finally, it will consider recipient agency within realist constraints before situating aid within the broader Sino-U.S balance of power.

Theoretical Foundations: Realism and Foreign Aid

This essay adopts realism as the primary framework through which to evaluate foreign aid, treating it as a hypothesis to be tested against evidence from the Indo-Pacific. Competing schools of thought offer diverse explanations as to whether aid is primarily an altruistic enterprise, a pragmatic policy tool, or a reflection of national identity and values. Yet treating realism as a testable framework, rather than a predetermined truth, makes it possible to ask whether these dynamics fully capture aid in the Indo-Pacific or whether other explanations such as liberal cooperation or identity-driven motives, better explain certain outcomes.

Realism is built on several core assumptions. At its core the global system is anarchic, there is no higher authority above states. Secondly, states are the primary actors and their primary goal is to protect their sovereignty. Third, because survival is never guaranteed, states seek power as the ultimate means of securing

[3] Jean-Claude Berthelemy, ""Bilateral Donors' Interest vs. Recipients' Development Motives in Aid Allocation: Do All Donors Behave the Same?"," *Review of Development Economics* 10, no. 2 (May 2006): 179–94, https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=5d911c5e-430c-38bc-894e-e4176d87beaf.
[4] Peter Rudloff, James M Scott, and Tyra Blew, "Countering Adversaries and Cultivating Friends: Indirect Rivalry Factors and the Allocation of US Foreign Aid," *Cooperation and Conflict* 48, no. 3 (September 2013): 401–23, https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836713482552.
[5] Jonathan Hillman, *The Belt and Road Initiative: Five Years Later* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, n.d.), 2018, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/ts180125_hillman_testimony.pdf.
[6] U.S. Department of State, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Advancing a Free and Open Indo-Pacific* (U.S. Government, 2019), https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf.

themselves.[7] Finally, cooperation may be possible but always fragile as states are concerned with relative gains and the distribution of power.[8]

In this light, aid is not an act of altruism but an extension of state influence. It is a form of soft power or an alternative to military coercion that permit donors to cultivate allies, secure influence, and project their values abroad.[9]

Morgenthau's 1962 essay, A Political Theory of Foreign Aid, continues to shape how realists view on aid today. He argued that aid serves political purposes and that is to gain diplomatic allies, reward friendly regimes, counter adversaries, and expand spheres of influence.[10] While aid may take different forms such as economic, military, technical or humanitarian, its true purpose is strategic. His analysis during the Cold War shaped aid as part of the ideological struggle between the United States and the former Soviet Union. Today, his insights echo strongly in the Indo-Pacific, where China and the U.S. deploy aid to advance their rivalry.[11]

Structural realism or neorealism, extends Morgenthau's insights by emphasising the systemic pressures that drive state behaviour. In an anarchic system defined by the distribution of capabilities, great powers are driven to compete for influence and security[12]. Foreign aid, under this logic is not a matter of choice but of necessity. China's pursuit of influence through BRI[13] or the U.S.'s maintenance of COFA agreements reflects systemic imperatives which both powers must extend influence to prevent encirclement by rivals and secure strategic depth. Aid thus becomes a currency in this zero-sum competition.

Contrasting Perspectives

Liberal institutionalists regard aid as a tool of cooperation, assisting states address shared challenges such as poverty, climate change and pandemics.[14] From this perspective, multilateral institutions such as the World Bank or World Health Organization depoliticise aid, aligning it with global development goals rather than narrow national interests. Constructivists, meanwhile view aid as moulded by identity and norms.[15] For instance, New Zealand's aid assistances to Pacific neighbours

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[7] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*.
[8] Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (1978): 167–214, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2009958.pdf?casa_token=oEkNGAe6qYoAAAAA:4Q7_O29Xg7VMfC9t7mYgzCdm-3mGo5VF_AcMqBS1zDOc12wmG6oquw6Pz5V3MXBWFEJHOctKc-cGr5lRPTCIGyS3USuSmgkoJdRt20oK1lejt5xch9kpnQ.
[9] Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, 1st ed (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).
[10] Morgenthau, "A Political Theory of Foreign Aid."
[11] Berthelemy, ""Bilateral Donors' Interest vs. Recipients' Development Motives in Aid Allocation: Do All Donors Behave the Same?"."
[12] John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 1. publ. as a Norton paperback (New York, NY: Norton, 2003).
[13] Jonathan Hillman, *The Belt and Road Initiative: Five Years Later*.
[14] Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1984).
[15] Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations 67 (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

often reflects cultural kinship and ethical responsibilities rather than strategic gains.[16]

However, in the context of Sino-U.S. rivalry, these perspectives provide incomplete explanations. Liberal cooperation is weakened by mistrust between Beijing and Washington while constructivist values take a back seat to driving forces.

From a realist lens, one of the main functions of foreign aid is to secure influence and shape the alignment of other states within the international system.17 Aid is not merely assistance; it is a tool to tilt the balance of power in favour of the donor by cultivating allies, consolidating spheres of influence, and denying strategic space to rivals.18

Firstly, aid is deployed to gain diplomatic alignment. Donor states allocate economic incentives to influence the foreign policy behaviour of recipients, mainly in international organisations where small states can provide valuable votes. An eye-catching example is the Solomon Islands' decision to shift recognition from Taiwan to China in 2019, following guarantees of substantial Chinese aid and investments.19 This move weakened Taiwan's diplomatic standings and simultaneously strengthened Beijing's control in the Pacific, showing how aid restructure alignments to serve strategic intents.

Second, aid secures access to strategic infrastructure and geography. The United States' Compacts of Free Association (COFA) epitomises this logic. In exchange for financial transfers and economic assistance, the U.S. receives exclusive military rights across vast swathes of the Pacific.20 This access not only allow power projection and intelligence collections but also ensures that no contender can establish a competing presence in these geopolitically critical islands. Aid, in this sense, becomes a mechanism for territorial and maritime control without formal annexation.

Thirdly, aid is used to counter and contain rivals. The Indo-Pacific has seen a competitive "aid race" between China and the United States, with each side advancing commitments to limit the other's influences.21 Washington's previous increases in Pacific aid explicitly respond to China's growing presence, while Beijing uses its aid to reduce Taiwan's diplomatic recognition and to weaken U.S. regional dominance.22 In this way, aid operates as a mechanism of denial which ensures

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[16] Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (New Zealand), *Aid Programme Annual Report 2021*, Annual Report (Wellington, 2021), https://www.mfat.govt.nz/assets/About-us-Corporate/MFAT-corporate-publications/MFAT-Annual-Report-2021-22.pdf.
[17] Morgenthau, "A Political Theory of Foreign Aid."
[18] Berthelemy, ""Bilateral Donors' Interest vs. Recipients' Development Motives in Aid Allocation: Do All Donors Behave the Same?"."
[19] Sean Chang, "Taiwan Loses Solomon Islands to China," *Asia Times*, September 17, 2019, https://asiatimes.com/2019/09/taiwan-loses-solomon-islands-to-china/.
[20] Andrew Harding, *Time to Act: The Strategic Benefits of Funding the Compacts of Free Association (COFA)*, Fact Sheet no. 264 (2024), https://www.heritage.org/china/report/time-act-strategic-benefits-funding-the-compacts-free-association-cofa.
[21] Nadège Rolland, *China's Eurasian Century? Political and Strategic Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative*, with National Bureau of Asian Research (Seattle (WA), Washington, D.C: The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2017).
[22] Hurst, Daniel, "US Announces $810m Aid for Pacific Nations as It Tries to Combat China's Influence in Region," World, *The Guardian* (Australia), September 29, 2022,

that influence ceded to one side is necessarily a loss for the other.

These perspectives anticipate that aid may sometimes reflect humanitarian imperatives or normative commitments rather than purely realist competition. By situating realism alongside these alternatives, this study does not discard competing theories but tests whether, in the Indo-Pacific context, realism provides the most convincing explanation of observed patterns or whether the evidence reveals limitations that require liberal or constructivist insights to complete the picture.

Strategic Aid in the Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific has emerged as a central theatre for geopolitical competition, mainly between China and the United States. This section explores the strategic use of aid by these actors in the region mainly focusing on China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI),23 and U.S. campaigns through USAID, in the past years, including the Compact of Free Association (COFA). These case studies show how aid is applied to achieve foreign policy goals, build influence and counter rival actors.

Announced by President Xi Jinping in 2013, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is China's flagship foreign policy project and a cornerstone of its engagement with the Indo-Pacific.24 While Beijing frames the initiative as a "win-win" model of connectivity and development, realists interpret the BRI as a strategic vehicle designed to expand influence, secure leverage, and erode U.S. primacy in the region.25

From a realist perspective, the BRI is a multi-dimensional strategy. Economically, it creates dependencies by tying recipient states into networks of Chinese finance, contractors, and supply chains.26 Politically, it enhances Beijing's diplomatic leverage, with countries becoming more likely to support Chinese positions in international forums. Militarily, BRI projects, particularly ports raise the prospect of dual-use facilities that could one day support Chinese naval deployments.27 Collectively, these aims align with China's pursuit of regional primacy and the weakening of U.S. influence.

Critics often describe the BRI as "debt-trap diplomacy," arguing that China deliberately saddles recipients with unsustainable debt to extract concessions. While scholars like Deborah Brautigam caution that evidence of intentional entrapment is mixed, the realist reading does not require malicious intent. Even if projects are requested by recipient governments, the structural outcome is the same: debt creates dependency, and dependency translates into leverage. In the Indo-Pacific, where small island economies often rely heavily on external assistance, this leverage can have profound strategic consequences.

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https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/30/us-announces-aid-for-pacific-as-it-tries-to-combat-chinas-influence-in-region.

[23] Jonathan Hillman, *The Belt and Road Initiative: Five Years Later*.

[24] Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.

[25] Mearsheimer.

[26] Rolland, *China's Eurasian Century?*

[27] Rolland.

Case Study: Solomon Islands

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) delivered to the Solomon Islands showed how aid functions as an instrument of strategic statecraft.[28] In 2019, the Solomon Islands aligned diplomatic ties with Taiwan and established relations with Beijing.[29] Within months, China pledged hundreds of millions of dollars in concessional loans and grants for stadiums, roads, telecommunications, and government buildings. Apparently, these projects addressed pressing developmental needs in one of the Pacific's most economically fragile states.

Realists, however see a strategic recalibration.[30] The aid caused a diplomatic realignment that diminished Taiwan's international presence and increased Beijing's influence in a geopolitically significant archipelago.[31] The Solomon Islands' location astride key sea lines of communication and its distance to Australia make it a valuable node for power projection and intelligence operations. Subsequent discussions of a China–Solomon Islands security agreement in 2022 heightened fears in Washington and Canberra of potential Chinese naval access in the South Pacific region.

Through BRI, Beijing converted financial assistance into political leverage, with the possibility of future military utility.[32] In realist terms, this is aid not as charity, but as a mechanism to reshape the regional balance of power in China's favor by denying advantages to its primary strategic competitors.[33]

Case Study: Papua New Guinea (PNG)

Papua New Guinea is the largest Pacific Island country and a central focus of Chinese BRI activities.[34] Since joining the BRI in 2018, PNG has received significant Chinese financing for roads, airports, hydropower plants, hospitals, and government buildings. Projects such as the Ramu hydropower station and the Pacific Marine Industrial Zone serve critical local economic needs, but they also bind PNG more deeply into networks of Chinese contractors including supply chains and financial institutions.[35]



Image: Matthew Dornan. Available on DevPolicy Blog

[28] Jonathan Hillman, *The Belt and Road Initiative: Five Years Later*.
[29] Sean Chang, "Taiwan Loses Solomon Islands to China."
[30] Morgenthau, "A Political Theory of Foreign Aid."
[31] Rolland, *China's Eurasian Century?*
[32] Rolland.
[33] Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.
[34] Jonathan Hillman, *The Belt and Road Initiative: Five Years Later*.
[35] Graeme Smith, "Beijing's Orphans? New Chinese Investors in Papua New Guinea,"

From a realist lens, this integration creates structural dependency, as PNG's debt exposure to China rise, Beijing also gains diplomatic and economic leverage.[36] Located north of Australia and adjacent to key maritime routes linking East Asia and the South Pacific, PNG occupies a position of strategic depth with implications for regional logistics, communications and potential military staging. Chinese investment increase its foothold in a state historically within Australia's sphere of influence thus reducing Western dominance in the Southwest Pacific.

Moreover, by offering alternatives to Australian or U.S aid, China pushes regional allies to allocate resources countering its influence, stretching their diplomatic bandwidth.[37] BRI assistance to PNG thus functions as a strategic wedge by reshaping local alignments, undermining rival primacy and incrementally altering the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific.[38]

Strategic Geography and Diplomatic Influence

Maritime geography amplifies the strategic implications of the BRI. Control or access to Pacific ports, even for commercial purposes, raises the possibility of future military utility.[39] Beyond infrastructure, BRI aid also shapes diplomatic alignment such as Pacific states receiving Chinese aid often adopt more supportive positions on issues such as the South China Sea or human rights.[40] High-level talks and development aid serve to bind recipients closer to Beijing, lodging them within China's normative and strategic domain.[41]

The BRI demonstrates how China uses aid as a strategic instrument in the Indo-Pacific. Far from being a purely developmental initiative, it secures economic dependencies, expands diplomatic influence, and raises the possibility of military access.[42] From a realist view, the BRI encapsulates Morgenthau's claim that aid is an instrument of foreign policy, serving not altruism but national interest.[43] It is a central pillar of Beijing's effort to reshape the Indo-Pacific order in its favour and to challenge U.S dominance in the region.[44]

The United States Compacts of Free Association (COFA)

The United States has traditionally played a limited aid role in the Pacific compared to Australia and New Zealand, but its presence has intensified as strategic competition with China has escalated. In the past ten years, USAID has increased its operations in the region, and Washington has renewed its financial commitments under the Compact of Free Association (COFA) with Micronesia, the Marshall

Pacific Affairs 86, no. 2 (June 2013): 327–49, https://doi.org/10.5509/2013862327.
[36] Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.
[37] Terence Wesley-Smith, *China in Oceania: New Forces in Pacific Politics*, with East-West Center, Pacific Islands Policy 2 (Honolulu, HI: East-West Center, 2007).
[38] Rolland, *China's Eurasian Century?*
[39] Rolland.
[40] Jonathan Hillman, *The Belt and Road Initiative: Five Years Later*.
[41] Rolland, *China's Eurasian Century?*
[42] Rolland.
[43] Morgenthau, "A Political Theory of Foreign Aid."
[44] Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.

Islands, and Palau.[45] These aid assistances are not purely developmental. The COFA agreements allow the U.S. military to operate freely in vast areas of the Pacific, granting strategic depth in a region where China's naval presence is expanding. Aid disbursed under these compacts is thus intimately tied to defence and foreign policy interests.[46]

COFA provides economic assistance, access to U.S federal programs and pathways for migrations. In exchange, Washington receives exclusive military rights across vast Pacific territories thus granting strategic depth in a region of increasing geopolitical competitions. These arrangements demonstrates a core realist principle that aid is activated to secure tangible advantages in the balance of power.[47]

The most direct expression of this logic is found at Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands which hosts the Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site. Aid under COFA permits continued U.S. access to this facility that is critical for missile testing, intelligence collection and forward projections.[48] From a realist standpoint, aid functions as means to entrench U.S. military primacy and deny China access to a strategically vital areas.[49]

Case Study 1: The Marshall Islands – Kwajalein Atoll and Strategic Depth

Kwajalein Atoll embodies the strategic military framework endorsing COFA. This location hosts U.S. ballistic missile testing and missile defense operations, allowing both forward basing and ISR capabilities critical to U.S. power projection. From a realist perspective, this access provides a deterrent against regional adversaries and ensures U.S. dominance in the western Pacific.[50] The Marshall Islands, in turn, have exercised agency by leveraging their strategic importance to negotiate enhanced economic packages, including compensation for historical nuclear testing conducted by the United States.[51] These negotiations illustrate that even within a highly asymmetrical relationship, COFA states can tactically extract concessions without challenging the overarching power hierarchy.

Economic and social dimensions of COFA also serve realist purposes. The provision of U.S. federal programs including health, education, and social services generates dependency that reinforces American influence.[52] By tethering the well-being of these small island states to U.S. support, the United States cultivates political alignment and loyalty, reducing the risk of alternative partnerships that could challenge U.S. supremacy in the region. Visa-free access to the United States for COFA citizens further integrates these states into U.S. economic and political

[45] U.S. Department of State, *Compacts of Free Association: Fact Sheet* (Washington DC: US Government, 2020), https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/fact-sheets/FactSheetVerifyFASCitizens.pdf.
[46] Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.
[47] Morgenthau, "A Political Theory of Foreign Aid."
[48] U.S. Congress, *U.S. Defense Infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific: Background and Issues for Congress* (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service (CRS), 2023), https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R47589.
[49] Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.
[50] Mearsheimer.
[51] Francis X. Hezel, *Strangers in Their Own Land*, Paperback ed (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 2003).
[52] U.S. Department of State, *Compacts of Free Association: Fact Sheet*.

systems, enhancing long-term influence and limiting the ability of adversaries to encroach on U.S. interests.

Case Study 2: Palau – Environmental Diplomacy as Strategic Leverage

Palau, a small but geopolitically significant COFA state, demonstrates how the United States uses aid to shape regional behavior while recipient states exploit the arrangement for local priorities. The U.S. provides economic assistance and supports environmental initiatives, including marine conservation programs, which serve dual purposes: they stabilize local societies and reinforce U.S. soft power, framing the United States as a partner in sustainable development.[53] Palau has used this aid strategically to pursue national environmental agendas, such as expanding protected marine areas, while signaling to the United States that continued alignment requires addressing domestic priorities. This case demonstrates that aid in realist terms is a tool to secure influence, yet recipients retain tactical agency to extract value.[54]

The significance of COFA is amplified in the context of U.S.-China competition. China's growing presence in the Pacific through infrastructure investment, concessional loans, and bilateral engagement presents both a threat and a bargaining opportunity. For the United States, maintaining COFA ensures that critical islands remain under American influence, preventing potential encirclement or penetration by a strategic rival. For COFA states, the presence of a competing great power creates leverage: they can subtly signal openness to Chinese engagement to extract more favorable terms from the United States. Realism view this as a definitive case of balance-of-power dynamics, in which weaker actors navigate competing interests to preserve autonomy while remaining constrained by the capabilities of dominant states.[55]

Case Study 3: Federated States of Micronesia – Climate Vulnerability and Strategic Negotiation

The Federated State of Micronesia (FSM) demonstrate the overlap of aid, environmental precarity, and strategic influence. Rising sea levels and climate-induced risks threaten national stability and, by extension, U.S strategic interests in the area. The FSM has leveraged COFA to secure funding for climate adaptation, disaster resilience, including social development programs, effectively utilising aid to reinforce domestic stability.[56] From a realist lens, the United States delivers such assistances not solely for humanitarian reasons but to mitigate potential disruptions that could undermine its military and strategic foothold.[57] At the same time, the FSM's negotiations reflect rational self-interest such as securing maximum benefits from a more powerful partner while maintaining formal alignment within the U.S.-led strategic framework.

The realist significance of COFA lies in its ability to lock in American influence at a time when China is actively seeking to expand its footprint. Pacific Island leaders

[53] U.S. Department of State.
[54] Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.
[55] Morgenthau, "A Political Theory of Foreign Aid."
[56] U.S. Department of State, *Compacts of Free Association: Fact Sheet*.
[57] Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.

realise this competition and use it to extract greater concessions from Washington, sometimes signalling openness to Beijing as a bargaining tactic.[58] From a realist point of view, this is a classic balance-of-power dynamic where weaker states exploit rivalry for gains, but their autonomy remains constrained by the overwhelming capabilities of the United States.[59]

COFA demonstrates that U.S aid is tightly bound to its strategic objectives. These agreements institutionalise defence access, preclude rival encroachment, and secure the well-being of partner states to Washington's support.[60] While recipients exercise limited agency in negotiations, the structural imbalance ensures that aid primarily serves U.S. power.[61] In this sense, COFA epitomises Morgenthau's insight that foreign aid is an instrument of foreign policy, one that stabilises American influence in the Indo-Pacific while reinforcing the hierarchical realities of international politics.[62]

Recipient Agency and Strategic Navigation

While donor motives dominate much of the debate, recipient states in the Indo-Pacific are not passive actors. Pacific Island nations have demonstrated considerable agency in negotiating, shaping, and sometimes resisting external aid. This agency takes several forms: "aid shopping," the assertion of national development priorities, and the imposition of political or sovereignty-based limits on donor strategies. Yet, as realism highlights, such agency operates within structural constraints set by great-power rivalry.[63]

The notion of "aid shopping" refers to the practice of recipient nations navigating strategic competition between donors to maximise their developmental needs.[64] This strategy is clearly visible in the Indo-Pacific. Countries such as the Solomon Islands and Kiribati have engaged in diplomatic manoeuvering which shows their ability to extract benefits from multiple donors.

For example, the Solomon Islands' decision in 2019 to shift diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China was a calculated move that resulted in major promises of Chinese development assistance. This shift was not simply a response to Chinese strategic pressure but more or less rooted in internal political considerations and ambitions for accelerated infrastructure growth. Likewise, Kiribati's pivot to China in the same year shows the pattern of small Pacific island nations in associating with partners based on seeming benefits rather than ideological alignment.[65]

This balancing act is apparent in how Pacific Island nations accept aid from China

[58] Rolland, *China's Eurasian Century?*
[59] Morgenthau, "A Political Theory of Foreign Aid."
[60] U.S. Department of State, *Compacts of Free Association: Fact Sheet*.
[61] Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.
[62] Morgenthau, "A Political Theory of Foreign Aid."
[63] Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.
[64] Matthew Dornan, "Foreign Aid to the Pacific: Trends and Developments in the Twenty-First Century," *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies* 1, no. 2 (2014): 334–51, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/app5.185.
[65] Denghua Zhang, *A Cautious New Approach: China's Growing Trilateral Aid Cooperation*, 1st ed. (ANU Press, 2020), https://doi.org/10.22459/CNA.2020.

whilst maintaining strong diplomatic ties with traditional donors such as Australia, New Zealand, Japan and the United States.[66] By navigating between competing donors, these nations can expand their developmental options and maintain a degree of autonomy, challenging simplistic portrayals of them as mere pawns in great-power rivalry.

Pacific Island governments are also increasingly assertive in defining their development priorities and mould how aid is used. National development strategies such as Vanuatu's National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP) represents a clear expression of nation-led goals. This includes inclusive growth, environmental resilience, and good governance.[67] The NSDP embeds customary land practice, climate adaptation including health and education targets, structuring development as a holistic and culturally grounded objective.

Donors operating in Vanuatu, including Australia, New Zealand and multilateral agencies, are expected to reflect their programs with the NSDP's pillars. For instance, The Asian Development Bank (ADB), including co-financing from Australia and New Zealand has funded the urban water, sanitation and road projects in Port Vila.[68] This prevents the over reliances on BRI loans which could increase Vanuatu's debt vulnerability. This alignment structure support recipient ownership and ensures that external support reflects internal priorities rather than donor interests.

Moreover, Samoa and Tonga have leveraged bilateral and multilateral negotiations to influence aid flows. Aid Coordination Unit in Samoa serve an important role in reviewing proposals, coordinating donor activities and rejecting projects that fall outside national goals.[69] The Tongan government works hand-in-hand with development partners to ensure that aid strengthens existing capacities and does not compromise national sovereignty.[70] Such examples highlight how Pacific nations carefully shape the aid they receive. By declaring their needs and preferences, they set a framework within which donor strategies must operate, reducing the risk of aid being purely donor-driven.

Limitations on Donor Strategy

Recipient agency can also manifest through constraints imposed on donor strategies. At times, domestic politics and governance dynamics have limited or

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[66] Zhang.
[67] Vanuatu Government, *National Sustainable Development Plan*, Government Report (Port Vila, 2016), 42 & 45 in links, https://repository.usp.ac.fj/id/eprint/8904/1/NSDP-report.pdf https://www.gov.vu/index.php/resources/vanuatu-2030.
[68] Asian Development Bank, *Port Vila Urban Development Project* (Manila: Asian Development Bank (ADB), 2021), https://www.adb.org/projects/documents/van-42391-013-pcr.
[69] Government of Samoa, *PARTNERS IN DEVELOPMENT: PROMOTING AID EFFECTIVENESS* (Apia, 2010), https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/67a155f272e2c5aeb2caf892/67f78527697dcc4d6d84da39_Development-Cooperation-Policy.pdf.
[70] Tonga Ministry of Finance, *Tonga Strategic Development Framework 2015–2025* (Tonga: Government of Tonga, 2015), https://finance.gov.to/sites/default/files/2020-09/Tonga%20Strategic%20Development%20Framework%202015-2025.pdf.

changed the effectiveness of strategic aid.[71] For example, in Papua New Guinea (PNG), Australian efforts to use aid for enhanced security cooperation, such as the development of the Lombrum Naval Base on Manus Island, have encountered local political resistance and complex negotiations. While PNG holds its relationship with Australia, internal political groupings and sensitivities around sovereignty have moulded how security cooperation unfolds.

In Fiji, the 2006 military coup led to the suspension of aid from several Western donors including Australia and New Zealand.[72] The Fijian government, in response pursued new partners such as China, which supported diplomatic, and economic engagement.[73] This shows how national interests can redirect strategic donor support and re-adjust bilateral relationships. Vanuatu too, has also demonstrated resistance to strategic encroachment. When report of a potential Chinese military base on the archipelago in 2018 raised concern in Australia and the U.S, Vanuatu's leaders quickly denied the claims, reaffirming the country's commitment to neutrality and non-alignment. Such responses shows the strategic boundaries that Pacific nations enforce even in the face of geopolitical pressure.

Recipient agency underscores that smaller states are not mere pawns in great-power competition. Through this aid shopping, national planning, and political resistance, Pacific nations influence how strategic aid is delivered. However, realists cautions against overstating this autonomy.[74] Donors exercise the capacity to set the broader terms of engagement and aid continues to function as a tool of statecraft. Pacific states shape the details of aid, but they rarely escape the strategic logics that underpin it.[75]

Conclusion

Realism offers the most persuasive lens through which to evaluate the role of aid in the Indo-Pacific. Across the case studies of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the United States' Compacts of Free Association (COFA) aid emerges consistently as a tool of statecraft rather than a neutral act of benevolence. States in an anarchic international system, facing persistent insecurity and competition, deploy aid to secure influence, shape alignments and deny advantages to rivals. In the Indo-Pacific, where Sino–U.S. rivalry is at its sharpest, aid is inseparable from strategy. Yet the question remains: is aid always strategic? A realist conclusion must be nuanced. Aid is overwhelmingly strategic in both intent and outcome, but instances exist where humanitarian imperatives or recipient agency complicate and occasionally subvert donor designs. The Indo-Pacific thus exemplifies the realist claim that while the veneer of altruism persists, the logic of power predominates.

Analysis of China's BRI shows how aid projects are instrumentalised for multiple strategic goals. Ports, airports and infrastructure projects are not just developmental investments but rather pave way for China to bolster influences, build dependencies,

[71] Matthew Dornan, "Foreign Aid to the Pacific: Trends and Developments in the Twenty-First Century."
[72] Greg Fry and Sandra Tarte, eds., *The New Pacific Diplomacy* (Acton, ACT: ANU Press, 2015).
[73] Zhang, *A Cautious New Approach*.
[74] Morgenthau, "A Political Theory of Foreign Aid."
[75] Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.

and align itself for potential military access. The Solomon Islands' changing of diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China in 2019 emphasises this logic. A seemingly technical matter of aid allocation translated into a strategic realignment that reduced Taiwan's international presence and bolster China's regional position. Papua New Guinea's growing debt exposure to China too, demonstrates how financial leverage can be converted into political influence. Whether or not every Chinese loan is designed as "debt-trap diplomacy," the realist outcome remains the same: aid creates dependency, dependency translates into leverage, and leverage reshapes the regional balance of power in Beijing's favour.

Similarly, U.S aid through COFA agreements is explicitly tied to strategic imperatives. Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands is crucial for missile defense testing and intelligence gathering while access to Palau and Micronesia provides forward depth against any rising Chinese naval presence. The compacts formalises long-term U.S. access and reinforce a sphere of influence in Micronesia. Beyond military utility, the integration of COFA states into U.S social and economic programs demonstrates how aid constructs dependency networks that bind recipients into Washington's orbit. Aid here is not a gift but a contractual exchange in which money and access to programs are traded for strategic denial of rivals. This reflects Morgenthau's classic observation that aid is "an instrument of foreign policy" rather than a charitable act.

However, realism cannot always ignore the agency of small recipient countries. The Indo-Pacific region demonstrates that even within asymmetric relationships, most recipients are not passive. Pacific Island countries exercise "aid shopping," switching recognition or partnerships to exploit maximum benefits. The Solomon Islands and Kiribati's switch to China shows premeditated strategic choices aimed at accelerating national infrastructure development. Vanuatu's National Sustainable Development Plan also shows how national strategies can mould donor programs, pressing external actors to align with recipient-defined priorities. Even in COFA negotiations, Micronesia and the Marshall Islands successfully extracted greater compensation, leveraging their geostrategic location against U.S. needs.

From a realist perspective, however, this agency is constrained by structural power dynamics. Smaller states may negotiate within the system, but they cannot alter the distribution of power that defines it. Aid shopping is a rational strategy of weaker states to maximise their position, but it does not overturn the overarching fact that the United States and China dominate the aid landscape. Agency matters, but it operates within limits imposed by great-power competition. Aid outcomes, therefore, reflect a blend of donor strategy and recipient negotiation, with the former generally setting the boundaries of the latter.

The primary question is whether aid is always strategic requires careful unpacking. Realism asserts that aid is never neutral because states act out of interest rather than altruism. The Indo-Pacific largely confirms this view. Chinese aid under the BRI consolidates influence and weakens U.S. dominance. United States under the COFA secures military access and constrains Beijing. Moreover, Australian and Japanese aid, while often framed as developmental, also functions strategically to counter Beijing's inroads. In nearly all high-profile cases, aid is strategic in both design and effect.

One of the striking findings of this study is how difficult it is to locate examples of aid that are genuinely divorced from either altruism or strategic. Even when recipient-defined priorities are foregrounded such as Vanuatu's NSDP or FSM's climate adaptation needs, the ability of donors to fund these priorities depends on whether doing so aligns with their interests. For the U.S, supporting Micronesia's climate resilience is not merely humanitarian but a way to maintain stability in a region hosting vital military assets. For China, building roads in Papua New Guinea is not simply development but an avenue to cement economic and political dependence. In this sense, aid can serve both developmental and humanitarian intent whist still reinforcing donor power. Pure altruism, if it exists, is marginal to the strategic logic that predominates.

The Indo-Pacific today is a laboratory for realist dynamics. China's rise, the United States' effort to maintain primacy, and the hedging behavior of middle powers like Australia and Japan create an environment in which aid is an integral tool of competition. Unlike the immediate post–Cold War period, when aid could sometimes be justified in terms of global development or liberal cooperation, the current strategic environment reduces such space. Aid now functions less as a mechanism of global solidarity and more as a lever of balance-of-power geopolitics. For small underdeveloped Pacific Island countries, this environment offers opportunities for resource extraction but also sharpens the risks of dependency, entrapment and loss of autonomy.

From a realist perspective, the trajectory of aid in the Indo-Pacific will always continue to be shaped by the distribution of power between China and the United States. As competition intensifies, aid assistance packages will grow larger, more targeted and more explicitly linked to strategic outcomes. Pacific Island nations will most likely continue to exploit this rivalry but their agency will remain bound. The structural reality is that aid will reflect the interests of great powers seeking to preserve or alter the regional balance. Climate change and other transnational challenges may always draw in humanitarian motives but even here, aid will be filtered through the prism of strategic competition. The Indo-Pacific region is too essential to global geopolitics for aid to escape power politics.

Ultimately, aid in the Indo-Pacific confirms realism's central views that, in an anarchic international system, survival and power push state behavior and foreign aid is no exception. China and the United States deploy aid as part of their struggle for regional dominance. Recipient states navigate and negotiate, but their autonomy is limited by structural constraints. Aid may occasionally serve humanitarian ends, but it is rarely free of strategic calculations. The Indo-Pacific thus illustrates that while aid is not always strategic in every instances, it is overwhelmingly strategic in its purpose, design and outcome. To paraphrase Morgenthau, aid is never a gift; it is an investment in power. In the years ahead, the politics of aid in the Indo-Pacific will remain inseparable from the politics of rivalry, as development and diplomacy continue to intertwine with the imperatives of geopolitical strategy.

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Images: Solomon Times

How should the Solomon Islands Paramilitary be implemented?

Author

Chief Superintendent Francis Ramoni, Solomon Islands.

Chief Superintendent Ramoni is a Senior Executive Officer in the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force and an Australian Command and Staff Course (2024) graduate. He holds a Master of Military and Defence Studies from Deakin University and a Postgraduate Certificate in Disaster Risk Management from Fiji National University, 2018.

Since joining the RSIPF in 1993, he has served across frontline, operational and leadership appointments. He has extensive experience in operational command, strategic planning and security management, including major national events, elections and high-level international visits. He currently oversees policing operations, leadership and capability development within the RSIPF.

Introduction

This paper examines how the Solomon Islands Paramilitary Force should be implemented and why the country needs the paramilitary unit to be placed in the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF). It also examines the historical context, regional security dynamics, and best practices of comparable nations. This paper analyses the role of a paramilitary force in supplementing the policing organisational efforts in maintaining law and order and managing security threats.

The Solomon Islands is an archipelago nation located in the Southwest Pacific Ocean, about 1,900 km northeast of Australia and southeast of Papua New Guinea.[1] It comprises over 900 islands spread over 1.6 million square kilometres of ocean territory.[2] Historically, the Solomon Islands had no conventional military force when it gained independence from Great Britain on 7 July 1978.[3] Instead, under the governance system of a parliamentary democracy, RSIPF acts as the primary law enforcement institution under the revised endorsed Police Act 2013.[4] The RSIPF operates under the Solomon Islands Constitution, which outlines the rule of law and

[1] Michael Otoara Ha'apio, Ricardo Gonzalez, and Morgan Wairiu, 'Is There Any Chance for the Poor to Cope with Extreme Environmental Events? Two Case Studies in the Solomon Islands', *World Development* 122 (2019): p.516.
[2] Bob Pollard and Matthew Wale, 'The Solomon Islands: Conflict and Peacebuilding', *Searching for Peace in Asia Pacific: An Overview of Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Activities*, 2004, p.581.
[3] Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka, 'A Weak State and the Solomon Islands Peace Process', 2002, 31.
[4] 'Home', The Law on Police Use of Force, p.11, https://www.policinglaw.info/.

the state's responsibilities to ensure public safety. During this period, the nation relied on its national policing organisation, the RSIPF, and its armed component, the Police Field Force (PFF) division, which is a paramilitary armed wing of the RSIPF, to maintain law and order.

During the 1980s—1990s, the PFF division was trained in basic tactical paramilitary capabilities for its internal security and law enforcement.[5] It was responsible for executing policing duties and managing all security issues.[6] The PFF specialised in operational tactics for riot control and civil conflict. Its capabilities included paramilitary operations, riot control, peacekeeping and internal security, international border and territorial security, and explosive ordnance disposal capability.[7] In this period, PFF played a crucial role in maintaining peace and order during times of instability in the country.

However, the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) disbanded the PFF division in 2004, and the RSIPF and RAMSI Participating Police Force (PPF) have since taken over its operational functions and responsibilities. This resulted on 5 June 2000, some of the PFF officers of Malaita origin—has involved with the Malaita militant group, the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF)—taking control of the police armoury and staging a de facto coup, forcing Prime Minister Honorable Bartholomew Ulufa'alu to resign and deposing his SIAC government.[8] During this period, the Solomon Islands police force became compromised and divided along islands and ethnic lines.[9] It experienced significant turmoil and dysfunction. Evidence indicated that Malaita police officers collaborated with the MEF militant group – the Guadalcanal police officers defected and joined the Guadalcanal militant group, the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM).[10] The police force has fractured, with some officers aligning with militant groups while others, seeking neutrality, have vacated their posts and assumed temporary positions in their respective provinces.

The police officers, including the PFF members, became increasingly entangled with militant groups, lost their impartiality and discipline, and were implicated in criminal activities, leading to a significant decline in public confidence and trust in law enforcement organisation. As a result, RAMSI, under the leadership of Australia and New Zealand, deployed to the Solomon Islands with selected nations in the region to bring back normalcy and peace to the country.

When the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) arrived in 2003, it undertook several significant actions to stabilise the country and address the issues within the RSIPF.[11] RAMSI primarily focused on restoring law and order in a context where the RSIPF had been severely affected by internal conflicts and tensions from

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[5] Kabutaulaka, 'A Weak State and the Solomon Islands Peace Process', 2002, 31.
[6] Faqih Faqih, 'The Normalcy in Solomon Islands-Australia Asymmetric Relations Post-RAMSI', *Jurnal Politik* 9, no. 2: 3.
[7] Madraiwiwi Fraenkel, 'The RAMSI Decade: A Review of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, 2003--2013', 2014, 47.
[8] Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka, 'A Weak State and the Solomon Islands Peace Process', 2002, p.3.
[9] Kabutaulaka, p.16.
[10] Kabutaulaka, p.16.
[11] Fraenkel, 'The RAMSI Decade: A Review of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, 2003--2013', p. 38.

1998 to 2003.[12] The police force was demographically unbalanced and had lost significant credibility, mainly after many Guadalcanal and Western Province officers left their posts during the conflict. RAMSI aimed to re-establish public confidence in the police.

RSIPF relies heavily on external assistance and regional cooperation to support its functions to maintain law and order. This includes re-enforcing additional resources and capabilities to address significant situations that exceed tactical resources and capabilities in responding to considerable disorder. These traditional security records have underscored the need for a more robust, specialised, capable paramilitary security machinery formation to offer a self-reliant and resilient nation.

It increasingly limits the claim's effectiveness at protecting broader Solomon Islands' sovereignty and interests. Solomon Islands advocates for community and international partners' support and recognition of its plan to establish a paramilitary component within the RSIPF establishment. The creation of the paramilitary force should address national and domestic security challenges, regional security stability, and socio-political factors that demand the establishment of such a force.[13] It recognises the need to acknowledge a robust, disciplined, and effective paramilitary force. It further outlines the operational frameworks required to ensure effectiveness and alignment with the country's national security objectives.

This paper argues that the implementation of the paramilitary force should consider – (1) the community perspective, (2) legal constraints, and (3) financial sustainability in the initial framework. RSIPF needs more capacity and capability to enforce its policing and national security strategies. It recognises that a robust, disciplined, and effective paramilitary capability is required to enhance the RSIPF's security capability to respond to internal and external threats.[14]

To make this argument, this paper conducts a qualitative analysis of primary and secondary sources to analyse the need for a paramilitary force in the Solomon Islands and the challenges of this claim. It will identify methods by which the paramilitary should operate within the country's legal framework.

Literature Review

The Solomon Islands has faced enduring security challenges, many of which are linked to the inadequacy of local forces in addressing internal conflict and unrest. Some scholars have an emerging consent that paramilitary units should be established in response to the persistent security challenges in the Solomon Islands. This will help bridge significant security gaps and provide stability in the region. Over the years, the Solomon Islands have faced recurrent challenges from ethnic tensions, weak governance, and limited institutional capacity, particularly in policing and public safety. These issues highlight a critical need for a paramilitary unit to be placed in the RSIPF to address the security challenges and gaps. For instance, when the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) temporarily stabilised

[12] Fraenkel, p. 38.
[13] Michał Magdoń, 'Instability of Solomon Islands. Implications and Policy Options for Australia', *Poliarchia*, no. 1 (04) (2015): p.7.
[14] J. Kereseka, 'Solomon Islands Ridge to Reef Island Diagnostic Analysis Report', 2021, p.7.

the region, underlying issues still needed to be addressed.[15] These issues collectively illustrate a fragile security landscape in the Solomon Islands, characterised by weakened institutions, political challenges, and the need for comprehensive reforms to build a more resilient state capable of addressing its security needs independently.

In addition, one of the most pivotal efforts in the Solomon Islands has been the RAMSI, which was launched to restore order following ethnic conflicts that local forces were unequipped to handle.[16] Some scholars like Kabutaulaka argue that local paramilitary and police units lacked the resources and structural integrity to manage security effectively, leading to repeated calls for external intervention.[17] This deficiency has highlighted a systemic issue where the state apparatus is insufficiently prepared to address significant security threats. It also highlighted that the structural limitations of local security forces, which are often limited to policing and military measures, struggle to be sustainable without parallel improvements in political stability and economic development.[18] Another critical perspective from scholar McDougall suggests that the Solomon Islands' security challenges are fundamentally tied to broader developmental issues.[19] The findings suggest that reliance on foreign paramilitary intervention alone cannot solve the underlying socio-economic problems that drive conflict.[20] This highlights the necessity of an integrated approach, combining security reform with socio-economic development to foster long-term stability.

In addition, the gaps in the Solomon Islands' security sector have also been assessed in terms of local paramilitary and police training. For example, the work on police reform notes that post-RAMSI, there has been an increase in local capacity.[21] However, local forces still face limitations in both training and infrastructure, making them reliant on foreign aid and military presence for substantial security measures.[22] In this context, understanding community dynamics and the root causes of conflict is crucial to better preparing local forces and new paramilitary units to prevent future violence rather than solely depend on foreign military support.[23] Moreover, recent developments involving international actors, such as the Solomon Islands—China 2022 security agreement, underline ongoing debates around militarisation in the Pacific. This highlights the risks of external forces potentially worsening existing tensions or introducing new geopolitical complexities.[24] This external dependency

[15] Madraiwiwi Fraenkel, 'The RAMSI Decade: A Review of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, 2003--2013', 2014, p.79.
[16] Kabutaulaka, 'A Weak State and the Solomon Islands Peace Process', 2002, p.15.
[17] Kabutaulaka, p.17.
[18] Kabutaulaka, p.17.
[19] Derek McDougall, 'The Failure of Security Sector Reform to Advance Development Objectives in East Timor and the Solomon Islands', *Security Sector Reform in Challenging Environments. Münster, Germany: Lit Verlag*, 2009, p.171-172.
[20] McDougall, p.172.
[21] Sinclair Dinnen and Danielle Watson, 'Police Reform in a Post-Conflict Context: The Case of Solomon Islands', *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice* 15, no. 1 (2021): p.7-8.
[22] Dinnen and Watson, p.8.
[23] Joanne Wallis, 'A "Helpem Fren" in Need... Evaluating the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands', *Security Challenges* 2, no. 2 (2006): p.85.
[24] Jon Fraenkel and Graeme Smith, 'The Solomons-China 2022 Security Deal: Extraterritoriality and the Perils of Militarisation in the Pacific Islands', *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 76, no. 5 (3 September 2022): p.481,

underscores a persistent gap in the Solomon Islands' self–sufficiency in maintaining domestic security. This indicates that the Solomon Islands faces multifaceted security and governance challenges. While influential paramilitary forces can be helpful in immediate crisis response, including substantial structural reforms within local institutions, they must complement them to build resilience and reduce dependence on external forces.

Community Perspective

The Solomon Islands Government (SIG), following its announcement to establish a military force, could highlight the transformative potential of a reformed and well-regulated entity focused on national security and stability.[25] This paper argues that this new unit must actively participate in a model of – (1) accountability and earning trust through transparency and commitment to lawful operations, (2) community service and outreach initiatives, (3) disaster response and preparedness training, (4) community infrastructure and development projects.[26]

The Solomon Islands Government has an opportunity to create a force rooted in integrity, designed not to repeat past mistakes but to ensure resilience against criminal activities and unrest. Learning from the experiences of the disbanded Police Field Force in 2004, It is good to recognise the critical role a structured and professionally regulated paramilitary unit can play in safeguarding peace and security.

First, informing the community ensures accountability and alignment with democratic principles. It enables public oversight of the paramilitary's objectives, operations, and structure, which is critical in a democracy. For instance, transparency helps avoid abuse of power and ensures that the paramilitary unit operates with checks and balances aligned with the public interest.[27] The Solomon Islands paramilitary should be transparent because transparency is essential to building trust, maintaining public accountability, and ensuring security policies that align with community needs and human rights. This approach should influence communities to regain respect and confidence in their paramilitary unit, especially after experiences of mistrust and disrespect during periods of ethnic tension.[28] It was alleged that during the ethnic tension, Malaita and Guadalcanal Police Field Force members were involved and assisted by rival militant groups Malaita Eagle Force (MEF) and Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM).[29]

In addition, accountability for past actions is also crucial to addressing past grievances. For instance, it plays a critical role in shaping a transparent, trustworthy,

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https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2022.2085243.

[25] Dinnen and Watson, 'Police Reform in a Post-Conflict Context', p.5.

[26] Barbara, 'Antipodean Statebuilding: The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands and Australian Intervention in the South Pacific', p.129.

[27] Martha Minow, 'Outsourcing Power: How Privatizing Military Efforts Challenges Accountability, Professionalism, Democracy', *BCL Rev.* 46 (2004): p.1025.

[28] Julien Barbara, 'Antipodean Statebuilding: The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands and Australian Intervention in the South Pacific', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 2, no. 2 (2008): p.129.

[29] Kabutaulaka, 'A Weak State and the Solomon Islands Peace Process', 2002, p.16.

and effective paramilitary unit that operates harmoniously with the community.[30] This is because many police officers were involved in the political disturbance and violence during the ethnic tensions, including the coup that ousted the Ulufa'alu government.[31] Transparency is crucial for holding those individuals accountable for their actions. This includes investigating misconduct or illegal activities and ensuring responsible people face appropriate consequences. Without accountability, there is a risk that similar abuse may occur in the future. A transparent paramilitary unit is more likely to operate effectively and fairly. Given the historical context of the Solomon Islands, where the paramilitary has been perceived as an extension of militant groups rather than a neutral law enforcement body, transparency can help establish a clear distinction between the paramilitary unit and non-state actors. This is vital for restoring order and ensuring that the paramilitary unit can fulfil its role in maintaining law and order without bias.

In the wake of ethnic tension that diminished public confidence in the Solomon Islands' paramilitary forces, it has become imperative to undertake a comprehensive effort to restore trust, thereby fostering stability and encouraging sustainable peace. These efforts are crucial to a broader strategy to reshape public perception and reinstate legitimacy.

Second, the community service and outreach initiatives provide a vital platform for paramilitary units to reestablish themselves as constructive members of society. This approach will ensure the communities of credibility and purpose of establishing this unit. For example, by engaging in volunteer work, supporting local events, and participating in cultural and educational programs, these units can illustrate their commitment to mending relationships with the communities they once fractured.[32] Such actions are intentionally crafted to reflect a transition from being a force linked to conflict to one that prioritises community welfare and social unity.

In addition, public education initiatives are vital for educating citizens about the new paramilitary unit's mission, values, and operational protocols. It is aimed at a successful campaign to explain the unit's purpose, highlighting its dedication to human rights, lawful behaviour, and community protection. For instance, by actively involving communities, the government can dispel misunderstandings stemming from past biases or excessive actions by security forces.[33] The outreach activities should be conducted at – town hall gatherings, informational brochures, and social media interactions. The purpose is to deliver precise and accessible information regarding the unit's commitment to prioritising community safety over disciplinary actions. Furthermore, these initiatives should establish avenues for feedback, enabling citizens to express their concerns and receive assurances that their

[30] Judith Swann, 'Leadership Development in the Police and Military Forces of the South Pacific' (UNSW Sydney, 2020), p.72.
[31] Joseph D. Foukona, 'State Powers and Institutions in Solomon Islands' Developing Democracy', *Wellington: Victoria University*, 2002, 18.
[32] Volker Boege, '10 Incompatibility, Substitution or Complementarity? Interrogating Relationships between International, State and Non-State Peace Agents in Post-Conflict Solomon Islands', *Post-Liberal Peace Transitions: Between Peace Formation and State Formation*, 2016, p.202.
[33] Finbar Benedict Kiddle, 'A Prologue to Development: Establishing the Legitimacy of the Rule of Law in Post-Conflict Solomon Islands' (Open Access Te Herenga Waka-Victoria University of Wellington, 2014), p.20-21.

opinions will be considered in developing the unit's operations.

The Solomon Islands government should also consider strengthening public trust and enhancing security through a community-centred approach. The government should improve public confidence and bolster security by adopting a community-focused strategy. This approach seeks to rectify historical biases and the traditional communal system in the Solomon Islands, commonly known as the wantok system.[34] This ensures that the unit operates fairly without favouritism or bias for all citizens. It suggested that the government must emphasise public education initiatives, engage with civil society, and recruit personnel from local communities because territorial control is essential to the influx of local intelligence.[35] The main aim is that these measures can foster transparency, build trust, and promote shared responsibility nationwide.

Third, disaster response and preparedness training has emerged as a critical area for showcasing the paramilitary's evolving role as community protectors. Given the Solomon Islands' vulnerability to natural disasters like cyclones, earthquakes, and floods, there are sufficient opportunities for the paramilitary to engage in life-saving interventions and alleviate suffering.[36] For instance, by establishing specialised disaster response units and conducting preparedness workshops, the paramilitary can impart essential resilience-building skills to the local populace, invest in community well-being beyond just security and demonstrate that their mission is now focused on protecting lives and reducing harm.[37] These initiatives are vital for enhancing community readiness and positioning the paramilitary as crisis management partners, reinforcing their commitment to serving the public good.

In addition, collaborating with civil society organisations is crucial in closing the divide between the public and the newly established paramilitary unit. These organisations, encompassing non-governmental organisations (NGOs), religious bodies, and local advocacy groups, are often deeply rooted in their communities and can serve as vital agents between citizens and governmental authorities.[38] For example, such groups can provide the paramilitary unit with valuable insights into particular community issues, cultural nuances, and historical grievances, facilitating a more informed and respectful approach to law enforcement.[39] Additionally, civil society can play a significant role in establishing oversight mechanisms that promote transparency and accountability in the unit's operations. For example, by engaging with civil society organisations, the government can affirm its commitment to honouring community perspectives, reducing potential biases, and ensuring that the new force is perceived as trustworthy within the community.[40]

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[34] Kabutaulaka, 'A Weak State and the Solomon Islands Peace Process', 2002, p.5.
[35] Goran Peic, 'Civilian Defense Forces, State Capacity, and Government Victory in Counterinsurgency Wars', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 37, no. 2 (February 2014): 178, https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2014.862904.
[36] Gordon Leua Nanau, 'SOLOMON ISLANDS', *Contemporary Pacific* 29, no. 2 (2017): p.354.
[37] Barbara, 'Antipodean Statebuilding', p.129.
[38] Bruce P. Montgomery, 'Fact-Finding by Human Rights Non-Governmental Organizations: Challenges, Strategies, and the Shaping of Archival Evidence', *Archivaria*, 2004, p.26.
[39] Montgomery, p.26.
[40] John Braithwaite et al., *Pillars and Shadows: Statebuilding as Peacebuilding in Solomon Islands* (ANU Press, 2010), p.2.

Furthermore, community infrastructure and development initiatives foster collaboration and share investment between the paramilitary unit and the local populace. For example, the paramilitary unit contributes to local and regional development by constructing and repairing vital infrastructure, including roads, bridges, and community centres.[41] Local leaders, non-governmental organisations, and international entities typically undertake these initiatives. This collaborative framework promotes transparency, enabling the community to observe the paramilitary's contributions to public welfare and safety.[42] Through these efforts, the paramilitary in the Solomon Islands seeks to reshape its societal identity, transitioning from a primarily reactive, enforcement-focused role to one that is proactive, community-oriented, and supportive. Although rebuilding trust is a gradual and complex process, such interactions are essential for transforming the paramilitary into an entity that is not only accepted by the community but also genuinely dependent upon. This strategic shift underscores a broader recognition among paramilitary leaders that enduring peace and security in the Solomon Islands can only be realised through the sustained trust of the populace.

In addition, recruiting individuals from local communities can significantly bolster public confidence in the new paramilitary unit. A diverse force that mirrors the demographic makeup of the Solomon Islands would enhance inclusivity and infuse the unit's operations with essential local knowledge and viewpoints. For instance, local recruits are more likely to grasp community norms, cultural traditions, and languages, which can help avert misunderstandings and encourage respectful interactions.[43] Moreover, having community members within the unit creates a natural mechanism for accountability, as these personnel are more inclined to feel a sense of duty toward the welfare of their communities. Implementing a transparent and equitable recruitment process—grounded in merit and community representation rather than political favouritism—would restore public trust and ensure that the unit functions impartially.[44]


Image: Department of Defence

The Solomon Islands government could establish a robust framework for the new paramilitary unit by implementing public education initiatives, engaging with civil society, and focusing on local recruitment efforts. These approaches should help

[41] Mona Sadika Jibril, 'Effects of Military Bases Established after Conflict on Their Communities and the Implications for Peacebuilding' (University of Reading, 2018), p.111.
[42] Boege, '10 Incompatibility, Substitution or Complementarity? Interrogating Relationships between International, State and Non-State Peace Agents in Post-Conflict Solomon Islands', 202.
[43] Kelly A. Moylan, 'A Critical Examination of Australian Police Peacekeepers Navigating Ethics, Human Rights, Structure, and Agency in Timor-Leste and the Solomon Islands', 2019, p.38.
[44] Moylan, p.39.

restore community trust by confronting biases, enhancing transparency, and positioning the unit as a partner in maintaining peace and stability. This cooperative, community-oriented strategy reflects the government's dedication to democratic principles and lays the groundwork for enduring security reform in the Solomon Islands.

Legal Framework

A thorough legal framework is crucial for establishing a functional and lawful paramilitary force in the Solomon Islands. This paper argues that (1) the framework should consider the country's legal principles, align with current legislation, (2) articulate a distinct mandate and operational parameters, and (3) establish a robust chain of command and accountability measures. It is essential to ensure the force functions within its legal confines, fulfils security responsibilities and upholds public confidence. For example, the Solomon Islands' paramilitary unit should be embedded in the national constitution and relevant legislative provisions.[45] The unit's insertion specifies legal authority for its formation and functions, adhering to the principles of the rule of law and protecting human rights.

First, the amendments or additions to the Solomon Islands Constitution, as well as regulations such as the Solomon Islands National Security Strategy and Intelligence Service Act and the Police Act, will be required to recognise and establish the paramilitary force formally.[46] For example, the legal framework must clarify the paramilitary unit's specific role, differentiating it from the police.[47] The purpose is to avoid organisational conflicts and enhance operational transparency. In addition, ensuring alignment with national laws and legislative framework is essential for the paramilitary unit to effectively engage with existing governmental bodies, law enforcement agencies, and the judiciary. This is because the legislative framework should aim to clearly outline the unit's powers, responsibilities, and constraints.[48] This aims to incorporate oversight mechanisms, such as regular parliamentary evaluations, which will be instrumental in ensuring that the force remains within its legal framework and honours the rights of citizens.[49] Incorporating oversight mechanisms, like regular parliamentary evaluations, is essential for maintaining a balance between security objectives and the protection of citizen rights.[50] These mechanisms ensure law enforcement agencies operate transparently, uphold accountability, and stay aligned with democratic principles.

Second, a formulated mandated function and operational framework are crucial for

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[45] 'Constitution of Solomon Islands, Solomon Islands, WIPO Lex', www.wipo.int, https://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/legislation/details/7751.
[46] John P. Kotter, 'NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY MINISTRY OF POLICE, NATIONAL SECURITY AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICE OCTOBER 2020',https://pacificsecurity.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/210201-SOLOMONS-National-Security-Strategy-Final.pdf.
[47] BENJAMIN R. BEEDE, 'THE ROLES OF PARAMILITARY AND MILITARIZED POLICE', *Journal of Political & Military Sociology* 36, no. 1 (2008): p.53.
[48] James Salt and M.L.R. Smith, 'Reconciling Policing and Military Objectives: Can Clausewitzian Theory Assist the Police Use of Force in the United Kingdom?', *Democracy and Security* 4, no. 3 (18 November 2008): p.237, https://doi.org/10.1080/17419160802362724.
[49] BEEDE, 'THE ROLES OF PARAMILITARY AND MILITARIZED POLICE'.
[50] BEEDE, p.54.

explaining the mission of the paramilitary unit to prevent duplication of the police function. The mandate should concentrate on areas requiring an enhanced security response, including counterterrorism, organised crime, border security, humanitarian assistance and support for law enforcement in situations that demand specialised skills and capabilities. Like establishing these boundaries, the legal framework safeguards against advancing into civilian policing responsibilities or paramilitary functions, thereby preserving a distinct separation among the paramilitary, police, and military roles.[51] The operational framework must be clearly defined to direct the force's activities and set forth protocols for cooperation with other security forces. For instance, this may encompass guidelines for joint operations, mainly when the paramilitary force collaborates with police or military units.[52] Furthermore, the framework should include provisions for emergencies, outlining the force's roles, responsibilities, and the procedures for declaring and concluding states of emergency. Such clarity in operational scope will ensure that the paramilitary force remains concentrated on its primary objectives, thereby minimising potential conflicts with other national security organisations.

Third, a clear and transparent chain of commands and a robust accountability framework are vital for the paramilitary force to cultivate professionalism and maintain ethical standards. This framework should define a command hierarchy that clarifies responsibilities from senior leadership to field operators and subordinates, including civilian oversight, such as a Ministry of Police National Security.[53] This can significantly enhance accountability and ensure that the force functions democratically. For example, the structure should articulate the relationship between the paramilitary force and other national security organisations, such as the police, immigration department, Customs department, Biosecurity department, Aviation department, etc.[54] This platform will facilitate effective coordination while preserving autonomy and preventing command conflicts. Accountability mechanisms that enhance transparency and avoid the abuse of power are equally important. For example, legal provisions require consistent reporting on operational activities, adherence to use-of-force principles, and internal evaluations of the force's conduct.[55] Establishing an independent oversight entity with the power to investigate complaints and misconduct allegations can significantly strengthen accountability. When these measures are paired with robust disciplinary policies, they ensure that the paramilitary force functions with integrity and will remain accountable to the community it serves.

Furthermore, establishing a paramilitary force in the Solomon Islands requires a thorough legal framework in harmony with national laws, clearly explaining its mandate, and establishing a robust command and accountability system. For example, the Solomon Islands must focus on these critical components and create a paramilitary force that legally meets purpose-driven requirements and

[51] Salt and Smith, 'Reconciling Policing and Military Objectives', p.230.
[52] Salt and Smith, p.230.
[53] Kotter, 'National Security Strategy Ministry of Police, National Security and Correctional Service October 2020'.
[54] Kotter.
[55] Sarah Meharg and Aleisha Arnusch, 'SECURITY SECTOR REFORM': (Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2010), p.10, JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep11686.

is answerable to its goals and the broader public interest.[56] This approach will protect national interests while promoting democratic principles and enhancing public confidence.

Forming a paramilitary force in the Solomon Islands marks a crucial advancement in the nation's security and disaster approach. Considering the country's susceptibility to natural disasters, mainly due to its position within the Pacific Ring of Fire, which is prone to cyclones, earthquakes, and flooding, this initiative is timely.[57] Effective interagency collaboration and coordination are essential for the success of this new force, enabling it to function efficiently within the legal framework of national and local governance. The persistent challenges faced by communities in the Solomon Islands due to climate change highlight the pressing need for a unified response strategy.[58] This paramilitary force could be legalised and vital in disaster management, ensuring community safety, and maintaining order during crises. The framework must incorporate stipulations for emergency powers that can be activated under defined circumstances, facilitating swift mobilisation and response to threats to national security.[59] The framework should mandate tactical response, crisis negotiation, and cultural awareness training to enhance effectiveness and adaptability. It would also incorporate knowledge of Solomon Islands laws and customary practices to ensure the force operates sensitively within local contexts. These emergency powers should be restricted in duration and subject to oversight to prevent extending extraordinary measures beyond necessary limits.

Creating a legal framework for the paramilitary force in the Solomon Islands necessitates a careful balance that honours current legislation while allowing for specialised operations. A practical framework should include an articulated mandate, an organised chain of command, established accountability measures, and cooperation with existing agencies, ensuring legality and operational effectiveness.[60] By aligning this framework with national and international standards, the Solomon Islands can cultivate a paramilitary force that effectively and responsibly serves its citizens.

Finance

The role of finance in sustaining paramilitary forces in regions like the Solomon Islands is multifaceted. This argues for financial influence in – (1) logistics, (2) training, (3) long-term operations sustainability, and (4) external support. Paramilitary forces often operate in challenging environments and are tasked with responsibilities ranging from maintaining internal security to managing conflict and crisis response. So, without adequate funding, these forces face significant operational constraints that can directly affect their capacity to perform their roles.

First, adequate logistical support is essential for the operational capability of supplies such as food, water, transportation, medical supplies, and communication systems.[61]

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[56] Kabutaulaka, 'A Weak State and the Solomon Islands Peace Process', 2002, p.15.
[57] Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka, 'Solomon Islands', *The Contemporary Pacific* 16, no. 2 (September 2004): p.354, https://doi.org/10.1353/cp.2004.0050.
[58] Kabutaulaka, 'Solomon Islands'.
[59] Kabutaulaka.
[60] Kabutaulaka, 'A Weak State and the Solomon Islands Peace Process', 2002, p.15-20.
[61] Suneet Kundra, Lamont Brown, and Charles Donaldson, 'Assessment of Logistical

For instance, financing logistics is particularly complex in the Solomon Islands, where infrastructure is often limited.[62] Adequate financial resources are needed to adapt to the local environment by building supply networks, securing transportation over rugged terrain or remote islands, and maintaining the flow of supplies. Financial constraints in logistics can lead to disruptions in paramilitary operations and reduce forces' overall effectiveness and mobility, while sufficient funding can improve operational readiness and response times.[63] Finance is essential for paramilitary logistics because maintaining a force that can respond effectively and efficiently to security threats and emergencies is costly.

Moreover, paramilitaries are often deployed to manage internal security challenges, such as civil unrest or insurgency. Financial support is essential for ensuring these forces can be mobilised quickly and effectively in response to such threats. For instance, this is to mobilise more rapidly and cheaply to avoid further escalation of the threats.[64] This is particularly vital in the context where rapid deployment is necessary to maintain order. The rapid deployment of such a force provides a decisive advantage in preventing violence or disorder from spreading and helps restore stability swiftly.[65] This is particularly important in regions with limited police resources, where traditional police units may lack the equipment, training, or logistical capabilities to address significant security threats alone.

Second, the paramilitary force needs specialised training for personnel to effectively manage diverse situations requiring military precision and compliance with civilian laws. Financial support facilitates ongoing training initiatives, access to skilled trainers (often sourced from abroad), and the establishment of training facilities.[66] This is particularly significant for the Solomon Islands, which depend on external expertise or collaborations to adequately train personnel in combat readiness, civil response, conflict de-escalation, and adherence to legal standards. The country has historically relied on external assistance for specialised training and capacity building within its security forces.[67] This will enhance the Solomon Islands' capability to independently respond to internal and regional security challenges, fostering a more resilient national security framework.

In addition, training is critical for enhancing the skills and preparedness of paramilitary personnel. Financial resources support various training programs, including basic physical training, tactics, and specialised skills relevant to counterinsurgency or peacekeeping. For example, in paramilitary setups in developing regions like the Solomon Islands, limited funding often results in a lack of formalised training programs and trainers, which may lead to poorly prepared forces.[68] Well-funded training can ensure that paramilitary personnel are equipped

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Support for Expeditionary Units' (Monterey, California: Naval Postgraduate School, 2014), p.v.

[62] Satish Chand, 'Facing up to the Challenges of Development in Solomon Islands', 2005, p.9.

[63] Chand, p.10.

[64] Tobias Böhmelt and Govinda Clayton, 'Auxiliary Force Structure: Paramilitary Forces and Progovernment Militias', *Comparative Political Studies* 51, no. 2 (2018): p.212.

[65] Tobias Böhmelt and Govinda Clayton, 'Auxiliary Force Structure: Paramilitary Forces and Progovernment Militias', *Comparative Political Studies* 51, no. 2 (2018): p.212.

[66] Chand, 'Facing up to the Challenges of Development in Solomon Islands', p.14.

[67] Chand, p.2.

[68] Sinclair Dinnen, Abby McLeod, and Gordon Peake, 'Police-Building in Weak States:

with the latest techniques, improving their performance in both combat and peacekeeping roles.[69] However, insufficient financing leads to skill gaps and inadequate preparation, making these forces less effective and potentially dangerous. In addition, finance is crucial for acquiring the equipment necessary for paramilitary functions, from basic weaponry and protective gear to more sophisticated technology such as surveillance systems. For instance, in the Solomon Islands, budget constraints often mean that equipment is outdated, of poor quality, or even scarce, which limits the capability and safety of personnel.[70] It is essential that access to modern and well-maintained equipment enables paramilitary forces to operate more effectively and enhances their deterrence capacity. The reason is that lack of funding can lead to over-reliance on outdated or makeshift equipment, which may hinder operational success and increase risk to personnel.

Third, long-term financial planning and consistent funding streams are essential for the sustainability of paramilitary forces. This involves covering ongoing costs such as salaries, infrastructure maintenance, and benefits. For example, sustainability in regions with limited financial resources, like the Solomon Islands, often fluctuates with political stability or external economic support, leading to periods of operational inactivity or reduced presence.[71] Sustainable funding ensures that paramilitary forces remain active and effective over time. As a result, unreliable or insufficient funding leads to failures in operational readiness, morale issues among personnel, and increased vulnerability to corruption. In addition, financial assistance has played a crucial role in the Solomon Islands, particularly concerning the paramilitary and police forces.[72] The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) highlighted the need for significant financial support to restore law and order, combat corruption, and rebuild the country's institutions following a period of conflict and instability.[73] The RAMSI underscored the need for substantial financial support due to the severe impact of the civil conflict and instability on the Solomon Islands' governance structures, economy, and social cohesion. This support would help the Solomon Islands recover from instability and lay a foundation for long-term peace and prosperity.

Furthermore, external financial support, such as aid from foreign governments or organisations, is critical in supplementing limited domestic funds for paramilitary operations. These funds often cover high-cost items or specialised training and support infrastructure development. For instance, reliance on external funding can create dependency, and shifting political alliances may lead to sudden changes in financial support.[74] Additionally, external funds may come with conditions that influence operational priorities or policies. External financial aid can bridge gaps in domestic funding, allowing paramilitary forces to access training, technology, and

Australian Approaches in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands', in *Managing Insecurity* (Routledge, 2013), p.88.

[69] Kabutaulaka, 'A Weak State and the Solomon Islands Peace Process', 2002, p.17.

[70] Sinclair Dinnen and Danielle Watson, 'Police Reform in a Post-Conflict Context: The Case of Solomon Islands', *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice* 15, no. 1 (2021): p.7-8.

[71] Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka, 'Australian Foreign Policy and the RAMSI Intervention in Solomon Islands', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 2005, p.299.

[72] Pollard and Wale, 'The Solomon Islands: Conflict and Peacebuilding', p.139.

[73] Pollard and Wale, p.139.

[74] Andrew Goldsmith and Sinclair Dinnen, 'Transnational Police Building: Critical Lessons from Timor-Leste and Solomon Islands', *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 6 (2007): p.1102.

unavailable resources.[75] The dependency on external support can be destabilised if those funds are withdrawn, leading to potential capability shortfalls. In addition, finance is the backbone of paramilitary operations in the Solomon Islands by supporting these critical pillars.[76] Sufficient financial resources enable paramilitary forces to maintain readiness, reduce corruption, sustain morale, and ensure operational longevity. Without consistent funding, these forces risk inefficiency, ineffectiveness, and vulnerability to corruption and mismanagement while also becoming heavily dependent on volatile external aid.

Conclusion / Recommendations

In conclusion, establishing a Solomon Islands Paramilitary Force to be placed in the RSIPF is a strategic response to the nation's unique security challenges. By aligning with regional security dynamics and learning from the experiences of comparable countries, the RSIPF can build a paramilitary structure that enhances its capacity to maintain law and order effectively.[77] A well-integrated paramilitary force will strengthen the Solomon Islands' internal security framework and provide a robust deterrent against escalating threats in the region. With careful implementation that respects legal frameworks, community engagement and financial assistance, this force can play a pivotal role in safeguarding the nation's stability and sovereignty.

I recommend the Solomon Islands government emphasise creating a legal framework that clearly defines the paramilitary force's role, responsibilities, and limits within RSIPF. Given the Solomon Islands' unique security challenges, the force's operational strategies align with the region's stability needs. Highlight how this specialised unit could address threats beyond traditional policing, such as organised crime and natural disaster response.

[75] Sinclair Dinnen, 'Competing Visions and Converging Realities? Justice and Security Governance in Post-Conflict Bougainville and Solomon Islands', *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 13, no. 3 (2024): p.102.
[76] Deon Canyon, *Perceptions of Indigenous Security Practitioners on China'S Geostrategic Activities in the Pacific* (JSTOR, 2022), p.7.
[77] Ni Nyoman Ari Tati Ratnasari and Anak Agung Banyu Perwita, 'The Implementation of Australia's "Stepping-Up Engagement" with the Melanesian States as the Defense Strategy of Australia to Respond to the Rise of China in the South Pacific Region (2013-2018)' (President University, 2020), p.163.

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Fraenkel, Madraiwiwi. ‘The RAMSI Decade: A Review of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, 2003--2013’, 2014.p.47

A Weak State and the Solomon Islands Peace Process’, 2002.p.12

A Weak State and the Solomon Islands Peace Process’, 2002.p.16

ADF
Australian Defence Force

Case Studies in Strategy

Case Study 1 - China's Economic Strategy in the Southwest Pacific

Lieutenant Colonel Atunaisa Vakatale, Fiji

Case Study 2 – Small States Building National Power: A Case Study of Singapore's Investment in Intellectual Capital

Commander Alfred Fox, Fiji

Case Study 3 – To what extent are classic works of strategy useful for dealing with issues faced by strategists in the twenty-first century?

Superintendent Joseph Iro, Solomon Islands

Case Study 4 – To what extent is strategy understood differently from the perspective of different domains?

Chief Superintendent Clifford Tunuki, Solomon Islands

Case Studies in Strategy

This section showcases a selection of the highest-quality case studies produced by DSSC and ACSC course members. These papers examine a range of strategic issues and demonstrate the depth of analysis, critical thinking and professional insight developed throughout their studies.

For DSSC course members, the case study provides an opportunity to explore foundational strategic concepts through the detailed analysis of historical examples. Topics include the nature and application of power, with particular emphasis on national power; theories of international relations; the meaning and practice of strategy; approaches to problem-solving; and the challenges posed by complex or "wicked" problems in the contemporary security environment.

For ACSC course members, case studies focus on the intellectual and professional demands of thinking, working and leading effectively at the operational level of warfare. Through their analysis, course members examine the interaction between policy, strategy, capability and operations, and consider how these elements are applied within the Australian defence and national security context.

Case Study 1 - China's Economic Strategy in the Southwest Pacific

Author

Lieutenant Colonel Atunaisa Vakatale, Fiji

Lieutenant Colonel Vakatale is an officer of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces and a graduate of the Australian Defence College. He has extensive command and staff experience, including deployments to the Middle East and other UN international missions. He is presently serving as Chief Staff Officer Human Resources Management at Headquarters RFMF, where he oversees and coordinates human resource management across the Force.

Introduction

At the end of World War II, the Southwest Pacific geopolitical landscape was primarily shaped by the Cold War, mainly through the US and its partners' strategic denial policy aimed to deter the spread of communist ideology into the region.[1] Historically, the region was dominated by Western powers, particularly the US and the UK. However, it has become a battleground for major power competition today, with China's growing international engagement presenting opportunities and challenges.[2] Recently, the region has become increasingly open, with small Pacific Island states exercising their sovereignty to engage with regional and international partners to strengthen their national power. Simultaneously, traditional and emerging allies have expanded their regional presence in pursuing their strategic interests.

This case study argues that China's economic statecraft and weaponised interdependence have significantly shaped the Southwest Pacific, offering opportunities and challenges for small island states. The key lesson for strategy students is twofold. First, smaller states must balance economic diplomacy and political sovereignty to avoid strategic dependency. Second, external economic influence can reshape national power structures, affecting domestic governance and regional stability. The case study will be based on China's economic statecraft in the Southwest Pacific for the last 15 years, highlighting some of its key e engagements with the Southwest Pacific Island States (SWPIS) over the period 2006 – 2022 and assessing how Beijing has strategically influenced and, in some cases, destabilised the national power structures of small island states. The paper is structured into two major sections. Firstly, it will establish a theoretical framework by defining economic statecraft, weaponised interdependence, and the foundation of national power, explaining their interrelations in the global strategic environment. Second, it defines, analyzes, and derives lessons learned on how China has been methodically applying the theories in the region.

[1] Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, "Mapping the Blue Pacific in a Changing Regional Order," n.d., 43.
[2] Graeme Smith and Terence Wesley-Smith, eds., *The China Alternative: Changing Regional Order in the Pacific Islands*, 1st ed. (ANU Press, 2021), 1, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1h45mkn.

Theoretical Framework:

Economic Statecraft

The case study will examine the concept of economic statecraft, weaponised interdependence, and the foundation of national power as they are the primary theoretical framework applied in this paper. According to Dr Darren Liam's presentation, Economic statecraft, like military statecraft, has long been a central tool for major and medium powers in achieving their foreign policy objectives.[3] Its concept involves the methodical utilization of economic instruments such as investment, infrastructure development, trade, and aid as tools to influence an opponent or a partner to align with a sender's strategic interest.[4] The framework has also served as an alternative for using military and other cohesive means by states seeking to project their interest assertively.[5]

Weaponised Interdependence

Farrel and Newman's framework of weaponised interdependence highlighted how powerful states exploit the globalization network as agents of power influence.[6] They theorize that interdependence can be weaponised through two main channels: the "*panopticon or by chokepoint effects."*[7] Panopticon effects refer to how states exploit the information network they control to their advantage. In contrast, the chokepoint effects refer to how privileged states limit or penalize others' use of global networks.[8] Security schools of thought have so far realized the weaponisation of the roles of financial markets, information technology, and the transaction of goods and services through borders in the geostrategic space.[9] This trend has introduced new strategic risks that states can exploit or mitigate. Moreover, globalization has created an environment where economic dependencies could escalate into geopolitical conflicts.[10] Presently, our globe is reaching an unparalleled level of interdependence and growing power competitions, where powerful states unwilling to exert their interest through physical means can resort to weaponising interdependence to project deterrence and advantage over adversaries.[11] The paper will focus on China's employment of economic interdependence through chokepoint effects in highly connected global systems and networks.

Foundation of National Power

As Professor Andrew Philips pointed out, the foundation of the national power model

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[3] "Defence and Strategic Studies Course, The Concept of Power Brief, Dr Darren Lim (04 Feb 2025)," n.d.
[4] Richard Herr "Chinese Influence in the Pacific Islands: The Yin and Yang of Soft Power," (Australian Strategic Policy Institute2019), 11–14.
[5] Herr, 14
[6] Henry Farrell and Abraham Newman, 'Weaponised Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion', *International Security* (Vol. 44, 2019), 308, 9
[7] Henry Farrell and Abraham, 42-79
[8] Turner Ruggi, "Counterstrategies to Economic Warfare: A Strategic Framework in a World of Weaponised Interdependence," *The RUSI Journal* 168, no. 7 (November 10, 2023): 61, https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2024.2307171.
[9] Farrell and Newman, 19–20. 305
[10]Farrell and Newman, 19–20.
[11] Farrell and Newman, 19–20.

is established under three central pillars: state, nation, and economy-building.[12] These components formed the triangular model that created the foundation of national power, and their careful interplay determined and generated a state's power to achieve its desired objective.[13] State building comprises how a state oversees the concept of political control through "*political discourse and the transition of power*."[14] Nation-building rests on a state's ideological cohesion, mainly focusing on beliefs and identity. In contrast, economic building implies how a state seeks to leverage the economic potential of the state and individuals.[15] The three pillars complement and reinforce one another, and a balanced approach and progression are required to maintain a sustainable and resilient state.

Their Interrelations and Key Lessons Learned

The interrelations between economic statecraft and weaponising interdependence are very significant components of contemporary global power competitions. Their mutual implementation by senders could raise national influence through the advancement of strategic economic dominance and dependencies. It must be noted that overreliance on these two frameworks also has risks that must be carefully managed in cases where a target has access to more economical options that could diminish or nullify the sender's intended strategic effects.[16] Interdependence via globalization has shifted power from interstate negotiations to private networks, reshaping the distribution and exercise of state power in international politics.[17] From this, we learn that the foundation of state power's positions in global politics will continue to be threatened and must be sanitized and protected to safeguard them from external economic pressure, such as coercion and assertive economic policies. A healthy economy generates the necessary resources and capital to develop state institutions, infrastructures, defense capabilities, and investment, which are key to a prosperous state.[18] Similarly, robust nation-building enables a conducive environment to create the necessary level of public trust and support, which is vital to strike a balance for the state and the economy to thrive.[19] Moving forward, policymakers must be aware that the three pillars reinforce each other, and the weakness of one has a flowing impact on the others.[20] These interactions made them subject to external disruptions aimed at enforcing strategic imbalance that could set the condition for a sender to systematically impose its will and intentions on smaller and weaker targets.

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[12] Nick Bosio "On Strategic Art - A Guide to Strategic Thinking and the ASFF (Electronic Version 1-1)," n.d., 42.
[13] Bosio, 42
[14] Bosio, 43
[15] Bosio, 43
[16] "Defence and Strategic Studies Course, The Concept of Power Brief, Dr Darren Lim (04 Feb 2025)."
[17] Kathryn Judge, "Intermediary Infuence," *University of Chicago Law Review*, Vol. 82, No. 2 (Spring 2015), pp. 573–642, https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclrev/vol82/iss2/1.
[18] Bosio,42
[19] Bosio, 42
[20] Bosio, 42

Applications of Theories and Lessons Learned:

Summary of China's Key Economic Engagement - 2006 to 2022

China first established diplomatic relations in the region by formalizing ties with Fiji in 1975.[21] Over the years, Beijing's engagement in the region expanded significantly, gaining momentum in 2006, when 3,000 private and state-owned Chinese investors operated, with total investments reaching US$2.[22] Between 2000 and 2012, China's trade with the SWPIS surged from US$248 million to US$1.77 billion, reflecting its growing economic influence.[23] In 2014, President Xi Jinping welcomed the Pacific Island States to a ride on the Chinese "*express train*" as part of China's Maritime Silk Road and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).[24] The paper will now highlight a few significant projects that laid the foundations for China's BRI in the region from 2014 – 2022. Papua New Guinea (PNG) integrated its 2010–2030 Development Strategic Plan with the BRI, securing a US$3.5 billion road upgrade. Other key projects included the construction of the Luganville Wharf in Vanuatu and the revival of the multimillion-dollar Gold Ridge Mine in the Solomon Islands.[25] Additionally, most SWPIS signed Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) for future economic cooperation and infrastructure development. Many also joined the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), gaining access to concessional loans in exchange for closer economic ties with China.[26]

Furthermore, a significant breakthrough was achieved in 2018 when President Xi Jinping consolidated eight leaders of the SWPIS states during the APEC Summit in Port Moresby, where he vowed to advance inclusive strategic cooperation. [27] He was adamant that their BRI initiative would help the SWPIS strengthen business ties, enhance connectivity with China and the globe, and simultaneously enhance the participation of the island states in economic globalization.[28] Later, in September 2019, the Solomon Islands and Kiribati switched their diplomatic ties from Taiwan to forge engagements with China.[29]In 2022, China made the bold move to sign a security pact with the Solomon Islands.

Economic Statecraft

China's employment of economic statecraft was apparent through the growth in its investment and trade since 2006, the introduction of its BRI in 2014, and how it was leveraged as an alternative for Fiji, Solomon, and Kiribati in the years 2009 and 2019,

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[21] Henryk Szadziewski, "A Search for Coherence: The Belt and Road Initiative in the Pacific Islands," n.d., 294.
[22] Jian Yang,' The Pacific Islands In China's Grand Strategy, Small States, Big Games (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) 10-11
[23] Szadziewski, 294.
[24] Szadziewski, 294.
[25] Szadziewski, 294, 299, 296.
[26] Joanne Wallis et al., "Framing China in the Pacific Islands," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 76, no. 5 (September 3, 2022): 526, https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2022.2063252.
[27] Szadziewski, 295.
[28] Szadziewski, 295.
[29] Joanne Wallis, Maima Koro, and Corey O'Dwyer, "The 'Blue Pacific' Strategic Narrative: Rhetorical Action, Acceptance, Entrapment, and Appropriation?," *The Pacific Review* 37, no. 4 (July 3, 2024): 800, https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2023.2253377.

respectively. The surge in Chinese private and state-owned investors in 2006 demonstrates its intention to expand its economic footprint and influence in the fragile regional public and private sectors. The trend of its engagement in the region from 2006 to 2022 demonstrates how economic statecraft and weaponised interdependence are exercised through diplomatic, economic, and strategic engagements. The level of engagement promotes an atmosphere of risks and opportunities in the region and underscores that the SWPIS' are an integral part of China's strategy in the Pacific.[30]

A recent Lowy Institute power index review revealed that China is still at the top over the US in how a nation exercises *influence and leverage through economic interdependence*.[31] China's invitation for the SWPIS to join its economic '*express train*' illustrates how the BRI has been and will continue to be used as a tool for strategic influence and economic coercion. It also highlights China's dominance in the global economy and its strategic determination to seize any opportunity that enhances its influence. Moreover, the shift in some Island states' allegiance from the West or like-minded peripheral powers like Taiwan to China should be a concern to the traditional residents and like-minded friends of the Pacific region. It again demonstrates China's economic might in leveraging trust in a country in need when there is a power vacuum; it also reinforces the lesson that SWPIS are open to many options when their national and regional interests are unmet. Pivot states like Fiji and the Solomons created the strategic gap for non-traditional partners like China to harden their presence and motives, hence making the geostrategic environment more volatile while putting more pressure on the existing liberal regional order. One of the most important lessons to consider is that we must recognize that economic power is a double-edged sword. While it can drive national development, it can also be used as a tool for influence and control. Therefore, navigating this balance is essential for maintaining sovereignty and regional stability.

Weaponised Interdependence

The careful application of the concept of weaponised interdependence can also be proven. The steady growth of China's economic ties in the region from 2006 to 2022 could also be studied to develop and extend a strategic network that would advance dependency and economic chokepoint effects,[32] where regular economic relations are converted to coercive power by the sender. It can be learned that through economic diplomacy, China gained control of access to capital and trade within the region, generating a cycle of overreliance on the Chinese market, supply chain, and investment. This situation could lay the foundation for Beijing to dictate and influence regional, domestic, and strategic alignments, as exhibited in the Solomon Islands and Kiribati's switch of allegiance in 2019. The final element of weaponised interdependence that could be drawn from 2006 to 2022 was how China strategically maneuvered its economic policies and diplomacy by constructing major infrastructures, like roads and ports, and issuing concessional loans. A key takeaway was that these expansions serve a dual purpose: strengthening economic and

[30] Wyeth, Grant. 2016. "What to Make of China in the South Pacific?" The Diplomat, September 29.
https://thediplomat.com/2016/09/what-to-make-of-china-in-the-south-pacific/.
[31] Lowy Institute, "Map - Lowy Institute Asia Power Index," Lowy Institute Asia Power Index 2024, accessed March 17, 2025, https://power.lowyinstitute.org/.
[32] Farrell and Newman, "Weaponised Interdependence," 47–49.

diplomatic ties while positioning China to support future military campaigns and pushing the SWPIS deeper into its debt traps. This could undermine the autonomy of Pacific Island nations while enhancing China's security and strategic influence in the region. This situation reinforced the lesson and the need for the Island states to consolidate their economic power, which could enhance their collective resilience in positioning them in the proper strategic condition to counter the Chinese economic coercion. Victor Cha termed this concept as "*transition*," – referring to how a target state could hedge dependency on the weaponizer by siding with an alternative supplier.[33] The broader implication here is that SWPIS are not immune to what transpired in the case of the Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka in 2017.[34]

Impacts of China's Economic Statecraft and Weaponisation of Interdependence on National Power and Key Lessons Learned

Economic options and opportunities also offered strategic challenges, and one of them was the risk of undermining the balance of the Island States' foundation of national power, which is state, economic, and nation-building. Regarding state-building, safeguarding sovereignty and the risk of political instability are always a concern.[35] This demonstrates the necessity to manage overreliance on the Chinese economic network and arrangements as it has the potential to invite uncalculated political pressure that would limit the Island state's ability to make independent political decisions that would drive their states' interest. For instance, the decision by Beijing to sign a security pact with the Solomon Islands in 2022 and the adoption of the '*Look North Policy*' by Fiji in 2009 after being isolated by the West due to its 2006 military coup.[36] A key takeaway from this scenario is understanding that the world is interconnected and complex. Thus, managing the interaction between domestic politics and the regional geopolitical landscape is vital. While the decisions by Fiji and the Solomon Islands may align with their national interests, they also create geopolitical vulnerabilities. These choices open strategic gaps that China could exploit, increasing the risk of a military foothold in the Pacific. The risk of political unrest is also a worrying factor. The shift in the Solomon Islands' allegiance from Taiwan to China projected wide internal resentment that led to civil unrest. Similarly, as seen in Fiji, China's support for actors who overthrow democratically elected governments may set a concerning precedent, potentially encouraging similar destabilizing political actions. The two scenarios also teach us that power vacuums could create strategic openings. Hence, traditional partners must optimize their regional status to relegate any pressure forcing them to isolate these SWPIS. Subsequently, this would nullify any opportunity for an alternative power to rise.

Secondly, the economic-building efforts of SWPIS are also impacted. China's provision of easy access to loans can lure the island states' economy into its debt traps, which places small states in awkward financial and political positions, risking the unconditional surrender of government assets.[37] A single example that can be

[33] Ruggi,63–65.
[34] Anjelina Patrick, "China - Sri Lanka Strategic Hambantota Port Deal," n.d.
[35] Bosio, 42
[36] Smith and Wesley-Smith, 32.
[37] Parker, Sam, and Gabrielle Chefitz. Debtbook Diplomacy: China's Strategic Leveraging of its
Newfound Economic Influence and the Consequences for U.S. Foreign Policy. (Cambridge, MA, 2018)

drawn is Tonga's total debt to China through concessional loans for infrastructure projects, leading to concerns as Tonga's debt to China reached over 40% of its GDP, requiring multiple loan deferments.[38] Chinese state and public-owned industries have also flooded the region's construction, mining, fishing, and logging domains.[39] This again contributed heavily to resource depletion, over-extraction, and, in some cases, land disputes as many non-transparent dealings were involved, turning the economic issue into security concerns.[40] Chinese big investors have the advantage to outcompete regional domestic enterprises, forcing a reduction in local businesses and economic capacity. Key examples could be the heavy involvement of Chinese logging companies in Solomon that led to environmental degradation and corrupt dealings over resources. Illegal fishing and exploitation of marine resources in Kiribati and Micronesia by Chinese-owned fishing vessels, coupled with extensive ownership of retail and construction businesses by the Chinese, remain economic concerns. These actions directly weakened local economic independence and the ability of SWPIS to build their economies, local investment and employment opportunities. It further reveals why it is essential to understand our strategic economic environment. The applications of the causal logic framework would be relevant. The framework would assist in enabling Island state leaders to view the environment through structural, institutional, ideational, and psychological lenses; this would set the platform for a feasible strategic design aiming to resolve regional economic tensions and preserve their own economic interests.[41]

SWPIS's national building capacity was also hindered by the recent influx of Chinese presence in the region. Anti-Chinese riots were conducted in the Solomons in 2006, 2019, and 2021; similar incidents occurred in Tonga in 2006 and PNG in 2009.[42] Domestic discontent mainly branched out from the Chinese business owners' attitude towards locals, which hinged on unscrupulous dealings. These tensions erode social cohesion as they create an environment that imposes ethnic, faith, and cultural divisions, further complicating the Island's state's ability to create the right environment to advance regional cooperation as prescribed in the *'Blue Pacific'* narrative.[43] In addition, the Blue Pacific narrative should be better utilized not only to leverage the voices of Pacific Island states but also as an ideological defense mechanism against assertive external influence.

Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/Debtbook%20Diplomacy%20PDF.pdf.

[38] Szadziewski, "A Search for Coherence: The Belt and Road Initiative in the Pacific Islands," 298.

[39] Szadziewski, 294–303.

[40] Denghua Zhang, "China in the Pacific and Traditional Powers' New Pacific Policies," 2025, 81–82.

[41] "Australian Defence College Presentation, Colonel (Retired) Celestino Perez, Jr., Ph.D.," n.d.

[42] Denghua Zhang, "China's Influence and Local Perceptions: The Case of Pacific Island Countries," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 76, no. 5 (September 3, 2022): 580–81, https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2022.2112145.

[43] Wallis, Koro, and O'Dwyer, "The 'Blue Pacific' Strategic Narrative," 798.

Most SWPIS secured independence after the 1970s and are still struggling to harness their foundation of national power to safeguard their independence and democracy. External influence from traditional and non-traditional partners will continue to be a norm due to the region's strategic importance. It is high time that island states were more accountable for the way they handled power competitions with China, considering Beijing's reputation for implementing assertive patterns of policy and behavior.[44] Balancing and solidifying how the three pillars of national power are key for the Island states in navigating economic overreliance and being overly dictated by China, making them drift away from the form of governance that would support their national interest and the aspirations of their people.


Image: Mick Tsilkas via Reuters

According to the trend and data gathered it can be deduced that China's applications of economic statecraft and weaponised interdependence have been a success over the period 2006 – 2022. However, China's successes in the region will continue to face long-term challenges and resistance from both Pacific Island governments and public sectors. Key regional obstacles include concerns over political and civil instability, debt-trap diplomacy, resource exploitation, corruption, and growing anti-China sentiment. Additionally, China's regional expansion is further hindered by the strategic responses of traditional powers, such as Australia's 'Step-Up' and New Zealand's 'Pacific Reset policies'[45] and the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy, which collectively seek to counterbalance Beijing's influence.[46] The key takeaways from this analysis are economic statecraft and weaponised interdependence are effective diplomatic tools, but the longevity of success for the sender partly rests on the condition of the target's foundation of national power. Thus, a well-balanced foundation of national power is essential for enhancing state maturity and resilience, helping to mitigate the vulnerabilities of small states in this region. A critical question for students of strategy is whether the time has come for Pacific Island states to make a definitive strategic alignment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the case study has highlighted the strategic significance of the southwest Pacific region and how it has evolved to attract non-traditional partners like China. It has been defined that the presence of China has created anxiety and raised many questions for Western strategy and geopolitical schools of thought. The paper asserts that China's tools of economic statecraft and weaponised interdependence present economic opportunities and risks to the Pacific Island States. It has also been examined that the key lesson for strategy students is that less materially powerful states must cautiously approach the delicate balance

[44] Daniel R Russel and Blake H Berger, "Weaponising the Belt and Road Initiative," 19.
[45] Zhang, "China in the Pacific and Traditional Powers' New Pacific Policies," 84–93.
[46] Robert G. Patman, Patrick Köllner, and Balazs Kiglics, eds., *From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific: Diplomacy in a Contested Region*, Global Political Transitions (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2022), 104, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-7007-7.

between economic gain and political sovereignty to detour them from being lured into the sticky network of strategic dependency. Furthermore, the case study has explored the possibilities of how external economic pressures can alter the state foundation of national power, and it has also brought to light the significance of balancing the foundation of national power in reducing strategic tension in such a contested geopolitical landscape. As geopolitical competition intensifies in the Southwest Pacific, the need for accountable foreign policy and strategic adaptability has never been greater. Overall, having explored the pattern of China's regional economic influence and the magnitude of the counterbalancing acts from the Island States and traditional regional power, it can be posited that China has gained short-term success and long-term success is not guaranteed.

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Wallis, Joanne, Maima Koro, and Corey O'Dwyer. "The 'Blue Pacific' Strategic Narrative: Rhetorical Action, Acceptance, Entrapment, and Appropriation?" *The Pacific Review* 37, no. 4 (July 3, 2024): 797–824. https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2023.2253377.

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Case Study 2 – Small States Building National Power: A Case Study of Singapore's Investment in Intellectual Capital

Author

Commander Alfred Fox, Fiji

Commander Fox is a Seaman Officer in the Fiji Navy and a graduate of the Indonesian Naval Staff College (TNI SESKOAL), Class of 2018. In 2021, he served as a Visiting Naval Fellow at the Sea Power Centre – Australia. He is currently attending the Australian Defence College, where he is undertaking the Defence and Strategic Studies Course.

Introduction

Small states when observed from the perspective of classical state theory are constrained by inherent structural challenges to significantly exert power for influence on the global stage, due to limited territorial mass, numerically low population and possession of scarce resources. Within this lens, national power is associated with material capabilities including military might, industrial capacity, and demographic power thus relegating small states to the periphery of global politics. The limited ability of small states to project hard power or shape international outcomes through coercive means has historically entrenched the perception that they are vulnerable actors whose survival is dependent on the protection or predatory attentions of greater powers. Nevertheless, this deterministic interpretation increasingly fails to reflect the innovation in grand strategy of modern small states who have reconfigured the dimensions of political power by developing non-material or intangible capabilities to significantly strengthen their ability to exert influence to compensate their physical limitations t

A prime example of a state that has successfully implemented this strategic orientation is Singapore. Following the devastation of the Japanese occupation (1942–1945), Singapore gained internal self-governance in 1959 from British colonial rule. The collapse of Britains' "Singapore Strategy" in 1942 had exposed the vulnerability of the island as a small and dependent territory and to combat the rising threat of communism, it merged with Malaysia in 1963.[1] Singapore faced further security challenges as Indonesia's *Konfrontasi* (1963–1966) was influencing the regional security landscape with race riots in 1964 and expulsion from Malaysia in 1965. Independence left the small state in a vulnerable position due to having limited land mass, inadequate natural resources, and welding a small inexperienced military force. Singapore under Lee Kuan Yew (1959 – 1990) in the fragility of its early sovereign with minimal national power to project political influence on the global stage, pivoted and cultivated formidable national presence through investment in intellectual capital to garner world-class governance, diplomatic agility, economic sophistication, talent generation, informed and engaged citizenry along with a

[1] Michael Leifer, *Singapore's Foreign Policy: Coping with Vulnerability*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2000), 52.

reputation for reliability. This case study will delve into the intricacy of small states investing in intellectual capital and the effects on building national power. Specifically, it will shed light on Singapore's empowerment of grand strategy in the Lee Kuan Yew era as a case study to illustrate how small states harness intellectual capital to build on the three foundations of national power: state building, nation building, and economic building. By investing in intellectual capital, small states can build national power to exert political influence globally. The case study will first outline the theoretical foundations and then explore the impacts of intellectual capital firstly with state building, secondly nation building and lastly economic building.

Small State Theory, National Power and Intellectual Capital

Early small-state theory highlights the structural constraints that limit the ability of small states to shape outcomes in the international system. David Vital characterizes that small states possess only limited ability to affect the behaviour of other states and are particularly vulnerable to external pressure.[2] Robert Rothstein in a similar vein defines a small state as one that must depend on the support of other states, international institutions, or broader political processes to ensure its security.[3] Robert O. Keohane reinforces this view by emphasizing that a small state is one whose leaders believe that, whether acting independently or with a small alliance of states, it cannot meaningfully influence the international system.[4] Conversely, modern day theorists specify that influence is not entirely fixed. Tom Long argues that influence is relational; a small state's influence depends not only on its own capabilities but also on how effectively it leverages its relationships with more powerful states.[5] Along the same lines, Christine Ingebritsen asserts that influence is transformational whereby small states leverage their domestic successes in fields like social and environmental policy to act as norm entrepreneurs, utilising moral authority and specialized expertise to influence the global stage.[6] Singapore was in a state of fragility in its early years of sovereign and recognizing the difficulty of small states to project influence with inferior traditional instruments of power, pivoted and focused on intellectual capital to strengthen the foundations of national power to enable the projection of different dimensions of influence on the global political stage.

National power is the foundation of influence that states induce to change the behaviour of another state in advancing own national interests. This case study uses Professors Andrew Philips model which ascribes three foundations national power: state building, nation building and economy building.[7] Summarily, state building focuses on the establishment of effective governance structures, nation building involves the cultivation of a shared identity and social cohesion among citizens while

[2] David Vital, *The Inequality of States: A Study of the Small Power in International Relations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 8.
[3] Robert L. Rothstein, Alliances and Small Powers (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 29
[4] Robert O. Keohane, "Lilliputians' Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics," *International Organization* 23, no. 2 (1969): 296.
[5] Tom Long, *A Small State's Guide to Influence in World Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 63.
[6] Christine Ingebritsen, *Scandinavia in World Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 12.
[7] Andrew Philips, "Foundations of National Power" (lecture, Foundations of Strategy AWC751, Australian Defence College, February 05, 2026).

economic building concentrates on the development of sustainable growth and prosperity.[8] When comparing Philip's model to other theories on the foundations of national power, Hans Morgenthau in contrast identifies nine key components that provide a nation's power: its geographic position, availability of natural resources, population size, collective national character, overall morale, the effectiveness of its diplomacy, level of industrial development, state of military readiness, and the competence of its government.[9] Alternatively, Kenneth Waltz, argues that national power is founded on territorial size and population, endowed resources, economic strength, political stability, military capability and state competence.[10] In contrast to Morgenthau's and Waltz's models, Philip's national power framework treats material capability such as economic and military strength as instruments of national power necessary for the application of grand strategy rather than as foundational elements. Therefore, there is a distinction between the national resources that states use as instruments to exert national interests from the basal resources like intellectual capital which Lee Kuan Yew intensively focused on to strengthen the foundations of Singapore's national power.

Intellectual capital, despite its different definitions across scholarly perspectives, is consistently centred on knowledge-based assets, intangible resources whose value derives from the processes of creating, disseminating, and applying knowledge. For instance, Thomas A. Stewart, one of the early figures to popularise the concept, defines intellectual capital as "the sum of everything everybody in a company knows that gives it a competitive edge" whilst Edvinson and Malone argue it as the ownership of knowledge, practical experience, organization technology, customer networks, and professional competencies that enable a company to maintain a competitive advantage[11] The concept of intellectual capital was initially articulated in 1969 by the economist John Kenneth Galbraith and although its origins lie in management and economics, it has expanded its scope into international relations on the recognition that a country's global influence and competitive edge are primarily fueled by its knowledge-based assets.[12] Accordingly, this case study uses Hannele Orjala's definition of intellectual capital, "the variety of intangible assets that give long term advantages to a nation and interact with organisations, regions, or globally, and that are able to produce future and equal benefits measured at all levels."[13] Consistent with prevailing literature, intellectual capital is now accepted to circumscribe a triad of interdependent capacities: human, structural and relational.[14]

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[8] Michael Wesley, "The State of the Art on the Art of State Building," *Global Governance* 14, no. 3 (July–September 2008): 373, Vera Tolz, "Forging the Nation: National Identity and Nation Building in Post-Communist Russia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 50, no. 6 (1998): 993,
[9] Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), 80 - 108.
[10] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 131
[11] Thomas A. Stewart, *Intellectual Capital: The New Wealth of Organizations* (New York: Doubleday/Currency, 1997), 12; Leif Edvinsson and Michael S. Malone, *Intellectual Capital: Realizing Your Company's True Value by Finding Its Hidden Brainpower* (New York: Harper Business, 1997), 44.
[12] Daniel Andriessen, "On the Metaphorical Nature of Intellectual Capital: A Textual Analysis," *Journal of Intellectual Capital* 7, no. 1 (2006): 104.
[13] Hannele Orjala and Mikael Collan, "National Intellectual Capital in Academic Journals: Topics and Trends," *Journal of Innovation & Knowledge* 10, no. 4 (2025): 100747,2.
[14] L. Harris, "A Theory of Intellectual Capital," *Advances in Developing Human Resources* 2,

Intellectual Capital for State Building

Effective state-building depends on effective governance that fosters a stable, legitimate, and competent framework that facilitates sustainable economic growth, enhances social cohesion, which amplifies the state's reputation and influence globally. A professionalized bureaucracy is the human capital that serves as the driver of this framework, institutionalizing authority across a state's territory and ensuring that power is not merely projected but legitimized and sustained against the competing interests of fragmented local actors. However, when a bureaucracy is inadequately remunerated and lacks intellectual capacity, the governance framework may deteriorate the state's reputation. Singapore after independence developed a highly professional civil service that became the backbone of rapid state formation and long-term national development.[15] The state focused on attracting top intellectual talent through competitive government scholarships, rigorous training, and clear meritocratic pathways[16]. To prevent corruption and retain expertise, civil servants were paid salaries comparable to private sector and corporate benchmarks, with senior officials' compensation eventually benchmarked to top corporate earners.[17] This strategy created a technocratic bureaucracy defined by efficiency, discipline, and policy competence, enabling the state to implement ambitious economic and social reforms with unusual speed and coherence. The elite Public Service Division enabled the rapid execution of key initiatives like the Central Provident Fund (CPF) in 1955 for social security and the Housing Development Board (HDB) in 1960 for mass public housing. Strong anti-corruption measures and rigorous oversight prevented graft and helped create an effective and efficient bureaucracy that was highly effective in state building.

An effective fiscal extractive capacity is vital for state building not merely as a means of raising revenue but as a bedrock of legitimacy, authority, and institutional strength. Fiscal capacity buttresses national power by enabling a state to ensure security, deliver public services, provide lawful governance, and build infrastructure for economic growth. Its effectiveness rests on human capital, as skilled populations boost productivity and diversify revenue, and on structural capital, where taxing frameworks such as digital systems enhance collection and compliance. Equally important is relational capital which encompasses taxpayer trust in government and social contract increase voluntary compliance, while weak legitimacy downgrades compliance and forces reliance on costly enforcement.[18] During the Lee Kuan Yeew era, Singapore constructed a robust fiscal extraction capacity through a combination of rapid industrial growth, friendly foreign investment, environment, modernised tax frameworks, and the aggressive expansion of the CPF. Singapore's investment in education not only produced a high skilled population that broadened the tax base but also built trust with the population. Singapore's approach was centred on the

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no. 1 (2000): 23; Yolanda Ramírez, Montserrat Manzaneque, and Alba María Priego, "Formulating and Elaborating a Model for the Measurement of Intellectual Capital in Spanish Public Universities," *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 83, no. 1 (2017): 152.

[15] Thomas J. Bellows, "Meritocracy and the Singapore Political System," *Asian Journal of Political Science* 1, no. 1 (1993): 24 – 44.

[16] Bellows, "Meritocracy and the Singapore Political System," 33.

[17] Bellows, "Meritocracy and the Singapore Political System," 37.

[18] Vitor Gaspar, Laura Jaramillo, and Philippe Wingender, *Political Institutions, State Building, and Tax Capacity: Crossing the Tipping Point*, IMF Working Paper 2016/233 (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, 2016),7.

strategic integration of human, structural, and relational elements of intellectual capital to generate both fiscal stability and efficient extractive capacity.

Intellectual Capital for Nation Building

Nation-building as reenforced by a state when citizens identify strongly with the state, perceiving it as a legitimate reflection of their interests and values. This shared identity cultivates cohesion, trust, and collective capacity, enabling the projection of both soft and hard power. Intellectual capital is essential, as education and shared narratives promote civic participation and resilience against fragmentation. However, when state narratives equate unity with stability, they risk constraining diverse viewpoints and discouraging dissent. Therefore, the very mechanisms that enhances solidarity can also sabotage the diversity and openness essential for a legitimate and resilient citizenry. Singapore harnessed intellectual capital by leveraging national identity to its citizens for nation building. This strategic identification reinforced through a suite of foundational policies such as the Bilingualism Policy of 1966 which balanced global economic competitiveness in English with the preservation of cultural roots and values in mother tongue education. The HBD provided affordable, high-quality public housing which fostered social cohesion, political stability, and economic mobility through high homeownership rates. Central to the HBD's success is the CPF, the mandatory social security savings scheme that embeds a "home-ownership-as-savings" philosophy which integrated long-term financial security to property ownership that anchored a stable, invested workforce with a shared sense of national identity.[19] This focus on intellect foundation successful formed Singaporeans into a cohesive body of citizens whose personal destinies were inextricably intertwined with nation building.

Effective nation-building entails fostering a deep-seated loyalty to the state, ensuring citizens identify with their country enough to minimize the risks of domestic unrest or externally influenced subversion. The maturity derived from investing in human capital acts as a strategic deterrent as a highly educated populace possess the cognitive resilience to subdue misinformation and destabilizing acts. However, there is need for strategic management of these cognitive resources to be aligned to unified national security objectives along with an efficient mobilization framework to ensure that the state responds appropriately. Intellectual capital cultivated under Lee Kuan Yew was pivotal in shaping Singapore's Total Defence by developing the expert and strategic thinking manpower needed to operationalise a whole-of-society security concept in a resource-poor state. The visionary investment built a competent cadre of professionals, planners and technocrats who could integrate military, civil, economic, social, and psychological pillars into a coherent defence architecture. Furthermore, National Service, the mandatory conscription policy established in 1967, functioned as a rigorous rite of passage to dissolve ethnic silos into a singular national consciousness. The leveraging of intellectual capital not only built credible armed forces but also embedded defence consciousness across Singaporean society, harnessing intangible resources for nation building.

[19] Vicente Chua Reyes, "Issues of Citizenship, National Identity and Political Socialization in Singapore: Implications to the Singapore Education System," *Studies of Changing Societies* 2013, no. 1 (2014): 42.

Intellectual Capital for Economy Building

States with empowered human capital can innovate rapidly and navigate successive technological eras with relative ease, thereby maintaining economic relevance and sustaining growth.[20] Populations with high educational achievement generate innovative solutions to complex problems and generate a culture of creativity and scientific research. However, these ideas need to be efficiently transformed into commercially viable technologies through advanced knowledge infrastructures.[21] Structural frameworks that can align intellectual capital with a state's development objectives is vital to its economic building. Singapore in 1968 rotated its industrial strategy from import substitution industrialization toward export-oriented industrialization.[22] Due to the nation's limited natural resources, the government recognized that cultivating human capital was essential to the success of this new direction.[23] After gaining independence in 1965, the state prioritised building an education system capable of producing a literate, technically skilled workforce. This led to a strategic shift toward technical and vocational training, including the expansion of vocational institutes, and ultimately culminated in the creation of the Industrial Training Board in 1973.[24] Eventually, institutions such as the National University of Singapore, formed in 1980, along with the Nanyang Technological Institute which was created in 1981 soon became leading centres for higher learning, research, and professional training.[25] Evidence and legacy of these firm foundations in intellectual capital during the Lee Kuan Yee era are currently reflected in the internationally recognised Global Innovation Index whereas Singapore was ranked 7th out of 107 countries in 2007 and 4th out of 133 countries in 2024.[26] By leveraging human,



Image: Jamie Koh. The Straits Times

[20] Şerife Koç et al., "The Impact of Innovation on Economic Growth: A Dynamic Panel Data Analysis Using System GMM Approach," *International Journal of Innovation Studies* 10, no. 1 (2026): 21.
[21] Robert D. Atkinson, *The 2022 State New Economy Index* (Washington, DC: Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, 2022), 14.
[22] C. B. Goh and S. Gopinathan, "The Development of Education in Singapore since 1965," in *Toward a Better Future: Education and Training for Economic Development in Singapore since 1965*, ed. S. K. Lee et al. (Washington, DC: World Bank and National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, 2008), 13.
[23] Boon Siong Neo and Geraldine Chen, *Dynamic Governance: Embedding Culture, Capabilities and Change in Singapore* (New Jersey: World Scientific, 2007), 97.
[24] Goh and Gopinathan, "Development of Education in Singapore," 14.
[25] Japan Science and Technology Agency, *Research on the Nurturing and Maintaining of STI Talent in Singapore (Addendum): The Driving Forces behind the Progress at NUS and NTU,* APRC-FY2022-RR-02 (Tokyo: Japan Science and Technology Agency, 2022),
[26] Soumitra Dutta and Simon Caulkin, *Global Innovation Index 2007* (Fontainebleau, France:

structural, and relational elements of intellectual capital, Singapore continues to expand its innovation capacity, thereby advancing economic building and strengthening national power.

States that invest in strong intellectual capital ecosystems attract both multinational corporations and entrepreneurial talent. Foreign expertise and foreign direct investment fuel economic building by boosting capital accumulation, transferring advanced technologies, addressing vital skill shortages, and enhancing international competitiveness.[27] These external inputs frequently serve as catalysts for productivity gains, industrial transformation, and job creation, within states. Conversely, relying on foreign expertise and investment can lead to structural weaknesses, particularly when local innovation systems remain underdeveloped or dominated by external actors. Moreover, without strong regulatory frameworks and strategic state planning, foreign firms may prioritize profit extraction over long-term capacity building, limiting technology spillovers and weakening local entrepreneurial ecosystems. Lee Kuan Yew postured Singapore as an investment and talent magnet by investing in intellectual capital which fostered a pro-business environment.[28] The government attracted multinational corporations by pivoting from low-cost manufacturing to building a high-value, knowledge-based economy through strategic intellectual capital incentives. These incentives focused on developing human capital, technology transfer, and a robust intellectual property ecosystem.

To maximise foreign investment, the Economic Development Board was created in 1961; however, through its mandate to implement industrial policies, it also allowed the state to regulate and restrain potential predatory manifestations of foreign investment.

Conclusion

Singapore's experience demonstrates that small states can undermine structural vulnerabilities by deliberately cultivating intellectual capital to strengthen the three foundations of national power: state building, nation building, and economic building. The small island state recast its limitations as strategic strengths by investing intensely in the human, institutional, and relational capacities of intellectual capital, building a state that is defined with competence, legitimacy, and long-term resilience. Intellectual capital reenforced state building through a professional, meritocratic bureaucracy; it reenforced nation-building by fostering a cohesive, educated, and security aware citizenry; and it powered economic building by enabling innovation, attracting global investment, and posturing Singapore as a knowledge driven hub. Together, these capacities enabled Singapore to exert influence disproportionate to its size, shifting from a vulnerable post-colonial territory to a respected global actor

INSEAD and World Business, 2007), 5; World Intellectual Property Organization, *Global Innovation Index 2024: Unlocking the Promise of Social Entrepreneurship* (Geneva: WIPO, 2024), 18.

[27] Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *"The Benefits of Foreign Investment,"* March 19, 2026, https://www.dfat.gov.au/trade/investment/the-benefits-of-foreign-investment#:~:text=Foreign%20investment%20has%20other%20benefits,services%20to%20the%20Australian%20market

[28] Lu Yang, "The Human Resource Development Policy of Singapore," *Academic Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences* 5, no. 4 (2022): 87.

with significant national power. Singapore's trajectory under Lee Kuan Yew demonstrates that small states are not destined to remain on the sidelines as by prioritising intellectual capital as a strategic asset, they can build durable national power to advance their grand strategy for security and autonomy, and to shape global norms. The case study offers an effective approach for how small states can transform power, not through accumulation of tangible resources, but through the deliberate fabrication of intellectual capital as an underlying resource of national power.

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Koç, Şerife, Ramazan Uctu, Hassan Essop, and Birol Mercan. "The Impact of Innovation on Economic Growth: A Dynamic Panel Data Analysis Using System GMM Approach." *International Journal of Innovation Studies* 10, no. 1 (2026): 20–30.

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Case Study 3 – To what extent are classic works of strategy useful for dealing with issues faced by strategists in the twenty-first century?

Author

Superintendent Joseph Adler Iro, Solomon Islands.

Superintendent Iro is an experienced law enforcement professional with over 20 years of service in the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF). He has extensive expertise in policing, investigations, leadership development, recruitment, and workforce training, supported by international qualifications from Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, and United Nations programs. A committed leader and lifelong learner, he is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Commerce while contributing to the development of policing and public sector capability across the Solomon Islands and the Pacific region.

Classic works of strategy occupy critical positions in contemporary strategic thought. Texts such as Sunzi's "The Art of War" continue to shape the intellectual foundations of military academies, policy institutions, and strategic cultures across the world, despite the profound transformation of warfare brought about by nuclear weapons, cyber operations, artificial intelligence, space systems, and hybrid conflict. The persistence of these ancient works raises a central question: to what extent can strategic principles formulated in pre-industrial societies illuminate the challenges of the twenty-first-century strategy?

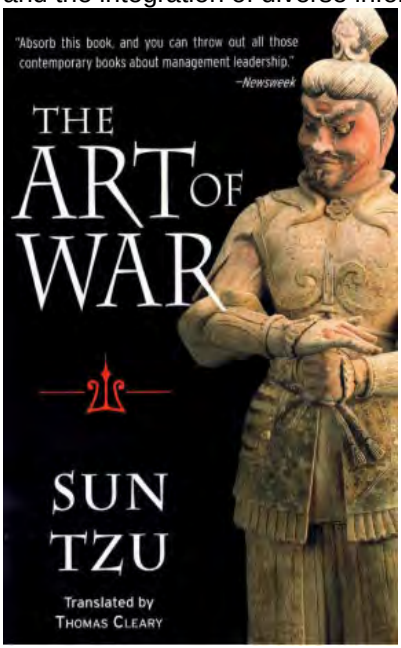
This essay argues that Sunzi's strategic theory remains valuable but inherently limited in modern contexts. Its strength lies in its heuristic insights: knowledge, deception, non-combat victory, adaptation, and strategic positioning, which still help strategists navigate uncertainty and complexity, even as technological acceleration and new operational domains constrain the applicability of its classical formulations.

The essay proceeds in five sections. First, it will examine Sunzi's principle of knowledge and its relevance to modern intelligence, assessment, and uncertainty. Second, it analyses deception in the information battlespace. Third, it explores Sunzi's ideal of winning without fighting in the context of deterrence and grey-zone competition. Fourth, it evaluates adaptation and emergent strategy in contemporary operational environments. Fifth, it assesses the limits of Sunzi's framework in domains fundamentally altered by technology. The conclusion synthesises these findings and clarifies the relevance of Sunzi's Strategies in the modern era,

First, Sunzi's maxim that "if you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles" remains one of the most cited principles in strategic studies. Its enduring appeal stems from its elegant articulation of a foundational truth: strategic advantage depends on accurate assessment of one's own capabilities, the adversary's intentions and strengths, and the broader environment.[1] In the twenty-first century, this principle continues to underpin modern

[1] Michael I. Handel, Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought, 3. rev. and expanded ed;

practices such as net assessment, red-teaming, intelligence fusion, and multi-domain situational awareness. These methods reflect the same imperative Sunzi identified: reducing uncertainty through systematic inquiry, critical reflection, and the integration of diverse information sources.



Modern militaries operationalise Sunzi's principle through structured methodologies that seek to reduce uncertainty and improve decision-making. For example, net assessment evaluates long-term competitive dynamics between major powers, mirroring Sunzi's emphasis on understanding relative strengths and weaknesses. Red-teaming simulates adversary behaviour to expose vulnerabilities, echoing Sunzi's insistence on anticipating enemy moves. Intelligence fusion centres integrate data from multiple domains such as; cyber, space, maritime, air, and land to create a coherent operational picture, reflecting Sunzi's call for comprehensive knowledge.[2] These practices collectively demonstrate how ancient strategic insights are translated into rigorous, institutionalised processes suited to contemporary operational complexity. They show how militaries convert broad philosophical principles into repeatable analytical routines, doctrinal mechanisms, and decision-support architectures that function under conditions of uncertainty and rapid change. By embedding these methods within organisational structures, states ensure that strategic foresight is not dependent on individual intuition alone but is reinforced through systematic inquiry, cross-domain integration, and continuous reassessment.[3]

These practices are evident in initiatives such as the Joint All-Domain Command and Control (JADC2) program, which aims to integrate sensors, platforms, and decision-support systems across the US military. By linking disparate data streams into a unified operational architecture, JADC2 seeks to accelerate decision cycles, enhance situational awareness, and enable more adaptive responses to complex threats. In doing so, it exemplifies how Sunzi's emphasis on information superiority is being reinterpreted through advanced digital and networked capabilities.[4] For instance, JADC2's ambition to reduce friction between services and create a more coherent battlespace picture underscores how contemporary militaries institutionalise Sunzi's insight that strategic advantage derives from superior

Repr (Cass, 2005); Handel, Masters of War.

[2] Mark McNeilly, Sun Tzu and the Art of Modern Warfare: Strategy in the Twenty-First Century (Oxford University Press, 2001).

[3] Eitan Shamir, Transforming Command: The Pursuit of Mission Command in the U.S., British, and Israeli Armies (Stanford University Press, 2011).

[4] David S. Alberts and Richard E. Hayes, "Joint All-Domain Command and Control (JADC2): Background and Issues for Congress," CRS Report R46725 (Congressional Research Service, Updated 2023).

knowledge, anticipation, and the ability to act with precision under conditions of uncertainty.

Similarly, NATO's intelligence requirements frameworks and red-teaming exercises operationalise Sunzi's injunction to "know the enemy" by modelling adversary behaviour in hybrid threat environments. These processes enable planners to test assumptions, identify potential escalation pathways, and anticipate how competitors might exploit political, informational, or cyber vulnerabilities. By institutionalising structured adversary emulation, NATO not only refines its understanding of emerging threats but also reinforces Sunzi's core insight that strategic foresight depends on rigorous, continuous engagement with the opponent's perspective.[5] These practices also cultivate a more adaptive analytical culture by encouraging planners to challenge prevailing narratives, explore alternative courses of action, and recognise the fluidity of adversary intent. In doing so, they help ensure that strategic assessments remain resilient in the face of uncertainty and deception, relevant to conditions that Sunzi regarded as intrinsic to competitive statecraft.

Critics have argued that Sunzi's principle presupposes a bounded, observable battlespace characteristic of pre-modern warfare. Contemporary strategic environments, by contrast, are shaped by "unknown unknowns" arising from emerging technologies such as quantum computing, hypersonic glide vehicles, autonomous swarms, and AI-driven cyber operations. These technologies generate forms of uncertainty that defy comprehensive understanding.[6]

A breakthrough in quantum decryption, for instance, could instantly invalidate years of signal intelligence, rendering self-knowledge and enemy knowledge simultaneously obsolete. This critique highlights a genuine limitation that Sunzi's framework does not explicitly address the epistemic instability created by technologies that evolve faster than intelligence cycles can adapt. Moreover, the accelerating pace of innovation means that strategic advantage may hinge less on knowing the adversary than on anticipating disruptive shifts in the technological landscape itself, an area where Sunzi offers little direct guidance.[7]

Second, although this critique ultimately reinforces Sunzi's relevance, Sunzi does not promise omniscience; rather, he advocates for continuous disciplined inquiry. His emphasis on scouts, spies, and self-audits aligns with modern practices such as cyber exercises, multi-domain experimentation, and persistent intelligence loops. The value of Sunzi's principle lies not in achieving perfect knowledge but in cultivating organisational habits of inquiry, adaptation, and reassessment, which clearly indicates that his framework remains highly applicable to twenty-first-century uncertainty.[8] Furthermore, his assertion that "all warfare is based on deception" resonates strongly in an era defined by information operations, hybrid warfare, and cognitive manipulation, as still being witnessed in the twenty-first century by

[5] Mark McNeilly, Sun Tzu and the Art of Modern Warfare: Strategy in the Twenty-First Century (Oxford University Press, 2001).
[6] Lukas Milevski, Sun Tzu's Art of War: Modern Interpretations and Strategic Applications (in Connection with His Foundational Article Expanded into Book Form, but Primarily His The Evolution of Modern Strategic Thought, Routledge, 2017).
[7] Mark McNeilly, Sun Tzu and the Art of Modern Warfare: Strategy in the Twenty-First Century (Oxford University Press, 2001).
[8] Michael I. Handel, Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought (3rd Ed., Routledge, 2001).

expanding of conflicts into the information domain, where perception, narrative, and ambiguity often matter more than physical force.[9]

Modern strategic behaviour frequently mirrors Sunzi's deception principles. For instance, Russia's annexation of Crimea employed a sophisticated blend of military deception, information operations, and proxy forces to create ambiguity and delay international response. However, China's *three warfares* doctrine; public opinion, psychological, and legal warfare seeks to shape perceptions and legitimacy in contested regions such as the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait. These practices reflect Sunzi's injunction to "appear weak whilst being strong" and to manipulate adversary expectations.[10] They also demonstrate how contemporary actors use ambiguity, narrative control, and legal reinterpretation to constrain opponents' decision-making space and generate strategic advantage without crossing thresholds that would trigger overt retaliation. In this sense, modern deception campaigns extend Sunzi's logic into domains where influence, legitimacy, and perception have become as consequential as physical force.

In cyber operations, deception is even more central. Defensive strategies such as honeypots, false indicators, and active cyber defence rely on misleading adversaries to protect networks. Offensive cyber operations often exploit deception to mask attribution, manipulate data, or create uncertainty about the origin and intent of attacks. These techniques reflect a battlespace in which visibility is limited, identities are malleable, and the boundary between truth and fabrication is deliberately blurred.[11] Deception becomes not merely a tactical tool but a structural feature of the domain, shaping how states signal resolve, probe vulnerabilities, and manage escalation. In this environment, Sunzi's insights into misdirection acquire renewed relevance, even as the technical mechanisms differ profoundly from those of his era, reinforcing how ambiguity itself has become a strategic resource in digital conflict.

Some analysts argue that digital transparency undermines deception, thus, the proliferation of commercial satellite imagery, open-source intelligence communities, and real-time geolocation tools makes it increasingly difficult to conceal troop movements, covert operations, or disinformation campaigns. For instance, Ukraine's use of commercial drones to expose Russian positions illustrates how transparency can neutralise deception. Yet this trend extends beyond the battlefield: investigative collectives such as Bellingcat routinely verify imagery, track equipment, and attribute attacks with a speed once reserved for state intelligence agencies. In such an environment, deception must contend with a dense, participatory information ecosystem that rapidly challenges falsehoods and reduces the viability of traditional concealment strategies.[12]

However, transparency does not eliminate deception, it transforms it. Sunzi recognised that deception must adapt to adversary countermeasures. Modern deception increasingly targets cognitive biases rather than physical concealment, therefore allowing deepfakes, algorithmic influenced operations, and multi-vector

[9] Antony Cummins, The Ultimate Art of War (Destiny Books, 2019).
[10] Lisa Raphals, "Deception and Indirection: Sunzi versus Xunzi," Journal of Chinese Philosophy 43, Nos. 3–4 (2016): 185–229.
[11] Cyber Deception: Techniques, Strategies, and Human Aspects (Springer, 2023), Edited by Tiffany Bao, Milind Tambe, and Cliff Wang.
[12] Dean P. Chen, Three Warfares in Chinese Strategy (Routledge, 2023).

disinformation campaigns to remain not only viable but also central to contemporary conflict. The information battlespace amplifies Sunzi's insight that perception can be more decisive than force.[13] These techniques exploit the speed and scale of digital communication to overwhelm verification processes, erode trust in authoritative sources, and create competing narratives that complicate strategic decision-making. In this environment, deception becomes less about hiding facts and more about shaping the interpretive frames through which those facts are understood, subtly steering public opinion and strategic choices before adversaries can mount an effective response.

Third, Sunzi's hierarchy of strategic excellence culminates in the ideal of "subduing the enemy without fighting." This principle aligns closely with modern concepts of deterrence, coercion, and grey-zone competition, where states seek to achieve strategic objectives without escalating to open conflict. Moreover, modern deterrence strategies like; economic sanctions, cyber signaling, forward deployments, and alliance commitments reflect Sunzi's emphasis on shaping adversary behaviour through indirect means. These tools aim to influence an opponent's cost-benefit calculations, impose psychological pressure, and constrain their freedom of action.[14] This highlights Sunzi's insight that the highest form of strategy lies in altering an adversary's choices rather than defeating them militarily, which remains deeply resonant in contemporary statecraft. For example, the US response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, combining sanctions, military aid, and force posture adjustments, exemplifies efforts to impose costs and constrain adversary options without direct confrontation.[15]

Critics argue that nuclear deterrence fundamentally alters the logic of non-combat victory, and nuclear stability depends on credible warfighting capabilities, not the avoidance of conflict. Moreover, grey-zone competition often escalates into kinetic exchanges, as seen in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict or maritime clashes in the Red Sea. These cases highlight how efforts to coerce or deter without fighting can rapidly spill into violence when misperception, nationalism, or local tactical dynamics override strategic restraint. Such dynamics suggest that Sunzi's ideal may be overly optimistic in environments where escalation risks are high, dual-use technologies compress decision time, and the boundary between peace and war is increasingly porous.[16]

In addition, Sunzi's principle remains relevant when understood as a heuristic for escalation management. Modern deterrence strategies rely on calibrated signaling, cost-imposition, and shaping adversary expectations, precisely the forms of indirect influence Sunzi advocates. For instance, the avoidance of major-power war in the Taiwan Strait since the mid-1990s illustrates how indirect strategies, combined with credible deterrence, can maintain stability without open conflict.[17] This dynamic

[13] Scott Hughes and United States Army Combat Studies Institute, Weaving the Tangled Web: Military Deception in Large-Scale Combat Operations (CSI Press, 2018).
[14] Lukas Milevsky, "The Irrelevance of Sun Tzu? A Critical Reconsideration of The Art of War," Journal of Strategic Studies 38, No. 6 (2015): 789–808.
[15] Michael Kofman et al., Russia's Hybrid Aggression: The View from Ukraine (Rowman & Littlefield, 2023).
[16] James W. Mitisek, "Shades of Gray Deterrence: Issues of Fighting in the Gray Zone," Journal of Strategic Security 12, No. 3 (2019): 1–25.
[17] Phillip C. Saunders and Scott W. Harold, Crossing the Strait: China's Military Prepares for

reflects a broader pattern in which states seek to manage crises by influencing perceptions of risk, demonstrating resolve without provoking retaliation, and maintaining channels for de-escalation. Such practices underscore how Sunzi's insights continue to inform contemporary efforts to navigate competitive interactions under the shadow of potential escalation.

Fourth, Sunzi's metaphor of water "formless, taking the shape of the terrain" captures his emphasis on adaptability, flexibility, and responsiveness to changing circumstances. This principle resonates strongly with contemporary operational concepts that prioritise agility, decentralisation, and iterative learning. For instance, the US Marine Corps' Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO) and Force Design 2030 initiatives embody Sunzi's emphasis on fluidity and positional advantage.[18] By dispersing forces across Pacific archipelagos, these concepts seek to exploit transient opportunities and complicate adversary targeting. Similarly, John Boyd's OODA loop, explicitly influenced by Sunzi, underpins modern airpower doctrine and multi-domain operations by stressing rapid adaptation, continuous feedback, and the ability to out-cycle an opponent's decision process.[19]

A further implication of Sunzi's metaphor is its relevance to the organisational and cognitive demands of modern command. Contemporary forces operate in environments defined by rapid information flows, dispersed units, and highly dynamic threat conditions, all of which require commanders to balance initiative with coherence. The emphasis on fluidity aligns with emerging concepts of mission command, which prioritise decentralised decision-making, shared intent, and the capacity of subordinate units to adapt without constant oversight.[20] This approach seeks to cultivate organisations that can reconfigure themselves in response to shifting operational pressures, much like water adjusting to the contours of its surroundings. In this sense, Sunzi's imagery continues to shape not only tactical manoeuvre but also the institutional cultures and command philosophies that underpin effective modern warfare.

Some analysts contend that emerging technologies—autonomous systems, AI-enabled targeting, and hypersonic weapons demand prescriptive architectures rather than fluid heuristics. The speed and complexity of algorithmic warfare may exceed human adaptability, requiring automated decision-making and rigid system integration. This critique suggests that Sunzi's emphasis on human cognition and flexible command may be outdated. Yet Sunzi's principle of adaptation extends beyond individual judgement to organisational learning and systemic flexibility.[21] Modern militaries increasingly value learning organisations capable of rapid experimentation, doctrinal evolution, and cross-domain integration. Hybrid threats from tunnel warfare to proxy forces rewards adaptability over rigid planning, making

Invasion? (National Défense University Press, 2023).

[18] Mark McNeilly, Sun Tzu and the Art of Modern Warfare: Strategy in the Twenty-First Century (Oxford University Press, 2001).

[19] David S. Fadok, "John Boyd and John Warden: Airpower's Quest for Strategic Paralysis," Airpower Journal 9, No. 4 (Winter 1995): 33–53.

[20] Hansson, U. & Hult, G. (2015). "Mission Command in the 21st Century: A Critical View." Defence Studies, 15(3), 175–193.

[21] Michael I. Handel, Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought (3rd Ed., Routledge, 2001).

Sunzi's fluidity a continuing guide for organisational design and strategic culture.[22]

Fifth, Sunzi's framework has clear limitations in domains fundamentally transformed by modern technology. Although nuclear weapons introduce existential stakes and irreversible consequences absent from Sunzi's world, concepts such as mutually assured destruction, second-strike capability, and crisis stability require theoretical tools developed by modern strategists. Yet Sunzi's framework still offers guidance on nuclear brinkmanship, escalation ladders, or arms control, particularly in its emphasis on psychological pressure, strategic signalling, and the management of uncertainty. These elements remain relevant even as the structural dynamics of nuclear deterrence exceed anything Sunzi could have imagined.[23]

Furthermore, despite illustration by malware that spreads beyond intended targets, it still reveals how cyber operations can escape the boundaries envisioned in classical strategy, Sunzi's analogies to siege warfare or infiltration that cannot fully capture the systemic fragility and collateral risks inherent in cyber conflict. For instance, space warfare introduces unique challenges: orbital debris, dual-use satellites, and the fragility of global communications networks. Hence, Sunzi's principles of terrain and positional advantage offer limited guidance for a domain where actions can have global, and long-lasting consequences.[24] These dynamics underscore how emerging domains demand conceptual tools that extend beyond classical strategic metaphors and account for the interconnected, and physics-driven vulnerabilities of modern systems.

In addition, autonomous weapons and AI-driven decision systems challenge Sunzi's anthropocentric assumptions about generalship, judgement, and moral agency. Strategic authority is no longer vested solely in a human commander whose insight, intuition, and ethical responsibility anchor the decision process. Instead, contemporary strategic decision-making increasingly involves human-machine teams, data ontologies, and algorithmic optimisation. These introduce new forms of epistemic opacity, where even designers struggle to fully explain how complex models generate recommendations. However, they also redistribute agency across networks of sensors, platforms, and computational processes, complicating traditional notions of accountability.[25] In such environments, Sunzi's emphasis on the cultivated wisdom of the commander must be reinterpreted to address the distributed, hybrid nature of modern strategic cognition.

To conclude, Sunzi's "The Art of War" remains a foundational text in strategic studies because it articulates enduring principles that transcend historical context. Its insights into knowledge, deception, indirect victory, adaptation, and strategic positioning continue to inform modern strategic practice across domains. Sunzi's heuristics provide conceptual orientation, but they must be combined with modern theories such as; Schelling's bargaining logic, Boyd's decision cycles, and empirical social science to produce a comprehensive understanding of contemporary strategic

[22] Freeman, Tyler E., & Calton, Michele A. (2021). "Building Military Learning Organizations: Many Birds, One Stone." The Learning Organization, 28(3), 257–269.
[23] Louis René Beres, "How Sun Tzu Might Approach US Nuclear Strategy," BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 885 (July 6, 2018).
[24] Mark O. McNeilly, Sun Tzu and the Art of Modern Warfare (Oxford University Press, 2001.
[25] Mark Bailey, Unknowable Minds: Philosophical Insights on AI and Autonomous Weapons (Imprint Academic, 2025).

competition. Therefore, classical works of strategy remain not only useful as prescriptive manuals but as intellectual tools that, when critically adapted, illuminate the complexities of modern conflict, especially in environments shaped by rapid technological change and evolving geopolitical pressures.

In this sense, Sunzi's relevance is substantial yet bounded. His principles continue to enrich strategic thinking, but they thrive only when embedded within a pluralistic strategic canon capable of addressing the unprecedented technological and normative challenges of the current century. Sunzi offers a vocabulary for understanding uncertainty, deception, and adaptive advantage, yet, these insights must now coexist with frameworks that grapple with algorithmic agency, autonomous systems, and the ethical dilemmas of machine-mediated conflict. Recognising both the durability and the limits of his thought allows contemporary strategists to draw on Sunzi without treating him as a universal template. His value endures not as a comprehensive guide, but as one indispensable strand within a broader, evolving tapestry of strategic understanding that even modern strategists can still rely on its relevance today.

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Case Study 4 - To what extent is strategy understood differently from the perspective of different domains?

Author

Superintendent Clifford Tunuki, Solomon Islands

Superintendent Tunuki is the Director of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force Explosive Ordnance Disposal Department. He is a senior Police Officer serving in the organization for more than 20 years. He has experience in EOD and has played an important role in the development and professionalization of the Solomon Islands National EOD and unexploded Ordnance (UXO) capability. His responsibilities include overseeing the national response to unexploded ordnance, coordinating EOD operations and supporting the protection of communities from the continuing threat posed by World War II explosive remnants of war. Superintendent Tunuki is a graduate of the Australian Command and Staff Course class of 2025.

Strategy is a set of processes that connect action to achieve an outcome. The actions are deliberated through capability and capacity means, utilising resources and manpower to achieve objectives. The strategic approaches of land, sea, air, and cyber domains vary in peacetime but become interdependent in wartime. Power across each domain determines how objectives are achieved. While strategic principles such as achieving goals, allocating resources, and countering opponents are essential, they remain consistent across domains. Land, sea, air, and cyber domains are shaped by physical geography, operational limits, technology needs, and engagement. The land strategy focuses on territorial control and sustained presence; the naval strategy emphasises mobility, power projection and security; the air strategy prioritises speed, precision and air superiority; and the cyber strategy relies on disruption and asymmetry. This essay will explore how strategy is understood differently across each domain in both peacetime and wartime contexts, highlighting key principles and focal approaches in land, naval, air, and cyber strategy.

In the context of peacetime, the land domain approaches strategy differently from other domains by emphasising on territorial control, stability operations, and deterrence rather than direct conflict. While primarily focused for land-based operations, its strategy integrates diplomatic, economic, and development efforts to prevent conflicts. Land forces play a critical role in border security, peacekeeping, and humanitarian assistance, maintaining stability through sustained presence. Max Boot (2002), highlights that 'the complexity of conflicts in peacetime can be optimally addressed through the integration of diplomatic, economic and development efforts'.[1] In contrast to air and naval forces, which exert global influence without physical occupation, land forces provide a direct presence, asserting control over territory and populations. Charles Flynn and Timothy Devine (2024) assert that the land domain has played decisive roles in peacetime by seizing, holding and

[1] Bookey. "The Savage Wars Of Peace: America's Small Wars and the Rise of Global Power." Summary of Max Boot's book, [https://cdn.bookey.app/files/pdf/book/en/the-savage-wars-of-peace.pdf], accessed [25/02/2025]. 28

defending key land terrain to protect against infringement from adversaries.[2] A well-coordinated land domain strategy guarantees long-term security by promoting stability, deterring possible threats, and reinforcing national and international peace efforts. Through the integration of diplomatic, economic, and developmental initiatives, land forces are essential in establishing a secure and resilient geopolitical environment. Consequently, the land domain plays a crucial role in peacetime, distinguishing its strategic approach from other domains.

However, in wartime, the land domain integrates with air, naval, and cyber operations to form a unified force. Land forces depend on aerial assistance, naval logistics, and cyber capabilities for communication and electronic warfare. In warfare, land strategy is shaped by geographical factors, resource management, and terrain considerations. It uses approaches such as manoeuvre warfare, territorial control, and personnel deployment. While the land domain emphasizes land strategies, other domains offer substantial support to ground forces through diverse capabilities to accomplish objectives. For instance, manoeuvre warfare prioritizes movement, speed, and adaptability to secure positional superiority over the adversary, enabling forces to exploit vulnerabilities and disrupt enemy activities. The air domain supports ground troops with strategic aerial bombardment, while the naval domain offers substantial assistance through logistics and personnel mobility. The cyber realm facilitates support by disrupting the enemy's communication networks and vital infrastructure. Christopher Tuck et al. (2022) emphasise that 'the necessity of considering land warfare comprehensively is a concept further emphasized by the significance of non-land domains in land operations. Concerning synergy, combined warfare can enhance the combat effectiveness of each service'.[3] This connection not only underscores the distinctive nature of land strategy as a decisive element in wartime but also ensures the successful achievement of multi-domain objectives.

The land domain essentially views power as the primary means of achieving strategic objectives, differentiating it from other domains that rely more on deterrence, mobility, or technological dominance. In this context, power is demonstrated through physical force, economic influence and political control. Ground troops assert control by physically seizing and securing territory, making land power the most immediate and concrete manifestation of military strength. In contrast to air and naval forces, which can exert influence from a distance, land forces establish power through a sustained presence, securing control over both territory and populations while undermining key areas of the enemy. Christopher Tuck et al. (2022) argue that ' power is obtained by directing the pattern of conflict, which is accomplished by influencing the enemy's centres of gravity'.[4] Furthermore, this type of power is visible throughout history, as territorial control has often determined the outcome of battles and the development of long-term stability. For

[2] Flynn, Charles. & Devine, Timothy. 'Mobilise land power to contain China's Maritime ambitions, Vol. 150/9/1459. 2024.
This Essay was edited with the assistance of Grammarly accessed on 26 - 28/02/2025 and ChatGPT accessed on 26 - 28/02/2025. I have critically assessed and validated any generated feedback. The final version of the Essay is my own creation.
[3] Tuck Christopher et al, Understanding modern warfare, Chapter 1, Land Warfare in Theory. Copyright © 2022. Taylor & Francis Group. All rights reserved. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003096252-3, 24
[4] Tuck Christopher, et al.

instance, the post-World War II occupations of Germany and Japan proved how land forces could establish control, enforce government, and facilitate recovery. Moreover, land power extends beyond battlefield success, integrating economic, political, and diplomatic power, reinforcing the idea that military occupation can shape geopolitical outcomes. Christopher Tuck et al. (2022) argue that 'Land power, akin to other types of power, is a resultant phenomenon: it exists to the degree that one can achieve desired outcomes through the deployment of ground troops and capabilities'.[5] Although progress in aerial, naval, and cyber domains strengthens strategic capabilities, the capacity to control and rule land remains fundamental to military and political power. Consequently, the land domain's focus on power highlights its essential function in both conflict and peace.

The naval domain views strategy differently in the context of peacetime compared to wartime, highlighting deterrence, maritime security, and power projection. In a peacetime context, the naval domain perceives strategy as a tool to prevent conflict, maintain stability, and safeguard national interests. Power projection in peacetime is a key aspect of naval operations. It involves the demonstration of military capability to influence other states and actors without direct confrontation. This strategic presence not only enhances national security but also reinforces international order by ensuring the free flow of maritime trade and upholding navigation rights. To achieve these objectives, naval forces leverage their mobility and global reach to protect sea lines of communication, counter-piracy, and deter potential enemies. Historically, the importance of naval strategy in peacetime has been evident. For example, Till (2014), highlights the role of the naval domain during the Song dynasty's economic prosperity, where naval forces were instrumental in securing maritime economic trade routes mitigating piracy threats and other illegal actors.[6] Contrasting to land forces that prioritise territorial control, naval forces operate vast distances of the sea and conduct strategic consolidated operations to achieve their objectives. Moreover, naval forces can remain on the water, operationalising across disputed zones and maintaining a security presence over extended periods. Corbett (2005) further emphasises the necessity of naval presence, arguing that naval forces play a critical role in preventing the enemies from gaining control of the sea.[7] This strategic presence not only enhances national security but also reinforces international order by ensuring the free flow of maritime trade and upholding navigation rights.

On the other hand, in warfare, the naval domain collaborates with other domains as part of a unified effort to achieve a political objective. In this aspect, the land, naval, and air forces are jointly in combat with the strategic intention of achieving national and political objectives. For example, in the Battle of the Island Hopping campaign during World War II, US allied forces employed air, land, and naval domains to execute a strategic combined operation aimed at isolating key Japanese island strongholds through territorial control, sustained aerial bombardment, and significant naval ships and amphibious assaults with logistical support.[8] The conduct of Joint

[5] Tuck Christopher et al
[6] Till, Geoffrey. Sea Power: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014. 19
[7] Corbett S, Julian, Some principles of maritime strategy, The project Gutenberg e-book, 2005, 57
[8] The Pacific Strategy, 1941-1944, The National WWII

operations in war with a well-established strategy is crucial to achieving the best outcomes. Gilli and Grgic contend, multi-domains are a product of military power and seek to mitigate coercion, regulate escalation, and infiltrate contested areas within the context of prolonged competition.[9] Thus, while the naval domain focuses on deterrence and maritime security in a peacetime context, it perfectly integrates with other military domains in war to achieve strategic objectives through joint operations and sustained maritime presence.



Furthermore, the naval domain sees power as the key means of achieving its strategic objectives, relying on military, economic, and diplomatic leverage to maintain stability and achieve maritime supremacy. Naval power is crucial for deterrence, force projection, and securing sea channels of communication. All of these contribute to national and international stability. According to Mahan (1890), maritime strength significantly impacts geopolitical outcomes because it allows a nation to project influence, safeguard trade routes, and discourage possible adversaries.[10] This concept remains relevant in contemporary naval policy, as nations utilize naval assets to uphold maritime security, safeguard territorial waterways, and ensure the unimpeded flow of commerce. A vital element of naval power is the capacity to project force beyond state boundaries, showcasing military strength without direct involvement in hostilities. This phenomenon is apparent in contemporary maritime diplomacy, as nations position warships in strategic areas to demonstrate power and influence. For instance, Till (2014) highlights that naval presence in disputed waters, such as the South China Sea, serves as both a deterrent against aggression and a means of reinforcing territorial claims[11].

Museum,https://nationalww2museum.org

[9] Gilli Mauro & Grgic Gorana, NATO, multi-domain operations and the future of the Atlantic Alliance, https://doi.org/10.1080/01495933.2024.2445491, Taylor & Francis, 14/01/2025.

[10] Mahan, A. T. (1890). *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783*. Little, Brown, and Company.

[11] Till, Geoffrey. (2014)

Furthermore, naval power extends beyond military applications to economic and political domains. By securing sea lanes and ensuring maritime trade flows, naval forces contribute to global economic stability. Corbett (2005) argues that the strategic purpose of naval power is to achieve dominance at sea and shape the broader geopolitical landscape through sustained maritime presence.[12] Thus, naval power remains a central pillar in achieving national security and strategic objectives.

Within the peacetime context, the air domain uses strategy predominantly through the lenses of deterrence, surveillance, and rapid response capabilities. This perspective sets it apart from its wartime function, where it collaborates with other domains to execute joint operations. In times of peace, airpower functions as an instrument of strategic influence, maintaining air superiority through regular patrols, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance operations, alongside swift mobility for humanitarian aid and disaster response. For example, in 1966, during the counterinsurgency movements between the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia, the government's air power significantly provided rapid mobility, intelligence, surveillance, and humanitarian support, and consequently, the Revolutionary Armed Forces were incapacitated.[13] In contrast to land territorial control and naval capabilities, which frequently necessitate extended operations to establish dominance, air domain can extend influence rapidly across extensive ranges, allowing the conduct of its operations to bolster deterrence and preparedness. Stu Paton (2023) emphasises that effective deterrence seeks to attain strategic outcomes with minimal force use. It underscores air power's capacity to rapidly project military influence, hence augmenting deterrence through conventional methods.[14] Consequently, the air domain's unmatched velocity, range, and versatility render it an essential instrument for maintaining strategic influence during peacetime, bolstering deterrence, and ensuring swift response capabilities across many operational scenarios.

In wartime, the air domain shifts from a deterrence-oriented strategy to an integrated combat function, collaborating with land, naval, and cyber forces to fulfil strategic objectives.

Airpower employs critical roles, including close air support for ground forces, strategic bombing to undermine enemy infrastructure, and air superiority to prevent enemies from dominating the airspace.[15] The coordination of air and naval forces is essential for power projection, as aircraft carriers facilitate force deployment independent of land bases. The air domain is interconnected with the cyber and space domains, as contemporary air operations rely on satellite communications, GPS navigation, and electronic warfare to mitigate enemy defences. The interdependence of air strategy is crucial in multi-domain operations, facilitating rapid manoeuvring, force multiplication, and precision strikes while minimizing collateral

[12] Corbett, J. S. (2005).
[13] Chwartz, Norton A. " Air Power in Counterinsurgency and Stability Operations." PRISM 2, no. 2 (2011): 127-134. Published by Institute for National Strategic Security, National Defense University. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26469118. 8
[14] Patton, Stu. "Deterrence at Distance: Air Power and Conventional Deterrence in the Emerging Global Environment." Ministry of Defence © Crown Copyright 2023. https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/. 160
[15] Till, Geoffrey. (2014)

damage. For example, during the Italian campaign of World War II, these elements of strategic actions were employed through air and land operations, which led to the Allied forces' success.[16] This illustrates that the efficacy of airpower is determined not solely by its independent capabilities but also by its integration with other domains, thereby securing strategic superiority in contemporary combat.


Image: Department of Defence

The air domain views power as a main means of achieving its objective through speed, precision, and air superiority. Air power projects rapidly over extensive distances making it an essential asset in deterrence and warfare. Air superiority allows nations to control the battlespace from the air and enhance the mobility of land and naval forces to limit the enemy's encounter. Moreover, strategic aerial bombing and precision guided weapons also enable air forces to impact wars and reduce personnel danger, thus restrict the need to prolong land operations. For instance, during the Vietnam War, US troops depended on air superiority and superior firepower to execute search and destroy operations in the area. Unlike land and naval forces, which encounter geographical limitations and require significant time for mobilisation, air power uses strategy differently in the perspective of aerial encounters through vast distances, battlespace from air and precision of aerial bombardment. Pape (1996) argues that the psychological and political consequences of airpower increase its strategic importance, as demonstrated by coercive air campaigns designed to compel adversaries to surrender without direct occupation.[17] The unique attributes of airpower position it as a dominant component in contemporary military strategy, allowing it to influence battles more rapidly and decisively than ground or naval forces alone.

In peacetime, the cyber domain perceives strategy through deterrence, information security, and safeguarding digital infrastructure; nevertheless, in warfare, it integrates with other domains to fulfil strategic objectives. Cyber operations are essential to national security, safeguarding governmental systems, financial institutions, and military communications from hostile attacks. Moreover, cyber deterrence is achieved through active cyber defence, wherein states cultivate offensive capabilities to discourage potential enemies from initiating cyberattacks. An example of cyber deterrence through active cyber defence was the US elections in 2018, where cyber operations were launched to protect the process of the elections.[18] In contrast to other domains that depend on physical presence and

[16] Renner, Robert A. Allied Air Power comes of Age, The roles and contribution of air power to the Italian campaign.
[17] Pape, Robert A. "Coercive Air Power." In *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War*, 55–86. Cornell University Press, 1996. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt1287f6v.6.
[18] Tate, Ryan. "Transparent Cyber Deterrence," Joint Force Quaterly, no. 92 2019, 12 -18

kinetic powers, cyber strategy during peacetime emphasises the protection of essential networks, the prevention of espionage, and mitigating cyber threats posed by both state and non-state actors. This strategy emphasizes the protection of critical infrastructure and confidential data from illegal access and assaults. The White House (2003) emphasises the importance of cyber strategy in safeguarding cyberspace to secure national security and economic interests.[19] Furthermore, Criminal organisations and terrorist groups, which are termed non-state actors, pose cyber threats. These actors destroy available technologies to conduct cyber-attacks using robust defence systems. The Department of Homeland Security highlights that the main risks associated with non–state actors are the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Digital Platforms, Unmanned Systems and Additive Manufacturing. It further emphasises that the measures in place to counter the four risks are through joint training, lessons learned, regulating best practices, restricting ads, introducing new legislation to prevent threats and regulating the manufacturing processes.[20] This emphasis on cybersecurity and resilience distinguishes cyber strategy in peacetime from its wartime role, where it shifts towards offensive, disruption, and multi-domain coordination.

In wartime, cyber strategy becomes an integrated tool alongside land, air, naval, and space domains, enhancing the effectiveness of multi-domain operations. The cyber domain approach strategy through the integration into multi-domain operations and focusing on disruption of enemy systems, hybrid warfare and support kinetic operations. Cyberattacks can incapacitate enemy command and control systems, impair essential infrastructure, and diminish communication networks, so undermining an adversary's capacity to coordinate defences or initiate attacks. For example, in the initial Russian attack on Ukraine in 2022, Russia disrupted the telecommunication networks, interrupting the internet connections and aiming to target the Ukrainian forces. The Russian cyberattacks impacted Ukrainian critical infrastructures such as banks, energy and communication.[21] Contemporary wars increasingly integrate cyber warfare to enhance kinetic operations, as shown in hybrid warfare strategies where cyberattacks precede or coincide with physical confrontations. For example, military forces can execute cyberattacks to incapacitate air defence systems prior to an aerial assault or to disrupt enemy logistics by targeting supply chain networks. These factors shows how in in wartime, cyber strategy operates in conjunction with other domains to augment operational efficacy and strategic results. Strategy Policy (2023) argues that the war in Ukraine is a highly dynamic contested of wills across all domains.[22] Thus, while cyber strategy in peacetime focuses on defence, deterrence, and international stability, it shifts to offensive operations, disruption, and multi-domain integration in war, demonstrating its evolving and essential role in modern warfare.

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[19] The White House, The National Strategy to Secure Cyberspace, Washington, DC; February 2003, 2

[20] Department of Homeland Security, Addressing risks from non-state actors, Use of Commercially available Technologies"Analytic Exchange Program, 2023. https://www.dhs.gov/publication/2022-aep-deliverables

[21] Nagl, John A, and Katie, Crombe, A call to action: Lessons from Ukraine for the future force. Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2024

[22] Strategic Policy. 2022. "Russia's War in Ukraine: What are the emerging military lessons?" Strategic Survey 122, no. 1: 31-74. https://doi.org/10.1080/04597230.2022.2145088.

The cyber domain is increasingly regarded as a superior type of power compared to other military domains, owing to its capacity to impact global security, economics, and political systems without the necessity of physical force. The capacity to undermine essential infrastructure, influence public opinion, and execute cyber-enabled economic warfare gives cyber power a strategic superiority that transcends conventional military capabilities. For example, in the Russia – Georgia war in 2018, the Russian cyber forces targeted the Georgian government and media websites by defacing and interpreting misinformation, disrupting financial institutions and causing economic instability.[23] Unlike land, naval, and air power, which rely on territorial control and kinetic force, cyber power operates in an invisible, borderless space where states and non-state actors can project influence through information dominance, cyber espionage, and digital coercion. Bonner (2013) argues that 'cyber reconnaissance and cyber superiority could conduct cyber operations effectively in an indirect way'.[24] The growing reliance on digital infrastructure for military, economic, and societal operations enhances cyber power, rendering it a pivotal instrument in contemporary statecraft. Consequently, whereas land, sea, and air domains are vital for conventional warfare, cyber capabilities are distinctly poised to influence global security dynamics in both peacetime and wartime.

In conclusion, during peacetime, the strategic domains of land, sea, air, and cyber function independently, emphasising stability, deterrence, surveillance, and security. Land forces perform stability and border operations, naval forces monitor maritime routes, air forces do rapid response operations, and cyber forces safeguard against digital threats. During wartime, the strategic integration of land, sea, air, and cyber domains operates interdependently to enhance the operational efficacy of each domain. This interconnection guarantees that military operations are effectively coordinated, adaptable, and able to respond to intricate emerging combat. Moreover, power functions as an effective instrument in every sector that dictates the successful attainment of objectives. Although each domain possesses unique traits of power, their efficacy is realised through strategic emphasis. Land power offers physical presence, naval power enables force projection, air power provides rapid air superiority, and cyber power employs a borderless approach. While each domain applies strategy differently based on its distinct operational realities, their collective effectiveness is achieved through a cohesive and adaptive strategic framework that ensures military success in both peace and war.

[23] Bonner, E. Lincoln III. "Cyber Power in 21st Century Joint Warfare"Joint Force Quarterly no. 68, 2013: 76-83

[24] Bonner E. Lincoln III. "Cyber Power in 21st century joint warfare, Joint Force Quarterly, no. 68, 2013, 103

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