

Partner & Regional Perspectives on Pacific Maritime Governance



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FRONT MATTER

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Publication note

The eleven briefs in this compilation were **originally published in February 2025 by the East-West Center as an Asia-Pacific Bulletin series**. The original publications can be accessed [here](#).

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Cover image

Title: Coast Guard, partners complete co-operative Pacific surveillance operation

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Publication Note

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Competition between China, the United States and other powers has increased, impacting over how countries cooperate in the Indo-Pacific.

Within this broader area, the Pacific which, since the end of the Cold War, had been largely dormant from a geopolitical perspective, has gained renewed strategic importance for China, the US and their allies and partners.

As Pacific states gained independence over the latter half of the twentieth century, they became international players with sovereign rights. And as developing states, their limitations for governing their expansive maritime territories became evident. The ocean, an essential source of culture and resources, become home to increasingly problematic non-state actor threats. Now, climate change has become an urgent threat for these territories, many of whose existence is threatened by rising sea levels. In 2018, the Boe Declaration of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), the principal political and economic group in the region, listed climate change as the single greatest threat to Pacific peoples.

INTRODUCTION

By
Gabriela
Wurst

Meanwhile, amid heightened great power rivalry around the world, external actors seek to define and defend their own interests in the Pacific region. Therefore, to understand the dynamics of maritime governance in the Pacific, several factors need to be accounted for: the perspectives, interests and limitations of Pacific island countries (PICs) (and their agency as sovereign powers), the motivations of external powers in the region, and traditional and nontraditional threats that affect governance in the Pacific. Also, is there a way to manage geopolitical competition in the Pacific?

Brief overview of the series

The present collection of briefs explores these factors in order to shed light on the dynamics of maritime governance in the Pacific. Its reports offer insights into the following questions: What dynamics are shaping maritime governance in the Pacific? And, how are external partners contributing to Pacific maritime governance?

The series opens with three issue-based briefs, before diving into the contributions of eight extra-regional powers to Pacific maritime governance. The former highlight the PICs perspective of the challenges they face and their struggle to push their regional agenda forward, their vulnerabilities and the opportunities for cooperation in the region, and legal challenges for cooperation, respectively. The eight reports that follow focus on individual external partner states' objectives in the region, their key policies and activities, the unique resources they can contribute to support governance in the Pacific and their key challenges and barriers in the region. The partners analyzed are Australia, the US, New Zealand, Japan, China, the United Kingdom, France, and South Korea.

Underlying themes

Different viewpoints driving cooperation

Despite being sovereign states (although, as Maima Koro points out in this series, decolonization is an ongoing process), PICs must navigate great power competition in their region whilst facing security and governance concerns of their own. At the same time, these states leverage the increased interest in their region to benefit from much needed cooperation (from the US, China and others) to overcome development challenges. Within this dynamic there are “mutual contradictions”, as Koro argues in this volume, the incongruent priorities and policies which arise from different threat perceptions and concerns.

For the US and its allies and partners, their driver for increased participation in the region is ultimately to ensure enhanced maritime governance in alignment with the ‘free and open Indo-Pacific’ concept, meant to counter revisionist aims, adjustments to status quo international order, and transnational crime. According to the 2022 National Security Strategy, China has “the intention and, increasingly, the capacity to reshape the international order in favor of one that tilts the global playing field to its benefit...”. In the Pacific, among China’s main goals are to “reshape the international maritime order in ways more aligned with PRC interests [and] set terms favorable to PRC military and commercial actors”, Brian Waidelich indicates in this volume.

Parallel efforts regarding China

The efforts of the US and its partners and allies run parallel to China’s contributions to maritime governance in the Pacific. As Waidelich points out, China seeks to reduce the influence of the US and Australia in the region; meanwhile, those states seek to dissuade PICs from engaging in security cooperation with China. Not only does this lead to increased tensions, but also increased distrust and heightened threat perceptions as many of these initiatives lack transparency. A prominent example is the China-Solomon Islands security pact, which “exacerbated anxieties over a possible People’s Liberation Army base near Australia”, writes Waidelich. Another concern was over the possibility of China rebuilding a World War II era airstrip in Kiribati, as noted by Senator Benjamin L. Cardin at a Senate hearing in March 2024.

There is not yet a mechanism to manage geopolitical competition in the Pacific islands. Both China and the US are dialogue partners in the PIF, yet there do not seem to be any palpable efforts sufficient to manage competition or promote cooperation toward complementary aims. Such goals seem a long way off, perhaps impossible in the current competitive era. Thus, this project had more modest goals. The experts assembled were tasked with creating comprehensive, yet succinct analytical summaries. Together, these take stock of the efforts of the region’s external partners goal and activities. This should lay foundations for future efforts.

Key Takeaways

- The Blue Pacific Continent is a **unifying identity** based on a Pacific perspective which accounts for its culture, heritage, and decolonization (Maima Koro in this series).
- Differing threat perceptions are seen in instances of **mutual contradictions**, as Koro indicates, such as AUKUS: while the Australia, UK, US security pact is viewed by these partners as making the region safer through the presence of nuclear-powered submarines, the partnership contradicts the Pacific's nuclear-free zone treaty.
- One of the Pacific's main **vulnerabilities** stems from its vastness, making it inherently difficult for PICs to effectively manage threats such as illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) and transnational maritime crime, as Tranform Aqorau writes. Combining **cooperative frameworks with technology** is key to a more resilient region.
- Daniel Mandell identifies and analyzes two main **legal challenges** that PICs face: the need for further agreements to increase their capacities for maritime governance and their lack of domestic legal capacity.
- **Australia** and **New Zealand** are uniquely positioned to advance maritime governance in the Pacific as members of the PIF. Australia is the largest donor to the region and seeks to be its "overall credible security partner of choice". New Zealand holds its own particularity, as its strategy and narrative towards the Pacific highlight shared heritage and, thus, leverages soft power as an important resource. Anthony Bergin and Henrietta McNeill explore these states' contributions.
- Wade Jones explores how the **US** seeks stability in the Pacific through defense cooperation, fisheries enforcement, diplomacy, and humanitarian assistance.
- Brian Waidelich analyzes **China's** drivers, actions and limitations in the region, as it seeks to grow its influence and reshape the maritime order in the region.

- **France** has an extensive part of its EEZ situated in the Pacific and is the “only European country capable of making a substantial security contribution to the South Pacific”, Céline Pajon writes, with a permanent military presence in the region. The **UK** also supports efforts in upholding the law of the sea and FOIP, yet to a lesser extent than its European counterpart. As Scott Edwards points out, further engagement in the “distant and relatively unconnected South Pacific” is difficult to justify domestically.
- **Japan’s** contributions to Pacific maritime governance are driven by its FOIP vision (see Yurika Ishii in this series). It is one of the region's main donors, providing 8% of the total aid to the region between 2008 and 2022 (Lowy Institute, 2024). Meanwhile, **South Korea’s** engagement is constrained by limited resources, geopolitical tensions and more pressing concerns closer to its immediate region, as seen in Wooyeal Paik’s analysis.

An important note

The months since the Donald Trump administration took power have seen sweeping changes regarding international assistance, a soft power tool used extensively in the Pacific islands by the United States. Also, regarding climate change, the US has withdrawn from the Paris Agreement and promoted policies that seek to loosen environmental controls.

It is important to note that these articles were written and edited in late 2024 and therefore reflect the world as the authors understood it to be at that time.

Mutual Contradictions: Pacific Islands Cooperation for Maritime Security with Global Powers

By Maima Koro¹

Blue Pacific: Reframing Global Understandings of the Pacific

Inspired by Epeli Ha'uofa's vision of the Pacific as large ocean continents in his Our Sea of Islands, Pacific Leaders in 2017 endorsed the Blue Pacific Continent as a unifying identity for the Pacific. "This powerful corrective image drawn to counter the dominant Western view of Pacific Islands as isolated, nonviable economies has so far gone unchallenged."

Thus, in this paper, Pacific refers to the Blue Pacific Continent endorsed by the Pacific Islands Forum. Though the Blue Pacific conceptualisation extends beyond the 18 member countries of the PIF, the PIF sets the regional political and security agenda of the region.

The Blue Pacific identity is not a "fancy concept"; it is about the collective heritage of the people of the Pacific. Maritime security is primarily viewed through these ecological anthropic lenses, and the historical experience of the Pacific. The officially endorsed Blue Pacific concept represents "a long-term Forum foreign policy commitment to act as one Blue Continent." In launching the Blue Pacific concept, Tuilaepa Sailele Malilelegaoi, then prime minister of Samoa stated: "international law and instruments confer rights on Pacific communities relating to the use of the ocean and its resources...especially for sustainable development...but the Blue Pacific is more than that..." It ensures a unified approach so that the unique priorities of the region are not marginalised and/or subsumed in a global agenda.

Region of Mutual Contradictions

Mutual contradictions is "where things are viewed as essential elements of a complex yet interconnected whole." It is a way of thinking that does not embrace the notion of 'mutual competition' or the idea of 'either-or'. Instead, it embraces the 'both-and' ways of thinking that leads to fluidity and negotiability. In the multitude of arrangements and agreements that the Pacific countries are signed into with global powers, there are advantages and benefits on both sides, but the benefits are not necessarily mutual as countries pursue their national interest. In the context of maritime security, as summed up by the Samoa Prime Minister, cooperation with global powers in reality means "we spend our time navigating the larger powers and those who have set rules." This is not to say in any regard that Pacific people just give in. Definitely not, as communal relational societies, collaboration is a way of life. Negotiation for the sake of survival and peace underpins everything.

[1] Maima Koro is a Pacific Research Fellow at Adelaide University.

The Pacific is a region of mutual contradictions. Maritime security for Pacific countries is closely linked to the health of the ocean and the sustainable use of its resources. Illegal and unreported fishing remains a priority, as does the climate change and nuclear nexus, the rise of cross boundary transnational crime, and deep sea mining.

Colonial control drew and redrew boundaries to ‘exert geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economic interests, and create and maintain global order and worldviews.’ The decolonisation agenda for the Pacific is ongoing and urgent with Pacific Leaders expressing concerns with the unfortunate violent situation in New Caledonia. Colonial presence also persists in French Polynesia and Wallis & Futuna. The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, Hawaii, and American Samoa remain territories under the US authority while The Federated States of Micronesia, Palau and the Republic of the Marshall Islands have Compact arrangements with the US. Similarly, New Zealand has Realm arrangements with the Cook Islands, Niue, and Tokelau.

These mutual contradictions are constant and are often inconsistent with international law and norms. The region’s increasing militarisation is symbolised by the AUKUS trilateral security partnership, that will deliver nuclear powered submarines to the region. This is a significant mutual contradiction as Australia is a member of PIF and a signatory to the 1985 South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty. Militarisation is also clear through security agreements such as the 2024 US-Fiji Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement, 2024 Fiji-France Status of Forces Agreement, 2023 US-PNG Defense Cooperation, and 2022 PNG and France Status of Forces Agreement 2022. The heightened militarisation of the US Compact states remains a concern for Pacific peoples.

Cooperation: Whose Interest Matters?

Pacific countries observe a ‘friends to all and enemies to none’ collaborative approach to global partnerships. Understanding the practicalities of the mutual contradictions of life, in line with their relational values, Pacific countries seek to deconflict and instead seek to collaborate for their development aspirations. In 2022, Honourable Prime Minister Fiamē Naomi Mata’afa stated that global powers are “dragging us in” to the Indo-Pacific, yet, “[w]e have been in partnership with these major powers for a long time. What’s new now that they seem to be seeking support in the Pacific?”

From the Pacific perspective, there is a double standard in being told how to conduct foreign relationships with respective partners and that they do understand the nuances of geopolitics. In 2019 the Samoa Prime Minister pointed out that it was unfair to be warned not to have relations with China yet Australia and even the US have significant trading relationships with China. She stated that it is the role of governments whether big or small to “ultimately make the decisions for the good of their respective countries.”

Relational Governance

Maritime security is about the capacity to enforce the framework of rules and norms for the “good order at sea.” However, it is widely accepted that the international community has issues with enforcement of international rules. Pacific countries exercise their own form of governance in complementarity to the international laws and norms. Relational governance is a whole of life consciousness grounded on the interconnectedness of all dimensions of life (people, land, ocean, customs, communities, ancestors and spirits) where relationships is the mechanism of and for order. This relational understanding is mandated in the birth and the spirit of the Blue Pacific identity and the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. Attention is carefully paid to relationships as the context defines the rules of engagement in any relationship across all levels. Relationship is the underpinning value of security, order and economic wellbeing for the people of the Pacific. This belief was present in the process where the Prime Minister of Fiji, Sitiveni Rabuka undertook to bring back Kiribati to the Pacific Islands Forum. The Honourable Prime Minister performed a vanua (land) diplomatic process that included Pacific values such as faith (religion), culture (respect, sincerity, trust) and Fiji customs of connections and kinship (sevusevu and boka) in the form of an apology to Kiribati to return to the Pacific Islands Forum.

Also present through the sharing of resources. For example, it took over forty years for some Pacific countries to establish the Pacific Nauru Agreement (PNA) in 1982 without external partners to claw back some benefits of the Pacific ocean. According to Professor Transform Aqorau, the key architect of the PNA, “for a long time we were really played off by the foreign fishing operators. It was quite unfair how distant water fishing nations, for the better part of 30 years, did not pay us for the true value of our tuna...I think that we are still fighting these inequalities, but what we have been able to demonstrate is that with the right motivation we can do it for all our shared resources.” This relational governance is also evident in the Tirvau Agreement between the governments of Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, a maritime border agreement based on a strong and historical heritage of trade and inter-island movements that predates modern maritime boundaries. This approach was formally endorsed in 2016 as the UN Mota Lava Treaty between the Solomon Islands and the Republic of Vanuatu concerning maritime boundaries. Also, evident when the cultural leaders of the Tafea Province of Vanuatu peacefully demanded a resolution over the disputed islands of Mathew and Hunter through a cultural petition to French President Macron in July 2023. In 2022, the government of Tuvalu launched its Falepili (good neighbour) foreign policy which is based on Tuvalu’s culture and relational values. Last month, Tuvalu formally endorsed the Australia Tuvalu Falepili Union paving the way for Australia to defend Tuvalu in the face of military aggression.

Conclusion

Maritime governance in the Pacific context is about navigating the reality of mutual contradictions that exist in the Blue Pacific region, leveraging on the mandate of the international rules and norms, complemented by Pacific values and beliefs. Cooperation

for maritime security from a Pacific perspective is not confined to the ocean but extends to include the land, the people and the environment given that in the Pacific, “maritime” is the way of life.

Maritime Threats in the Pacific Islands Region: Vulnerabilities and Opportunities for Cooperative Action and Technological Solutions

By Transform Aqorau²

The Pacific Islands region, characterized by its vast maritime expanses and rich marine biodiversity, faces a complex array of maritime threats that challenge its economic development, environmental sustainability, and regional security. These threats, ranging from illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing to climate change, transnational crime, and marine pollution, exploit the inherent vulnerabilities of Pacific Island nations. However, while the region's geographical isolation and limited resources exacerbate these vulnerabilities, they also present unique opportunities for cooperative action, including regional partnerships and the strategic use of technology to address and mitigate these challenges. This paper explores both the vulnerabilities faced by Pacific Island nations in maritime security and the opportunities for leveraging cooperative mechanisms and technology to safeguard the region's maritime interests.

Vulnerabilities of Pacific Island Nations

1. Geographic Isolation and Vast Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs)

One of the defining characteristics of Pacific Island nations is the vastness of their maritime domains relative to their landmasses. Countries such as Kiribati, the Solomon Islands, and the Marshall Islands possess large Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) that extend millions of square kilometres, granting them sovereignty over significant marine resources. However, this expansive maritime territory presents considerable governance and enforcement challenges.

The sheer size of these EEZs, combined with limited naval and aerial surveillance capabilities, leaves these areas vulnerable to illicit activities such as IUU fishing, which depletes fish stocks and threatens the livelihoods of coastal communities dependent on fishing. IUU fishing not only undermines sustainable fisheries management but also results in substantial economic losses for Pacific Island nations, whose economies are highly dependent on marine resources. For instance, the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) estimates that IUU fishing costs Pacific nations approximately \$616 million annually.

2. Climate Change and Environmental Degradation

Pacific Island nations are at the forefront of climate change, with rising sea levels, ocean acidification, and increasingly frequent extreme weather events posing direct threats to

[2] Transform Aqorau is CEO at iTuna Intel. He is also Vice-Chancellor at Solomon Islands National University.

their maritime environments and economies. Coral reefs, which play a crucial role in supporting fisheries and coastal protection, are particularly vulnerable to ocean warming and acidification. These changes impact marine biodiversity and disrupt the livelihoods of communities reliant on these ecosystems.

Furthermore, climate change-induced sea-level rise threatens the very existence of low-lying atoll nations such as Tuvalu and Kiribati. As sea levels rise, coastal erosion increases, and saltwater intrusion into freshwater supplies threatens food security and public health. The vulnerabilities of these nations extend beyond environmental degradation to include displacement and the erosion of state sovereignty, as rising seas may necessitate population relocations.

3. Transnational Maritime Crime

The vast and porous maritime borders of Pacific Island nations make the region susceptible to transnational maritime crimes such as human trafficking, drug smuggling, and arms trafficking. Organised criminal networks exploit weak maritime law enforcement capabilities and the limited presence of security forces to conduct illicit activities that not only threaten regional security but also undermine governance and the rule of law. The lack of surveillance infrastructure, combined with the difficulty of patrolling such vast maritime areas, exacerbates the region's vulnerability to these transnational threats.

Opportunities for Cooperative Action

Despite the significant vulnerabilities faced by Pacific Island nations, there are promising opportunities for cooperative action at the regional and international levels to strengthen maritime security and resilience. By leveraging regional frameworks and engaging in multilateral partnerships, Pacific Island nations can enhance their collective capacity to address maritime threats.

1. Strengthening Regional Organizations and Cooperation Mechanisms

Regional organizations such as the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and the FFA play pivotal roles in facilitating cooperation among Pacific Island nations on maritime issues. The FFA, for instance, coordinates regional efforts to combat IUU fishing through initiatives such as the Regional Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance (MCS) Network. By pooling resources and expertise, Pacific Island nations can strengthen their surveillance and enforcement capabilities, making it more difficult for illicit actors to operate with impunity.

The Niue Treaty Subsidiary Agreement (NTSA), which allows for the cooperative enforcement of fisheries laws across EEZs in the region, is a prime example of

regional cooperation in action. Under this treaty, countries can conduct joint patrols, share information, and apprehend vessels engaged in IUU fishing activities across multiple jurisdictions. This type of cooperation not only enhances the capacity of individual nations but also ensures a unified approach to maritime security across the region.

2. Engaging International Partners

International partnerships offer significant potential for enhancing the maritime security capabilities of Pacific Island nations. The involvement of partners such as Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Japan, and the European Union has been instrumental in providing both financial and technical support for capacity-building initiatives.

For example, the Australian government's Pacific Maritime Security Program (PMSP) has provided Pacific Island nations with Guardian-class patrol boats, which are critical assets for conducting surveillance and enforcing maritime laws. In addition to material support, these partnerships often include training and capacity-building components that equip local maritime authorities with the skills and knowledge needed to address maritime threats.

Moreover, international organisations such as the United Nations and its agencies, including the International Maritime Organization (IMO), play key roles in fostering global cooperation on issues such as marine pollution and climate change. Pacific Island nations, by participating in these forums, can advocate for stronger international action to address global challenges that disproportionately impact the region.

The Role of Technology in Enhancing Maritime Security

While cooperative action is essential, the strategic deployment of technology can significantly enhance the ability of Pacific Island nations to monitor, protect, and manage their vast maritime territories. Advances in surveillance, data analytics, and environmental monitoring technologies offer practical solutions to the unique challenges faced by the region.

1. Satellite Surveillance and Remote Sensing

The development of satellite-based surveillance technologies has transformed the way in which maritime areas are monitored. By using remote sensing technology, Pacific Island nations can monitor large areas of their EEZs in real-time, detecting suspicious activities such as illegal fishing, transshipment, and vessel movement.

One notable example of this technological approach is the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency's use of the Pacific Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance (PMCS) programme, which integrates satellite imagery, vessel tracking systems, and data analytics to monitor fishing activities across the region. The implementation of automatic identification systems (AIS) and vessel monitoring systems (VMS) further enables authorities to track vessels and detect anomalies that may indicate illegal activity.

This type of technological innovation enhances the effectiveness of traditional patrol efforts, allowing limited resources to be deployed more strategically. It also fosters greater transparency in fishing operations, as vessels can be tracked and monitored in real-time, ensuring compliance with fisheries regulations.

2. Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and Drones

The use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and drones presents a cost-effective solution for monitoring maritime areas that are difficult to access or patrol regularly. UAVs can be deployed to conduct surveillance, monitor marine protected areas, and detect illegal activities without the need for extensive personnel or infrastructure.

In combination with satellite surveillance, UAVs provide a flexible and mobile means of conducting real-time reconnaissance and data collection. This is particularly valuable for Pacific Island nations with limited naval and aerial assets, as drones can be used to enhance the range and frequency of patrols.

3. Environmental Monitoring and Data Collection

Technological advancements in environmental monitoring are crucial for addressing the long-term impacts of climate change and environmental degradation in the Pacific Islands region. Sensors, buoys, and other monitoring technologies can be deployed to collect real-time data on ocean conditions, sea levels, and marine biodiversity. This data is vital for informing climate adaptation strategies, fisheries management, and disaster preparedness.

For instance, the deployment of oceanographic sensors and monitoring stations can help Pacific Island nations track changes in sea temperature, ocean acidification, and coral health, providing early warning of environmental changes that could affect marine ecosystems and fisheries. Additionally, real-time data collection can inform decision-making processes, enabling governments to respond more effectively to climate-induced challenges.

Legal Challenges in Maritime Governance Cooperation in the Pacific Islands Region

By Daniel Mandell³

Despite being small in land mass, population, and economic size, under international law the more than one dozen Pacific Island Countries (PICs) have de jure control of vast exclusive economic zones (EEZs) that total more than 19 million square kilometers, an area that is larger than Russia. However, most of the small countries have significant development needs, and many lack the domestic capacity to effectively govern their expansive maritime domains. This fact explains why the PICs' leaders have welcomed the assistance of countries with more developed maritime capabilities, including the United States, Japan, Australia, and China. These development partners have provided a range of assistance, including the donations of new patrol vessels and technology, training, and ship-rider programs that enable military and maritime law enforcement officers from the development partners to engage in police actions within a PIC's waters (for examples, see [1], [2], [3], [4] and [5]). From a legal perspective, the goal of increasing cooperation and collaboration even further will require overcoming challenges in two distinct areas: negotiating additional bi- and multi-lateral agreements, and a lack of domestic legal capacity.

With regard to the first challenge area, in order to ensure that any maritime governance activity by a development partner complies with all relevant national and international laws (in addition to international treaties such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, there are also several regional agreements and plans that bear on maritime governance and cooperation in the Pacific), agreements will need to be negotiated between each development partner and each PIC in whose waters activity is to take place. Many such agreements are already in place, such as the ship-rider agreements that the United States has in place with 12 of the PICs. These agreements permit U.S. Coast Guard officers to enforce maritime regulations of the host nation unilaterally, alongside, or with the consent of a PIC official (for instance, see [1], [2], and [3]). Other agreements are in the early stages of being drafted and implemented, such as the recently agreed to Pacific Policing Initiative that will create up to four regional police training centers and a multinational crisis reaction force. But as cooperation increases, new agreements may be needed to cover new areas of activity, as well as to govern access to and the sharing of information and technology. Small, technical details cannot be overlooked: from carrying weapons to operating vehicles, foreign military and security personnel must have the requisite legal permissions to avoid violating local laws. Multilateral activities, such as training exercises, require an additional set of agreements covering everything from liability for accidents to the purchase of fuel for ships.

[3] Daniel Mandell is a Visiting Assistant Professor at Chicago-Kent College of Law. He previously served as Legal Counsel in the Office of the President of the Republic of Palau.

The need to complete this web of agreements leads to the second area that requires attention: the PICs' lack of domestic legal capacity. Whereas larger countries like the United States, Japan, and Australia have teams of experienced lawyers to negotiate and draft all of the required agreements, the PICs do not. Taking Palau as an example, the Office of the President has only two or three lawyers who must provide services to the entire executive branch; historically, these lawyers have been American civilians who stay in their position for no more than four years. The level of expertise and institutional knowledge that a country like Palau can bring to the negotiating table is thus very limited, representing a development challenge that can make it more difficult to negotiate and comply with complex agreements within the context of a long-term relationship.

As challenging as it is to set up cooperation and collaboration on the front end of the maritime governance process, the back end can be just as much of an issue. In the event a police action leads to an arrest, the relevant PIC must be able to prosecute the offender in its local courts. But here, too, the PICs face limited domestic capacities. As Justin Tkatchenko, the former foreign minister of Papua New Guinea put it, “[o]ur police are very good at getting the arrest done, but I think the problem that we have in PNG is in concluding the process and making sure that that person ends up in jail and gets the full force of the law put upon them.”

The United States, Japan, Australia, and other development partners can cooperate to help the PICs overcome these legal challenges by helping them further develop their domestic legal capacities. Many examples of such cooperation already exist. The United Kingdom has provided funding to help the PICs obtain the technical expertise they need to complete extended continental shelf submissions. The Quad has announced a maritime legal dialogue under the Quad Maritime Security Working Group “to focus our expertise on international law of the sea issues in support of our efforts to uphold the rules-based maritime order in the Indo-Pacific.” China has signed a security pact with the Solomon Islands to strengthen the Solomons’ “police law enforcement capacity.” Providing experts, consultants, or even detailing and embedding officials from their own governments within the PIC governments would help to ensure that the PICs are able to negotiate all of the required agreements – such as those that permit a foreign security official to act within a PIC’s jurisdiction – as well as have the skills and personnel needed prosecute complex international crimes. The U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance and Training (OPDAT) has programs designed to build the capacity of foreign prosecutors, investigators, and judges; increasing the funding of this office and others like it so that they can assist the PICs could be useful. The PICs and their development partners could also develop a single, multilateral agreement or convention that would provide the framework for cooperation in the maritime governance sphere and obviate the need for separate bilateral agreements.

The need for many legal agreements and additional legal capacity represents a large challenge to effective maritime governance in the Pacific. But this big challenge is not insurmountable. The United States, Japan, Australia, and other development partners, together with the PICs themselves, have already made significant progress in establishing the framework to facilitate continued cooperation in the area, providing funding for the needed personnel, and helping train local officials. By continuing to help the PICs further develop their own domestic legal capacities, these countries will be able to enable the small islands to better protect their large maritime domains.

Australia's Contributions to Pacific Maritime Governance

By Anthony Bergin⁴

Australia's Maritime Governance Objectives in the Pacific

When it comes to strengthening Pacific maritime governance, Australia's principal objective is to support the regional security architecture through bilateral and multilateral engagement. Australia is an original member of the Pacific Islands Forum. Australia desires a strengthening of law and order at sea while respecting Pacific priorities. Given the increasing strategic competition for influence in the Pacific, including security cooperation, as a member of the Pacific family, Australia **aims to be the overall credible security partner of choice** for the region.

Australia's Key Policies and Activities

The principal policies and activities revolve around the Pacific Maritime Security Program. The PMSP is a comprehensive package of capability building, infrastructure development, sustainment, training, and coordination activities designed to enhance regional maritime security for Pacific Island nations. The PMSP replaces and builds on the long partnership with the islands through Australia's original Pacific Patrol Boat Program, which provided 22 boats to 12 Pacific Island countries between 1987 and 1995. The replacement Guardian-class Patrol Boats (GPBs) are 39.5-metre, steel-hull patrol boats that are manufactured in Western Australia. Thirteen nations are receiving GPBs as sovereign assets with a shared support system built on partnership. Those nations are also receiving support to upgrade their wharves to support the new craft. Thus far, twenty vessels have been handed over to Pacific Island countries: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

The PMSP is not a simple a transfer-and-forget project. Thirty-three Australian maritime security advisers (MSAs) and technical advisors (senior sailors with marine engineering or electrical specialisations) have deployed to recipient countries. Australia also provides fuel for multilateral GPB surveillance operations, including for four annual Forum Fisheries Operations. GPB crews receive opportunities for comprehensive training in Australia and Pacific Island countries to operate, manage and maintain their vessels.

Australia is in the process of offering PMSP partners vertical take-off, commercial off the shelf drones for each GPB, as well as training associated with operating them. The small drones are intended to operate from the GPBs. They will provide the vessel's crew with

[4] Dr Anthony Bergin is a senior fellow at Strategic Analysis Australia and an expert associate at ANU National Security College.

better situational awareness, and increasing their efficacy during surveillance, boarding, and search and rescue operations. The drones are expected to be rolled out early 2025.

Australia also makes key contributions to regional aerial surveillance operations. It seconded personnel to the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) in Solomon Islands to support regional surveillance coordination. Australia supports 1440 hours of annual air surveillance to be flown day and night through a contracted program operationally managed by FFA. In December 2023 Australia gifted two PAC-750XL aircraft to the PNG Defense Forces for transport, search and rescue, and surveillance.

The Australian Federal Police has provided small craft for local marine policing to Vanuatu and PNG. Australia has extended maritime surveillance cooperation support to the region through the Pacific Quad (Australia, France, New Zealand and the United States), as well as through the France, Australia, New Zealand Arrangement (FRANZ) that coordinates regional disaster response.

In terms of supporting ocean science that underpins ocean development and maritime governance, Australia, with the US and New Zealand, is funding a \$34 million fisheries and ocean science research vessel for the Pacific. The vessel will have missions ranging from tuna tagging, deploying instruments for ocean observation, and implementing bathymetry surveys. This is important because most Pacific Islands don't have research vessels of their own, but have significant ocean science needs.

Australia funds the Pacific Fusion Centre in Vanuatu, which facilitates research, information-sharing, and coordination between PIF members to address security challenges, particularly those of ocean governance and maritime security. In August 2024 Australia committed \$400 million over five years for a Pacific Policing Initiative that would cover responding to illicit maritime activities. Australia is the leader in the initiative. But this is a regional initiative of pooling resources for the Pacific by the Pacific. The PPI includes up to four regional police training centres located in the region, a Pacific Police Support Group to deploy in response to island country requirements, and a coordination hub in Brisbane.

Unique Resources Australia Can Contribute to the Pacific

The PMSP aims to assist the Pacific response to threats and challenges like IUU fishing, drug trafficking, people smuggling, medical evacuations, disaster relief, and search and rescue. But it's really the "cradle to the grave" nature of the PMSP in terms of Australian partnership that makes it unusual: it incorporates maritime operations, training, enhanced aerial surveillance, and regional coordination.

The islands prioritise how the vessels are used, not Australia. This supports the agency of the island states and builds trust with Australia's Pacific Island neighbours. The PMSP

is a 30-year program valued at \$5.9 billion. It's been strongly supported over time by all the major political parties in Australia.

The PMSP is not based on geopolitical competition, even though there is increased strategic competition in the region. In 2019, for example, China donated a hydrographic vessel to Fiji. But China hasn't yet delivered its broader maritime domain awareness capabilities to the region (see the China paper in this series, and generally [1], [2], [3], and [4]).

Australia is considered a Pacific Island nation not by virtue of its geographic boundaries — it straddles the Indian and Southern Oceans too — but because Australia is an original member of the Pacific Island Forum, an organization with considerable scope for decision-making. That makes Australia the largest and most influential PIF member of the regional family, with the most resources to put into achieving PIF outcomes. It gives Australia a privileged regional position, including when it comes to supporting maritime governance through engagement that's Pacific-led, paying close attention to both regional and individual island state needs. But it is also something that Australia needs to balance, so as not to be overbearing. Some island states are wary of Australia's oversized influence at times.

Overall, the evidence is that Australia's emphasis on friendship with the island states, combined with a practical focus on maritime capacity building, has worked to build strategic trust between the islands and Australia.

No other countries have such a wide network of MSAs in the region. Australian naval officers have been based in the region, supporting the Australian donated patrol boats, since 1987. The MSA's are critical in building capacity and capability of nations. They play an important role in the development of maritime surveillance policies in the recipient countries.

Finally, Australia is the only country with a resident diplomatic presence in every sovereign Pacific Island country. This allows for better relationship building. Australia is also the largest aid donor by far to the region, (AU\$2 billion a year with infrastructure loans and grants of AU\$4 billion) making Australia the largest development partner.

Key Challenges and Barriers for Australia in the Pacific

Australia needs be responsive to the region's demand signals at a pace the Pacific can absorb. It can be hard, for example, to make quick changes to the Australian supported maritime training schedule of around twenty courses. Being agile is a key challenge when it comes to maritime governance support.

Pacific nations wish to engage with many partners in enhancing their maritime governance. Deconflicting maritime capacity building is an issue for Australia. Four

formal Pacific Quad meetings are held year help, but there now more external players and it is important for Australia to be creative but not to overlap. Australia and the US at the AUSMIN meeting in August this year committed to increasing Pacific maritime security coordination between Australia, France, New Zealand, and the US.

Best-fit solutions are needed. But not all the Pacific Island states need the same things, and trying scale up or down in maritime capacity support is challenging. As one example, the number of external ship visits is challenging for the Pacific Island countries to handle. Island governments don't want to offend partner country maritime visitors by saying "don't come". For many, it is culturally difficult to say "no". This is an issue of listening and relationship building.

The United States' Contributions to Pacific Maritime Governance

By Wade Jones⁵

U.S. Maritime Governance Objectives in the Pacific

The United States (U.S.) seeks to promote stability, security, and sustainable development across the Pacific Islands by helping to enhance maritime governance. Central to U.S. objectives is combatting illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and transnational crimes, including human trafficking and drug trafficking by criminal networks in Asia. The U.S. also aims to bolster the economic well-being of Pacific Island nations by ensuring the sustainable management of maritime resources, particularly fisheries. With narrow-based economies that are isolated from major markets and vulnerable to external economic shocks, Pacific Islands nations rely heavily on their maritime resources. The U.S. is committed to supporting the sovereignty of these nations by strengthening their maritime capabilities to enable effective management of their territorial waters and combatting threats.

Through defense cooperation, fisheries enforcement, diplomatic engagement, and humanitarian assistance, the U.S. plays a vital role in regional stability. However, challenges such as the vast geographical expanse, competing influences, and limited local capacities present ongoing barriers that must be addressed to ensure the continued success of these efforts. Despite these challenges, the U.S. remains a valuable partner in maritime governance, leveraging its many resources to support a renewed commitment to the region.

U.S. Key Policies and Activities

The U.S. has implemented several key policies and initiatives. Defense and security cooperation forms the foundation of U.S. efforts, particularly through the Compact of Free Association (COFA) agreements with the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), the Republic of Palau, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Under COFA, the U.S. is responsible for security and defense matters in these nations and regularly deploys U.S. military and Coast Guard (USCG) resources to monitor and enforce maritime laws. The U.S. National Security Strategy and Indo-Pacific Strategy underscore the importance of maritime governance and regional stability to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific.

The U.S. also supports sustainable fisheries management through partnerships with regional organizations such as the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) and Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), while also targeting transnational

[5] Wade Jones is a Pacific Islands expert and former Pacific Islands Program Officer at the U.S. Institute of Peace.

criminal networks that exploit the region's vast maritime space. The U.S. plays a key role in combating IUU fishing and transnational crime through its involvement in initiatives like Operation Kurukuru, conducted in collaboration with the FFA. This annual operation, conducted by FFA member nations and partners like the Pacific Quadrilateral Defence Coordination Group (Australia, France, New Zealand, and the U.S.), aims to enhance maritime security and promote sustainable fisheries management throughout an area of operation of over 13 million square miles.

Diplomacy and regional cooperation are also essential components of U.S. efforts. New embassies in Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Tonga facilitate direct engagement on maritime governance issues. The Quad partnership (Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S.) is another vital platform through which the U.S. coordinates intelligence sharing and regional capacity-building initiatives aimed at countering both traditional and non-traditional security threats. In alignment with these efforts, the U.S. works closely with like-minded partners through the Blue Pacific Initiative to promote resilience, ocean and environmental protection, and sustainable development. The U.S. also actively participates in forums like the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), creating opportunities for collaboration on maritime issues.

Unique Resources the U.S. Can Contribute to the Pacific

The U.S. brings unique resources to maritime governance. The U.S. Navy (USN) and USCG provide unmatched capabilities in maritime domain awareness (MDA), search and rescue, law enforcement, and countering transnational criminal activities. Shiprider agreements with 12 Pacific Island countries help to address the significant challenges, such as limited resources and vast exclusive economic zones (EEZs), which make maritime surveillance and enforcement difficult. These agreements allow local law enforcement officers to embark on U.S. vessels and work with those crews to enforce laws within their respective waters. This vital collaboration allows Pacific Island nations to benefit from U.S. assets and operational reach. Additionally, USCG has expanded efforts to position vessels in the region, operating from Hawaii and Guam to enhance maritime presence and enable faster response to illegal activities or emergencies. This collaboration ensures that maritime security and disaster response efforts are well-coordinated and effective.

The U.S. enhances MDA through technology, data, and intelligence support to Pacific Island nations. Indo-Pacific Command, in collaboration with the Pacific Disaster Center, provides real-time data, risk assessments, and coordination to help Pacific Islands nations to prepare for and respond to natural disasters. The annual Pacific Partnership missions are another unique U.S. contribution, delivering essential services, building disaster response capabilities, and supporting the fight against transnational crime through capacity-building activities across the region. Through the Quad's Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) initiative, the U.S. aims to provide more than \$11.4 million in cutting-edge MDA technology to Pacific nations.

Key Challenges and Barriers for the U.S. in the Pacific

Despite significant contributions, the U.S. faces many challenges. The vast geographical of the region complicates logistics and the timely deployment of resources. Moreover, China's expanding influence in the region presents a strategic challenge, as its presence economic investments, infrastructure projects, and diplomatic engagement could undermine U.S. efforts to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific. This competition places Pacific Islands stakeholders in an uncomfortable position as they seek to maintain neutrality by being "friends to all and enemies to none." As Pacific Islands leaders navigate this geopolitical rivalry, the difficulty of maintaining neutrality risks undermining U.S. efforts aimed at fostering long-term partnerships and achieving strategic objectives.

Another barrier to maritime governance is the limited resources and capacities of the Pacific Island nations themselves. While U.S. support is substantial, infrastructure limitations, technological gaps, and shortages of trained personnel hinder the effective use tools and resources provided to support maritime governance. These constraints make it difficult for Pacific Island nations to independently manage their maritime domains and ensure effective maritime governance. Building and maintaining the capacity of Pacific Island nations to manage their maritime domains independently is an ongoing challenge that requires sustained effort and investment.

Aotearoa New Zealand's Contributions to Pacific Maritime Governance

By Dr Henrietta McNeill⁶

New Zealand's Maritime Governance Objectives in the Pacific

Aotearoa New Zealand considers itself 'a Pacific Island nation, surrounded by water' of Te Moana-nui-a-kiwa (the Pacific Ocean), with a vested interest in the maritime safety, security and governance of the region. New Zealand maintains a non-self-governing territory, Tokelau; and has special responsibilities regarding security and defence to independent states in free association — Niue and Cook Islands. This means that New Zealand is responsible for the security and defence of their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), and in some cases representing their interests globally (particularly at the United Nations). Climate change is a big concern, including ocean acidification and fish stock movements.

New Zealand seeks to reach these objectives by engaging in the international rules-based order, participating in global agreements such as United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (including actively engaging on redflagging issues), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) agreements, Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ), and the Commonwealth Blue Charter Action group which it leads. It also plays a key regional role as a member of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), through which it participates in the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty [1985] and the Convention on protection, management and development of the marine and coastal environment of the Pacific region [1986]. New Zealand has long been a fierce leading proponent of the anti-nuclear movement, seeking to limit militarization in the Pacific Islands



Figure 1: New Zealand's expansive search and rescue zone (source: Maritime New Zealand)

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region. Alongside Australia, it took France to the International Court of Justice in 1973, campaigning against French nuclear testing at Mururoa (French Polynesia).

The New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) conducts search and rescue operations in one of the world's largest search and rescue (SAR) zones (30,000,000km²), including the EEZs of Samoa, Tonga, Cook Islands, Tokelau, and Niue. To undertake its defence, humanitarian, combat and peacekeeping operations, the NZDF has nine ships in its fleet (including frigates, offshore patrol vessels, sustainment vessels, amphibious vessels, and inshore patrol vessels), supported by P-8A Poseidon and C130 aircrafts, and numerous helicopters.

New Zealand has a vested interest in ensuring that transnational criminal activities do not arrive onto its own shores, and that its economic resources, including fisheries, are protected. In doing so, New Zealand works to protect the Pacific Ocean region from illicit criminal activity, including illegal unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, maritime drug trafficking, and irregular migration.

New Zealand protects its significant maritime trading routes through diplomacy.

New Zealand's Key Policies and Activities

New Zealand's overarching foreign policy in the Pacific Islands is a continuation of foreign policies since 2018 which refocussed how New Zealand engages in the Pacific. The policies all prioritised relationships as the central point of diplomatic and security engagement, and were driven to different extents by the changing face of geostrategic competition over the Pacific Islands. New Zealand recognises that it plays a unique role, as a nation both 'in and of' the Pacific, and a security and development partner. New Zealand's foreign policy towards the Pacific since 2018 saw significantly increased investment, including towards maritime governance and security issues.

In support of law enforcement efforts to counter transnational crime, New Zealand seconded law enforcement staff to the Pacific Transnational Crime Coordination Centre based in Samoa. New Zealand is a member and significant funder of regional law enforcement organisations, including the Pacific Transnational Crime Network (part of the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police), the Pacific Immigration Development Community, and the Oceania Customs Organisation. It is also a member, alongside Pacific states, of the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime. In 2019, the multi-agency New Zealand Transnational Crime Unit was established to build 'investigative and intelligence capability to combat transnational crime in the Pacific', including maritime-based transnational crime.

New Zealand manages bilateral capacity-building programmes in the Pacific, with customs, police, and immigration agencies focussed on illicit drug detection, improving legislation, and monitoring small crafts undertaking nefarious activities (for instance, see [1], [2], [3], and [4]). This support includes resourcing Pacific states to implement

maritime governance. In 2021, New Zealand donated a border security rigid-hulled inflatable boat to Niue, and trained staff to crew it safely. New Zealand's Pacific Maritime Safety Programme assists regulatory capacity in Pacific states; provides search and rescue boats; and supports domestic vessel safety compliance and fleet improvements for seaworthiness.

As a member of the PIF, New Zealand is committed to the Blue Pacific narrative set out in the 2050 Strategy on the Blue Pacific Continent. This narrative considers the stewardship of the Pacific Ocean at the core of politics, as 'custodians of nearly 20 percent of the earth's surface, and we place great cultural and spiritual value on our ocean and land, as our common heritage'. The PIF's Boe Declaration on Regional Security defines climate change as the 'single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific', also highlighting environmental and resource security, and transnational crime. New Zealand contributes to PIF functions financially including the Office on the Pacific Ocean Commissioner, the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) (monitoring IUU fishing) and the Pacific Community's Centre for Ocean Science. The NZDF also provides aerial and surface surveillance support for FFA multinational operations combatting IUU fishing, and responds to separate FFA requests.

Unique Resources New Zealand Can Contribute to the Pacific

New Zealand may not have the same fiscal resources or defence assets as other Pacific security and development partners; however, it remains an important donor to the Pacific, invoking soft power. New Zealand describes the Blue Pacific continent as 'home', connected by 'history, culture, politics, demographics and indeed DNA', with many New Zealanders holding Pacific ancestry, and a large Pacific diaspora residing in New Zealand. This makes its people-to-people links its greatest asset. New Zealanders are typically seen to be more understanding and sensitive of Pacific cultural protocols, using culture to broker peace. In the Pacific Islands region, diplomats argue that New Zealand is a sort of 'Pacific whisperer', where 'the reality of New Zealand's smaller size, cultural literacy and lower-key diplomatic style arguably affords it an inherent advantage by allowing it to present as more relatable and conversant with the region, and to deliver or amplify certain messages in a way that Australia [or other partners] cannot'.

Pacific Island states are not monolithic and have diverse needs, including in the maritime environment. New Zealand's small government enables flexibility and responsiveness to the changing environment and needs in the Pacific. New Zealand is good at listening to the needs each state, and tailoring support appropriately. New Zealand's government also coordinates well between government agencies providing support, rather than burdening the Pacific with duplicative or unnecessary training. However, it is notable that New Zealand's focus tends to be in Polynesia.

New Zealand also facilitates in the Pacific for other partners. For instance, it provides space in High Commissions for British, Canadian, and at times, Australian diplomats; free aerial surveillance; and carries other states' HADR supplies and personnel. At times

it conducts shared trainings in the region with partner states. There may be an opportunity for New Zealand to coordinate on those issue rather than just being a facilitator.

Key Challenges and Barriers for New Zealand in the Pacific

New Zealand does not have the same fiscal resources as larger partners, and cannot finance large maritime governance projects (such as Australia's successful and long-running Pacific Maritime Security Programme). In addition, one of the NZDF's naval fleet, the HMNZS Manawanui recently sank in Samoa, creating environmental risks and reducing New Zealand's hydrographic capability and HADR response. Instead, New Zealand leverages the skills of its personnel to provide capacity-building, regulatory technical assistance, and legislative advice.

New Zealand is also navigating the 'crowded and complex' geopolitical environment in the Pacific Islands. Partners which have had long absences from the region lean upon New Zealand's soft power expertise to help them into the region. This can create a bipolar identity for New Zealand – on one hand it is a member of the PIF, and on the other hand it wants to be a 'partner of choice' as a member of the Partners to the Blue Pacific (which excludes Pacific Island states), a point raised by Meg Taylor. New Zealand balances its relationship with China in the region, respecting the sovereign decision-making of Pacific Island states to have a variety of partners, although its foreign policy towards the region has increasingly been more guarded towards China's activities. In 2024, Foreign Minister Winston Peters expressed that 'China has a long-standing presence in the Pacific, but we are seriously concerned by increased engagement in Pacific security sectors'. While this may signal a shift in New Zealand's broader security and foreign policy approaches, long-standing maritime governance policies with a focus on the environment, fisheries, and transnational crime with a focus on regionalism are unlikely to be affected.

Japan's Contributions to Maritime Governance in the Pacific

By Yurika Ishii⁷

Japan's Maritime Governance Objectives in the Pacific

Japan's involvement in maritime governance in the Pacific is driven by a strategic commitment to maintaining and enhancing security and safety in the region. This effort is a crucial element of Japan's vision for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) and to maintain maritime security in Pacific Ocean.

One of Japan's primary goals is to support the socio-economic development of Pacific Island Countries (PICs). Such development will help ensure the rule of law so that regional governments preserve democracy, their constitutions and due process. Socio-economic development will also enable the countries to address their geopolitical challenges effectively.

Another critical aspect of Japan's strategy is combating transnational crimes such as illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, drug trafficking, and human trafficking. The Pacific region is particularly vulnerable to these crimes due to its vast maritime spaces and limited enforcement capacities. Japan has stepped in to assist by supplying PICs with advanced maritime surveillance technology and providing comprehensive law enforcement training. These resources are intended to empower PICs to better monitor waters surrounding the countries and respond to unlawful activities.

Japan's Key Policies and Activities

Japan employs a multifaceted approach to achieve its governance goals in the Pacific. One significant aspect of this approach is capacity building and technical support. Japan implements various programs that provide financial assistance, technical training, and infrastructure development to PICs. These initiatives are designed to strengthen the institutional frameworks within these countries, enabling them to address their maritime challenges more effectively.

Japan conducts extensive training programs for the maritime law enforcement agencies in PICs, with experts from the Japan Coast Guard playing a pivotal role in training local personnel (see PALM8). Furthermore, Japan has donated patrol boats and other critical equipment to bolster the operational capabilities of these agencies (For instance, see Nippon Foundation's role in these projects). This support is essential for enabling PICs

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to carry out effective maritime surveillance and law enforcement activities.

Financial assistance plays a crucial role in Japan's strategy. Through partnerships with international organizations such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Japan has contributed significant financial resources to support maritime crime control measures in PICs. For example, Japan's collaboration with UNODC has involved substantial funding to assist in the implementation of maritime law enforcement initiatives, with a particular focus on capacity-building activities (see [Strategic Cooperation between Japan and UNODC: Goals and Priorities 2024-2026](#)). Furthermore, Japan strategically deploys its [Official Development Assistance](#) (ODA) to help PICs enhance their legal and operational frameworks for maritime governance. This financial support is indispensable for establishing sustainable and effective maritime governance structures in these island nations.

A relatively new addition to Japan's policy toolkit is the adoption of [Official Security Assistance](#) (OSA), which is designed to support the security needs of developing countries, including PICs. In 2023, the Japanese government provided [patrol boats and other related equipment](#) as a part of this program (see [MOFA Press Release](#)).

In addition to direct support, Japan also seeks to strengthen regional cooperation through strategic partnerships. Collaboration with the QUAD nations — the United States, Australia, and India — is a key component of Japan's strategy. Together, these countries promote maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region, with initiatives such as the [Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness](#) (IPMDA) being central to their efforts. Japan also actively participates in multilateral frameworks such as the [Pacific Islands Forum](#) (PIF). Furthermore, the 10th Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM10) took place in Tokyo in 2024 (see [MOFA Press Release](#)). These platforms facilitate cooperation and information sharing among PICs and other regional stakeholders, further enhancing maritime security.

Unique Resources Japan Can Contribute to the Pacific

Japan brings several unique resources to its efforts to improve Pacific maritime governance. Among these are expertise and advanced technology. Japan provides maritime surveillance technology, including radar systems, satellite monitoring, and information-sharing mechanism on cybersecurity (see [MIC Press Release](#)). In addition, Japan leverages its extensive experience in maritime law enforcement to offer high-quality training programs and technical support. This training is vital for building the local capacity needed to address maritime security challenges.

Japan also leverages its diplomatic influence to foster cooperation and build a network of regional support. Strong diplomatic relationships are crucial for promoting a cohesive

approach to maritime security in the Pacific (see [the list](#) of Japanese Embassies, Consulates and Permanent Missions). Japan plays a leading role in regional initiatives and frameworks that promote maritime security, strengthening its influence in the region and ensuring that its efforts are aligned with broader regional goals.

Japan's historical relationships in the North Pacific, spanning trade, diplomacy, and security partnerships, have positioned it as a trusted partner in this region. In terms of infrastructure development, Japan has become a preferred partner for quality infrastructure (see [Partnership for Quality Infrastructure of 2015](#) and G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment of 2017).

Key Challenges and Barriers for Japan in the Pacific

Japan faces several challenges and barriers in its efforts to enhance Pacific maritime governance. Geopolitical competition, particularly with China, poses a significant challenge. China's economic and diplomatic initiatives, such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), have increased its influence in the Pacific Islands, creating competition for resources and complicating Japan's efforts to secure long-term cooperation with PICs. The strategic rivalry between Japan and China in the Indo-Pacific further complicates regional dynamics and presents challenges for Japan in achieving its maritime governance objectives.

Jurisdictional limitations present another barrier. The Japan Coast Guard's authority is restricted to Japanese maritime jurisdiction, limiting its ability to conduct direct law enforcement activities in international waters. This limitation necessitates effective coordination with local maritime agencies in PICs, which can be challenging given the varying levels of capacity and resources among these countries. Effective coordination with local maritime agencies is essential for the success of Japan's initiatives, but differing levels of capacity among PICs can pose significant challenges to achieving seamless collaboration.

Regional instability and corruption also hinder Japan's efforts. Widespread political instability and corruption in some PICs can undermine the effective implementation of maritime law enforcement initiatives. These issues affect the sustainability and success of Japan's efforts, making it difficult to achieve long-term objectives. Socio-economic challenges, including high levels of poverty and disparities within PICs, further complicate long-term planning and sustainability in maritime governance. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that includes both economic development and capacity building.

Environmental challenges, such as climate change and rising sea levels, add another layer of complexity to Japan's efforts. The impact of climate change on PICs affects their socio-economic stability, complicating maritime governance efforts. Addressing these environmental challenges requires significant resources and long-term commitment from Japan and its partners. Japan has many green technologies that could be shared with the

region. Additionally, natural disasters, such as cyclones and tsunamis, are common in the Pacific region and can disrupt maritime governance initiatives, further straining local resources. Japan can provide timely support in the aftermath of such events to maintain the effectiveness of its initiatives.

The People's Republic of China's Contributions to Maritime Governance in the Pacific

By Brian Waidelich⁸

PRC Maritime Governance Objectives in the Pacific

The People's Republic of China's (PRC's) approach to Pacific maritime governance seeks to improve China's standing among regional countries, reshape the international maritime order in ways more aligned with PRC interests, and set terms favorable to PRC military and commercial actors. PRC diplomats engaging their Pacific island country (PIC) counterparts advocate building a "China-Pacific Island Countries community with a shared future" (see [1], [2], and [3]). This "community" is a localized component of Beijing's broader foreign policy framework of a "community of shared future for mankind," an envisioned end state in which China plays a more active role in global affairs. The PRC believes the existing international order unfairly benefits advanced Western nations and seeks to use its expanding ties with PICs to reduce the influence of the US and Australia. China also seeks to entice the three PICs that still diplomatically recognize Taiwan — Palau, Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands — to switch their allegiance to the PRC. The PRC attempts to block Taiwan's participation in multilateral institutions in the Pacific, including the Pacific Islands Forum, the region's premier platform for multilateral cooperation (see [1] and [2]). Beijing has sought greater access in the Pacific in areas ranging from law enforcement to fish stocks, seen notably in the "Common Development Vision" that China's Foreign Minister proposed to 10 PICs in 2022 (see [1] and [2]). Although the vision was not adopted by regional leaders, China has since advanced other bilateral and multilateral initiatives tied to maritime governance.

PRC Key Policies and Activities

China engages in various multilateral and bilateral mechanisms that may be used to advance Pacific maritime governance objectives. Beijing maintains an extensive diplomatic network in the region, with embassies in nine PICs at the time of writing. The PRC is a dialogue partner of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and an observer of the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF). China has established a series of multilateral dialogues between itself and PICs, including the China-Pacific Island Countries Foreign Ministers' Meeting and the China-Pacific Island Countries Forum on Fishery Cooperation and Development. Senior PRC leaders including President Xi Jinping and Foreign Minister Wang Yi have paid multiple visits to PICs over the past decade, and China designated a special envoy to Pacific island countries in 2023.

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Infrastructure projects funded through China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) could contribute to PICs' ability to enforce laws within their exclusive economic zones (EEZs). Beijing depicts Pacific Islands as a "southern extension" of the BRI, and all PICs that diplomatically recognize China have signed BRI memoranda of understanding. Although many BRI projects in the region have been land-focused (e.g., roads, bridges, sports stadiums), port and shipyard projects have been proposed or awarded in countries including Fiji and the Solomon Islands. These projects could improve PICs' ability to station or repair maritime law enforcement (MLE) vessels.

China has spearheaded several multilateral initiatives with PICs concerning marine resource management and maritime domain awareness (MDA). The "Guangzhou Consensus" adopted in 2021 at the First China-PICs Forum on Fisheries Cooperation and Development vows to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and explore the formation of a "modern fishery cooperation and exchange center" between China and PICs. In 2023, the China-PICs Center for Disaster Risk Reduction Cooperation was established, a facility in southern China which aims to provide PICs with disaster risk monitoring and early warning technology as well as support for post-disaster rescue operations. The PRC is also working through the PIDF to establish the China-Pacific Countries Marine Spatial Planning and Blue Economy Cooperation Center.

Unique Resources the PRC Can Contribute to the Pacific

The PRC seeks to transform itself into a "maritime great power" and has made significant investments in MDA and law enforcement capabilities (see [1] and [2]). China has shown willingness to contribute some related capabilities to international cooperation, including in the Pacific.

PRC MDA capabilities include several constellations of ocean observation and meteorological satellites that could be used for climate change monitoring, environmental protection, early warning for disaster prevention, and marine navigation and safety. China's Haiyang and Gaofen constellations contain payloads for ocean observation and monitoring, while the Fengyun constellation provides weather forecasting and climate prediction services. China reportedly uses technologies including meteorological satellites to support the China-PICs Center for Disaster Risk Reduction Cooperation.

China has considerable MLE capability that could be contributed to Pacific missions. The China Coast Guard (CCG) has grown rapidly over the past decade and is currently the world's largest MLE fleet, with over 150 large regional and oceangoing vessels (see [1] and [2]). Although China's MLE forces have historically operated mainly near China's coastline and in the East and South China Seas, in recent years, CCG vessels have ventured out further through their involvement in Pacific Fishing Commission patrols. As of June 2024, the CCG has registered 26 vessels in the convention area of the North Pacific Fishing Commission and an additional 26 in that of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission.

CCG missions in the Pacific could be supported by PRC police officers deployed overseas. Over the past decade, China has sent police experts and equipment to countries including Fiji, the Solomon Islands, Kiribati, and Vanuatu to conduct operations and train local law enforcement officials. On September 11, 2024, a groundbreaking ceremony was held in southeast China's Fujian Police College for a new training center for PIC police officers.

Key Challenges and Barriers for the PRC in the Pacific

Strategic competition with the US and its close ally Australia will likely complicate PRC contributions to Pacific maritime governance. Washington and Canberra worry that Beijing seeks to establish a military footprint on strategically important islands that would allow China to spy on allied forces during peacetime and disrupt their maneuvers during a conflict. The leaked April 2022 China-Solomon Islands security agreement — which permits Honiara to request PRC military and police assistance — exacerbated anxieties over a possible People's Liberation Army base near Australia. Several US and Australian deals inked since with countries such as Papua New Guinea and Tuvalu demonstrate efforts to secure exclusive military use rights and to dissuade PICs from expanding security cooperation with China.

Beijing's attempts to advance regional maritime initiatives may also be frustrated by PICs with concerns about China's poor track record with illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. China continues to be ranked as the worst global offender in the IUU Fishing Risk Index, despite some recent targeted policy measures by Beijing. IUU fishing poses a significant concern to countries like Kiribati whose economies depend heavily on revenue from tuna fishing licenses and access fees to their EEZs.

PIC leaders are fully aware of their position in US-China strategic rivalry and will be cautious to embrace any multilateral initiative that could be perceived as choosing a side. The PRC Foreign Minister's inability in 2022 to gain consensus among PIC leaders for China's Common Development Vision — which Micronesia's president warned could bring war to the region — is a case in point. Nevertheless, strong demand for development resources will motivate most PICs to accept aid from both the US and China as long as doing so does not jeopardize relations with either country.

Finally, China's own domestic issues and competing priorities in other theaters could constrain the resources that Beijing devotes to the Pacific in the years ahead. The PRC's slowing economy and increasing concerns about BRI projects' repayment, performance, and reputational risks may make Beijing more selective in providing PICs with technical assistance and maritime infrastructure upgrades. Growing requirements for MLE vessels to defend China's declared interests in hotspots such as the Taiwan Strait and East and South China Seas could also limit CCG deployments in the Pacific.

The United Kingdom's Contributions to Pacific Maritime Governance

By Scott Edwards⁹

The UK's Maritime Governance Objectives in the Pacific

The Pacific Island states have not factored significantly in the United Kingdom's (UK) policymaking since a comparatively late wave of decolonization, with Fiji and Tonga receiving independence in 1970, the Solomon Islands and Tuvalu in 1978, Kiribati in 1979, and Vanuatu in 1980. There was a marked additional diplomatic withdrawal throughout the early 2000s. Unlike Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean, the Pacific Islands do not feature explicitly in the 'Indo-Pacific' Chapter of the UK's National Strategy for Maritime Security. This is despite the fact that 3 Pacific Island countries are Realm countries (sharing the same monarch as head of state), 9 are in the Commonwealth, and the UK maintains a British Overseas Territory in the Pitcairn Islands.

However, the emergence of a coherent set of objectives related to Pacific maritime governance can be seen through the implementation of the 'Pacific Uplift' – a diplomatic 'rebalancing' in light of growing Chinese influence in the region and the desire for a 'Global' role for Britain following Brexit. The Integrated Review Refresh in 2023 set out to deepen 'our engagement with Pacific Island countries and regional resilience'. In practice, the objectives are broadly working with and through the Rules Based International Order to solve problems of maritime governance. While UK foreign policy is currently in flux given the first non-Conservative government since 2010, this emergent policy is likely to largely continue due to its linkages to broader goals in the Indo-Pacific, namely, to maintain a free, open, and secure Indo-Pacific, and promote and uphold UNCLOS.

The UK's Key Policies and Activities

The UK's 'Pacific Uplift' policy is underscored by a growing diplomatic footprint. This has consisted of (re-)establishing three new diplomatic posts and the extension of pre-existing posts such as the doubling of diplomatic staff and the creation of a defence section in Fiji. It is also seen through the increased leveraging of the UK's position in the commonwealth and as a founding dialogue partner of the PIF. There have been Ministerial visits by successive government Ministers for Asia and the Pacific/Indo-Pacific - including the most recent by Catherine West -, as well as increasing visits by Royal Family members.

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An increased diplomatic footprint has facilitated the growth of growing maritime security ties. Some of this takes the form of new bilateral partnerships, most notably the UK-Fiji Memorandum of Understanding focusing on Fiji's maritime borders. Substantial bilateral interventions are currently restricted to Fiji given the stronger relationship since decolonization and the still-ongoing development of broader relations. Indeed, other activities demonstrating this growth are undertaken through the expanded programming of the Integrated Security Fund (ISF, formerly the Conflict, Stability, and Security Fund - CSSF). The CSSF has previously facilitated activities such as providing technical assistance to Pacific Island Countries on their Extended Continental Shelf negotiations. Looking forward, the ISF's Pacific Programme has maritime security as a priority in its 3-year £21m funding projection. This includes work with the Pacific Community (SPC), where a three-year Integrated Ocean Management and Maritime Governance Programme has been established.

The UK has also been supporting multilaterally led programming, including recent UNDP-led activities. Of most note is the recently concluded maritime security conference in Fiji – part of an ongoing programme concerned with the reform of Fiji's Maritime Security Committee, a whole-of-government body. The UNDP, UK Government, and Fiji Government have also established a Blue Accelerator Grant Scheme (BAGS) – a project incubator implementing and scaling up transformative ocean-based solutions.

Security partnerships have been assisted by the presence of two River-class Offshore Patrol Vessels; HMS Spey and Tamar. Both were deployed in 2021 to the Indo-Pacific for a 5-year period. Beyond port visits, the vessels have primarily assisted in constabulary tasks such as counter-IUU fishing patrols, which has enabled the implementation of ship-rider arrangements and joint enforcement operations in the region. The vessels have also served a Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief role and participated in Pacific Partnerships, the largest annual regional naval development assistance mission.

Climate activities are a key area of engagement. The UK has hosted a forum on Climate Change and Resilience in the Pacific and provides catalytic financing for projects delivered through the Sustainable Blue Economies Programme (SBE), funded by the £500 million Blue Planet Fund (BPF) launched in 2021. The UK also provides funding to the Commonwealth Marine Economies Programme and Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance.

Unique Resources the UK Can Contribute to the Pacific

The UK's approach is marked by a relatively strong degree of agility and responsiveness to regional needs. In a way, this comes from necessity given the historic lack of UK presence and expertise in the region, but it has led to a relatively unique approach marked by local engagement, whether through the development of relationships with

local stakeholders or the hiring of local staff. When coupled with the UK's relatively good standing and not-negatively viewed heritage in the region, this has enabled the flourishing of needs-based programming to develop. This is particularly the case with the ISF, given its focus on enabling high-risk interventions and agility, that enables quick responses and the testing of new forms of programming.

As an island nation with a large and diffuse EEZ, the UK also has a lot of thematic expertise concerning regional maritime governance. While the UK should be reflective of the pitfalls of delivering only top-down expertise and not learning mutually, it does enable well-received capacity building initiatives, especially regarding the climate-ocean nexus. The UK Hydrographic Office has shared information with PIS to help monitor sea-level rise and erosion, as well as develop plans to support safe navigation, and the OPVs engage in various environmental activities such as water sampling for climate change impact analysis. Not only does this environmental approach to diplomacy align with both the UK's and PIS' priorities, but it may also mitigate concerns of more militarized regional activities - including AUKUS, which clashes with sensitivities of nuclear technologies due to (colonial) nuclear testing legacies – and problematic interventions as have sometimes occurred from more-consistently involved states such as France and Australia.

Key Challenges and Barriers for the UK in the Pacific

The UK has two significant challenges to realizing a more-defined role in the region. The first is a capability gap. The two OPVs mark a limited presence in the region, and the UK is dependent on New Zealand for air-surveillance of the waters of even the BOTs. With budget cuts likely under the Labour government, it is also unclear as to how much the UK can fund. This problem is worsened when you consider the fact that existing funding is relatively low. Under the Conservative government, the foreign aid budget was significantly cut. Data from the Lowy Institute's Pacific Aid Map shows that in 2021 the UK ranked 17th among donors to the region, and much of this was focused on British Overseas Territories. While the ISF is an important intervention, the Pacific accounts for a tiny sum of its overall focus. Taken together, the better-funded Southeast Asia and Pacific accounted for 0.77% of CSSF funding in 2020/2021, 1.08% in 2021/2022, and 1.21% in 2022/2023. Much of the CSSF/ISF discourse is on linkages to UK-security at home, but this is harder to achieve in the distant and relatively unconnected South Pacific. Such a capability gap is likely to raise questions about long-term commitment from the UK - something that has already been questioned in relation to the SIDS and the shift in UK's priorities in response to international crises.

The second-interlinked problem is related to the UK's ability to find unique ways to engage in a region where states already have a lot of choice from established partners. Friendly states such as Australia, New Zealand, France, and the United States are better embedded. At times this can be positively utilised, as was the case when new high commissioners to Vanuatu, Samoa, and Tonga originally operated from New Zealand facilities. However, more innovation is needed to work with states who traditionally look to Australia, New Zealand and France for equipment and training. China, too, has the

resources to supply infrastructure to the Pacific Island countries and is increasingly engaged, which provides a significant barrier given the UK's inability to leverage the same resources.

France's Contributions to Pacific Maritime Governance

By Céline Pajon¹⁰

France's Maritime Governance Objectives in the Pacific

France's Pacific territories, including New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna, French Polynesia, and Clipperton, together encompass a vast Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). This French Pacific EEZ is approximately 7 million km² and represents 67% of France's global EEZ. France's primary focus in maritime governance in the Pacific is the protection of this resource-rich maritime domain from Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, predatory activities, and drug trafficking.

Sovereignty forces are permanently stationed in New Caledonia (1,650 personnel) and French Polynesia (1,180 personnel), tasked with maritime surveillance and policing, crisis prevention, civil security, and, when needed, support and logistics for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR).

Additionally, these forces actively participate in regional cooperation initiatives, advancing France's second objective: contributing to the stability and security of the region, in collaboration with partners, including by helping to strengthen the maritime capacity of Pacific Island countries.

France's Key Policies and Activities

France articulates its maritime policy in the region within the framework of its Indo-Pacific strategy, published in 2019 and subsequently updated. This strategy aims to foster a region that is 'open and inclusive, free of all forms of coercion, and founded on multilateralism and respect for international law,' particularly at sea.

In the Pacific, French forces assist the nations of the Pacific Island Countries in monitoring their vast maritime territories. For instance, France collaborates with Australia, the United States, and New Zealand within the Quadrilateral Defence Coordination Group (Pacific Quad) on maritime surveillance missions and combating illegal fishing, benefiting the Oceanian States and supporting the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) (for examples, see [1] and [2]). France also conducts naval activities to combat illegal fishing and trafficking with local partners and the FFA. These are known as the Tautai and Kurukuru missions.

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Since 2021, France has organized an annual South Pacific Coast Guard seminar, rotating the venue between New Caledonia and French Polynesia each year. This initiative aims to strengthen regional coordination between France, the Pacific Islands and Pacific Quad partners, while supporting the sovereignty of Pacific Island nations.

Unique Resources France Can Contribute to the Pacific

France stands out as the only European country capable of making a substantial security contribution to the South Pacific, with a permanent presence of 2,800 military personnel who have extensive experience in regional cooperation. The French forces are currently undergoing modernization: aging maritime patrol vessels are being replaced by Oceanic Multimission Patrol Vessels (POMs), which will enhance the effectiveness of surveillance in the EEZ. Four units are scheduled to be deployed in the Pacific between 2023 and 2025, with the first two already stationed in New Caledonia and French Polynesia. Additionally, the AVSIMAR program, planned to replace the Falcon 200 maritime patrol aircraft between 2025 and 2030, aims to provide more extensive and efficient coverage through the integration of drones and satellites. France also regularly deploys high-end aeronaval capabilities in the region to demonstrate its commitment to a rules-based order at sea.

France has an innovative maritime governance framework that could serve as a model for countries with limited capacities in the region. Instead of relying on a separate coast guard service, France employs a multi-agency approach known as the "Coast Guard Function" (fonction garde-côtes) within its broader "State Action at Sea" (Action de l'État en mer - AEM) framework. This approach involves a coordinated effort among various government agencies, including the French Navy, customs, and maritime affairs, which collectively handle coast guard responsibilities such as maritime surveillance, search and rescue, environmental protection, and law enforcement at sea. The Secretary General for the Sea (Secrétaire général de la mer - SGMer) ultimately oversees and coordinates the activities of these agencies. While similar coordination systems exist in countries like Australia, the UK, or Germany, coordination in these cases does not imply command. The decisions of agencies such as the Coast Guard, Navy, and Customs follow their own chains of command. In contrast, in France, the préfet maritime not only coordinates but has the authority to order missions across all agencies.

France has also developed significant experience in Maritime Domain awareness (MDA). The Maritime Information Cooperation and Awareness Center (MICA) model exemplifies this expertise. MICA relies on the voluntary cooperation of ship owners to collect information on maritime security and disseminate it to relevant authorities, on the basis of a specific type of agreements (MOU) between French Navy and more than 80 private companies. Recently, MICA supervised the Bellbuoy exercise from Brest, with the participation of 15 countries, 10 of which were from the Pacific region. Additionally, MICA actively contributes to supporting the European maritime information-sharing project CRIMARIO II.

The CRIMARIO project, originally launched in the Western Indian Ocean, has now expanded its scope to include Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands. This initiative promotes IORIS (Indian Ocean Regional Information Sharing) as the main platform for information sharing and incident reporting in these regions. Through CRIMARIO, PICs such as Fiji and PNG have been trained to utilize IORIS, enhancing their real-time communication, situational awareness, and coordinated response capabilities to address maritime threats and incidents.

IORIS now connects multiple nations across the Indian Ocean, the Indo-Pacific, and extends as far as South America, including countries like Peru and Ecuador. This platform is widely used to support NCAGS (Naval Cooperation and Guidance for Shipping) objectives, facilitating the safe and secure movement of merchant vessels in regions with heightened security concerns.

In addition, MICA participates in the SHARE-IT project, an initiative aimed at strengthening connectivity among International Fusion Centers (IFCs) worldwide. This project aspires to create a global network for maritime security, significantly improving collaboration, information sharing, and coordinated response efforts across IFCs in the near future.

France possesses technological innovations that could aid the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) in enhancing their maritime surveillance capabilities. This includes light tactical unmanned aerial systems (UAS) capable of performing a range of functions such as tactical situational awareness, combating illegal activities at sea, traffic surveillance, pollution detection, monitoring suspicious behavior near vessels, and coastal surveillance.

Key Challenges and Barriers for France in the Pacific

An important issue is the persistent tension between metropolitan France and its overseas territories, rooted in historical issues and ongoing decolonization processes. Recent turmoil in New Caledonia highlights how memories of the colonial past and the decolonization continue to provoke friction. Similarly, the success of pro-independence parties in the 2023 local elections in French Polynesia has reignited discussions on greater autonomy. While these issues may not directly affect France's capacity to contribute to maritime governance, they could negatively impact France's image in the region, fostering ambivalent feelings about its colonial past and current intentions.

Another issue France should address is the coordination with local authorities in its overseas territories when implementing its Indo-Pacific strategy. Indeed, in the Pacific, local governments now hold significant authority over their EEZ, including responsibilities for environmental management and the establishment of marine protected areas, and are actively involved in exercising these powers (in particular, see “Rapport de la mission d’information portant sur l’impact des stratégies de la France dans l’espace indopacifique, sur les collectivités françaises du Pacifique”).

Finally, France may need to address legal barriers that complicate certain cooperative efforts, such as shipriding with PICs. For instance, the contribution of French vessels to fisheries control operations for third-party states is restricted due to France's non-participation in the Niue Treaty (1993), which mandates that agents from the coastal state must be present to witness violations in their jurisdiction. France aims to expand the legal framework to strengthen the fight against illegal fishing while respecting the rights of third-party states, as emphasized during the 2023 SPDMM Summit in Noumea.

Overall, it is important to recognize that France has relatively limited resources compared to regional powers such as Australia or the United States (see this [report](#)). As a result, its engagement in the region heavily depends on effective coordination with partners.

The Republic of Korea's Contributions to Pacific Maritime Governance

By Wooyeal Paik¹¹

ROK Maritime Governance Objectives in the Pacific

The Republic of Korea (ROK) has a significant interest in Pacific maritime governance owing to its reliance on maritime trade, its security concerns in the Indo-Pacific region, and its broader geopolitical strategy as a Global Pivotal State and Indo-Pacific Strategy, which was coined as a regional and global security strategy by the current government. ROK's objectives and actions in Pacific maritime governance can be understood through its strategic perspectives, policies, and contributions, as well as the challenges it faces.

There are two ROK objectives related to Pacific maritime governance. The first is to ensure freedom of navigation. As a major trading nation, ROK is highly dependent on sea routes from the Korean peninsula to the East China Sea to the South China Sea to the Malacca Strait for its exports and imports, including critical energy and other resources. Safeguarding freedom of navigation in the West Pacific along with the so-called 'like-minded' countries is critical to its economic security, often labeled as protecting supply chains. The following quote from the Korean government shows it well.

"As a liberal democracy with an open economy, the ROK firmly upholds the fundamental values of freedom, democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. The ROK recognizes that peace and stability along the sea lanes that connect the Indian Ocean and the Pacific, all the way from the Strait of Hormuz to the South China Sea, are crucial in safeguarding national interests." (See 2023 Progress Report of Korea's Indo-Pacific Strategy, Korean MOFA, p.4).

Second, regional stability and security via enforcing alliance and alignment is critical. The ROK aims to contribute to maritime stability, particularly in response to increasing tensions involving regional power competition between China and the US/Japan. In particular, the hegemonic challenger, China, has been aggressive to grow its military presence in the West Pacific maritime governance. For Korea, the ever-growing North Korean military threat should be also taken care of. Strengthening alliances and security partnerships among like-minded countries in the region is critical. ROK seeks to enhance security cooperation with key regional players such as the U.S., Japan, Australia, the Philippines, Vietnam, and small Pacific Island countries such as Fiji to promote maritime governance.

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ROK Key Policies and Activities

There are three points to make to illustrate the ROK's policies and actions to improve Pacific maritime governance. First, creating and developing its own Indo-Pacific Strategy is one of the most decisive policy actions. In December 2022, following the new Yoon government's 'Global Pivotal Strategy' doctrine — arguably the first comprehensive global security strategy — ROK minted its Indo-Pacific Strategy. It highlights its increased focus on the maritime domain in Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and even the South Pacific. The strategy emphasizes liberal international rule-based order, freedom of navigation or protecting lines of communication, and cooperation in maritime security, aligning with the U.S. and other key security partners in the West Pacific.

Second, is enhancing international engagement and maritime capacity building in the Pacific. ROK participates in international maritime conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), and regional forums like the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) to shape and uphold maritime governance norms. Based upon the growing naval capacity, the ROK engages more in joint exercises with security partners in the Pacific such as the Rim of the Pacific Exercise, Exercise Sea Dragon, and so on. Such dedicated actions ensue the ROK's contribution to the smaller regional countries' maritime security capacity building via equipment transfer, technical assistance, education training, and official development aid.

There has been a notable expansion in exchanges between maritime law enforcement agencies in the ROK and ASEAN countries. And when an oil spill occurred off the island of Mindoro, the Philippines last year, for the first time, the Korean Coast Guard dispatched an emergency response team to assist with the clean-up activities on the coast and provide relevant materials. The 3rd ROK-ASEAN Dialogue on Environment and Climate Change as well as the ROK-Viet Nam Environmental Ministerial Meeting and the 1st ROK-Malaysia Climate Change Dialogue in 2023, significantly improved the ROK's maritime governance capacity to evaluate achievements and identify joint projects for environmental cooperation and climate change response between the ROK and ASEAN nations. Additionally, at the 5th ROK-China Environment Ministers' Meeting, cooperative measures to address climate change and other maritime pollution issues such as marine debris such as plastic.

Third, the ROK expands its geographical scope to the South Pacific. In May 2023, the ROK hosted the first-ever Korea-Pacific Islands Summit and unveiled the Action Plan for Freedom, Peace, and Prosperity in the Pacific, successfully broadening its maritime governance horizon. ROK has been providing development aid and capacity-building support to Pacific Island nations, particularly focused on sustainable development, disaster resilience, energy, fisheries management, and environmental protection to address the climate crisis faced by the Pacific Islands. marine pollution, sustainable fisheries management. ROK also pledged a progressive increase in the size of the ROK-Pacific Islands Forum Cooperation Fund. It is a critical action to implement the ROK's

Unique Resources the ROK Can Contribute to the Pacific

For this set of policy execution, the ROK makes use of some critical resources to contribute to the Pacific maritime governance. Along with its growing naval capacity (near blue-water navy level), its technological capacity in shipbuilding, maritime engineering, maritime surveillance, fisheries management, environmental management, and sustainable energy to be leveraged to support the maritime infrastructure development in Southeast Asia and Oceania, maritime awareness and security enhancement. The current government has been increasing development assistance and investment in the Pacific region

Key Challenges and Barriers for the ROK in the Pacific

Four challenges among others hinder the ROK's contribution to Pacific maritime governance. First, the growing geopolitical tensions between China and the US puts the ROK in a difficult position to contribute to Pacific maritime governance. More competition rather than cooperation happens in the West and South Pacific region as we witness a series of military conflicts in the East China Sea, South China Sea, and South Pacific. As a US's treaty ally and China's immediate neighbor with a high level of economic interdependence, ROK has no choice but to navigate the geopolitical and geoeconomic turmoil.

Second, the ROK has another critical variable to control, North Korea's ever-growing military threat. Maritime security concerns related to North Korea, particularly submarine and missile developments, not to mention, nuclear weapons provocation, often divert ROK's focus from broader Pacific maritime governance issues to more immediate security concerns. The North Korean factor limits ROK's intention to go beyond the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia more often than not.

Third, the ROK needs to become a legitimate blue water navy with more surface and submersible ships in both quantity and quality such as Aegis-level destroyers and nuclear-powered submarines. ROK will acquire six more advanced Aegis destroyers by the mid-2030s, which will vastly improve its contribution to Pacific maritime governance. At the same time, its Coast Guard organization should be upgraded to have more international interactions with its counterparts in Pacific countries.

Last but not least, the ROK's immediate Pacific Ocean, i.e., that of East Asia, is closely monitored and managed by the great powers, leaving little room for the ROK to contribute to the truly international Maritime governance. Unlike the Indian Ocean, each sovereign country — China, Japan, Taiwan, ROK, DPRK, Russia, and the US — invests much more national resources such as naval strategic assets to control their own sovereign territories in the sea and nearby realms.

ROK has clear objectives to maintain maritime security, protect the environment, and preserve rule-based international order in the Pacific. However, geopolitical competition and ensuing tensions, resource limitations, and balancing its economic and security interests present significant challenges.