

#### 2023

### Lalaga, tithiki, talia vata: Pacific Islands weaving statecraft

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Adelaide Papers on Pacific Security 02/2023 Security in the Pacific Islands Program Stretton Institute March 2023





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#### Introduction

In the Pacific Islands, partner states are weaving webs of statecraft to try to influence or coerce Pacific Island countries (PICs) to change their behaviour.

In the Pacific, weaving is a traditional practice used to bring people together, facilitate collaboration, and provide for communities by creating mats for talanoa discussions. baskets and bilums for holding resources to barter, and nets for fishing to ensure the community is fed. That is, weaving is used for both diplomacy and security.

This paper re-interprets the metaphor of weaving statecraft through a Pacific lens, focussing on PICs' activities to influence their partners and one another through statecraft, the actions that states take *with the intent* of changing: '(a) their external environment; (b) the policies and/or behaviour of target states, actors, communities, and/or individuals; and/or (c) the beliefs, attitudes, and/or opinions of target states, actors, communities, and/ or individuals'.<sup>1</sup>

We do not measure what influence or outcome these actions have had, as this is subjective – for example, *achieving* international agreement is different to *adherence* to international agreement. Instead, we look at how PICs are deploying tools of statecraft with the *intent* of influencing behaviour. By analysing the major tools of statecraft (security and defence; economic; diplomatic; soft power; grey-zone; black-zone), we draw focus away from partner actions, and examine how PICs are weaving statecraft to influence their partners. We argue that PICs are effective at using diplomatic tools of statecraft to influence partner states and each other themselves. In the Pacific, influence is not necessarily based on financial or security resources. Therefore, changing partners' behaviour or beliefs is often achieved through collective approaches to influence, or to resist external influence. Through the Pacific Way, intra-regional statecraft often manifests through dialogue. PICs weave statecraft, each in their own distinctive way, applying 'Oceanic diplomacy', 'the distinctive diplomatic practices and principles which come out of the long history and diverse cultures of the Pacific Islands'.2

'Lalaga' is the Samoan word for weaving; 'tithiki' is the word for weaving in Cheke Holo language of Isabel Province, Solomon Islands; and 'talia vata' is the Fijian word for weaving.

Joanne Wallis, Henrietta McNeill, Alan Tidwell, Czesław Tubilewicz, <u>Statecraftiness: weaving webs of statecraft</u> in the Pacific Islands. Adelaide Papers on Pacific Security 01/2022, Stretton Institute: Adelaide, 2022, p.2

<sup>2</sup>George Carter, Greg Fry, and Gordon Nanau, <u>*IB 2021/23 Oceanic Diplomacy: An Introduction.*</u> Department of Pacific Affairs, Australian National University: Canberra, 2021, p.1

### Security and defence

PICs have engaged in security cooperation at the regional level as a means of statecraft since PNG's deployment to respond to the Santo rebellion in the lead-up to Vanuatu's independence in 1980. There are only three militaries in the region (Papua New Guinea (PNG), Tonga, and Fiji, and a para-military in Vanuatu). Bilateral and regional security support has continued, through the Bougainville crisis from 1997, the International Peace Monitoring Team to Solomon Islands in 2001, and the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) from 2003-2017.

Prior to RAMSI, the then Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare called the proposed Australian military intervention, 'nothing short of recolonising this country. This honourable house is being deliberately used as a puppet for overseas agenda'.<sup>3</sup> Incoming Prime Minister Allan Kemakeza deployed tools of statecraft in the country's interests while resisting unilateral influence from Australia: he requested a regional peacekeeping response under the Pacific Island Forum's (PIF) Biketawa Declaration [2000], which provides scope for PIF members to support each other when experiencing volatile security situations. Pacific countries that participated in RAMSI contributed to its success through their Pacific approach to security and better understanding of Melanesian norms. For example, Pacific RAMSI personnel communicated in local Solomon Islands pidgin. A similar approach was effective during the 2021 riots in Solomon Islands: Fiji supported the Australian response by deploying peacekeepers, and PNG contributed troops through a bilateral agreement.

PNG has recently sought bilateral security deals, including with the US and Australia, leveraging new-found geopolitical interest in the region to build its defence capability and infrastructure. This follows Fiji, which leveraged geopolitical competition to secure Australia's commitment to redevelop its Blackrock Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Assistance & Disaster Relief Camp.

The Blackrock Camp will train Fijian peacekeepers, which reflects that Fiji has deployed personnel as United Nations (UN) peacekeepers since 1978. Samoa, Timor-Leste, PNG, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Palau have also contributed to UN peacekeeping missions in locations such as Sudan and South Sudan. Tonga has contributed to coalition forces (outside of the UN) in both Iraq and Afghanistan. As contributors to international peacekeeping, PICs not only build their capacity and generate income, but subvert external narratives of the region as an area of crisis, to instead demonstrate that PICs can play a role in alleviating crises.

Policing is another way of exercising statecraft in regional security. 13 PICs deployed 163 police officers to RAMSI.<sup>4</sup> The people-to-people links created through these deployments were so meaningful that even some children of those deployed were named Ramsi.<sup>4</sup> This 'living memory' is an affirmation and reflection of positive influence between PICs: respect, and long-term relationality, symbolic of embedding into oral histories the good relationships that continue for generations to come, cementing regional solidarity and collective statecraft. PIC police officers were also deployed regionally under the Biketawa Declaration in other situations, including the Regional Police Support Mission in Bougainville in 2019.



Policing connections are maintained through the Pacific Islands' Chiefs of Police (PICP) and other regional law enforcement agencies, which enable further collaboration on cross-jurisdictional investigations. PICP efforts have also led to shared learning - the Cook Islands police has delivered command and control training around the region, and the Solomon Islands police has provided use of force and public order management training to Nauru and Samoa. Fiji has become a regional hub of forensic training, assisting Vanuatu with forensic policies, and attaching Tongan and Samoan police officers on secondments. In 2023, Solomon Islands and PNG announced a bilateral agreement to facilitate police deployments, which was described by Solomon Islands Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs Collin Beck as 'Wantok states connected by geography, culture and blood. Melanesian solidarity and diplomacy'.<sup>5</sup> These 'for Pacific, by Pacific' approaches influence how PICs act, developing trust between police forces for future joint operations.

The PIF was one of the first regional bodies to develop a facility for Disaster Risk Reduction: the Regional Natural Disaster Relief Fund in 1975. Since then, PICs have been increasingly involved in supporting one another, and their partners, when natural disasters strike. Following New Zealand's 2010-2011 Christchurch Earthquakes, trades workers arrived from Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa to help with the rebuild through a trades training scheme. During Australia's bushfires in early 2020, PNG deployed 100 defence force personnel from an engineering battalion, and Fiji deployed 54 military personnel under the Republic of Fiji Military Forces' Climate Change Disaster Emergency Response, while Vanuatu provided financial assistance. Fiji responded to Tonga's Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcanic eruption and tsunami in 2022, with Fiji Military Forces engineers, medics, and infrastructure specialists boarding Australian naval support vessels. Similarly, Fiji sent 34 military personnel to assist New Zealand after Cyclone Gabrielle in February 2023.

Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief as a tool of statecraft has multiple benefits: it assists the neighbour in need and establishes trust between states; it develops capacity and utilises the skills of the PIC providing support; and it demonstrates the shared political importance of climate change and natural disasters as existential threats.

<sup>5</sup>Collin Beck, <u>Twitter Post</u>, 9 February 2023.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup><u>Solomons MP on attack over peace plan</u>. *The Age*, 10 July 2003.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>Judy Putt, Sinclair Dinnen, Meg Keen, and James Batley<u>, The RAMSI Legacy for Policing in the Pacific</u> <u>Region</u>. Department of Pacific Affairs, Australian National University: Canberra, 2018.

#### Economic

Economies of scale and high costs of shipping make trade difficult and expensive for most PICs.

In response, PICs have collaborated to ameliorate these barriers to trade through the Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement (PICTA); the European Union (EU) Economic Partnership Agreement [2011]; [2001], and the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relationship (PACER) Plus [2020].

Fiji and PNG opted to stay outside PACER Plus as they were sceptical about its benefits, but have benefitted from temporary labour migration programs created to entice them to the negotiating table. Negotiations require tools of statecraft to be deployed from both sides, and this is an example where both sides deployed economic statecraft tools - resistance and inducement.

Trade fairs are a popular tool of economic statecraft for PICs. Sometimes these are aimed at specific states, such as the Buy Samoa Made trade fair in Australia in 2015; some aim to bring people to the country, such as Tourism Fiji's annual trade show; and others seek a global outreach, such as Vanuatu, which has attended the World Expo since 1985 to promote trade and tourism. Promoting tourism shifts the narrative from framing the Pacific as 'dangerous' (particularly areas that have experienced unrest or coups) to framing it as 'paradise'.<sup>6</sup>

Sub-regional economic statecraft can be seen in the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Trade Agreement [1993], which enables labour mobility for skilled workers and the free trade of goods between Vanuatu, PNG, Solomon Islands, and Fiji. PNG has made all MSG nationals' travel 'visa on arrival'. The MSG has built solidarity through these shared Melanesian economic means, building stronger negotiating platforms between partners (although not without tensions, as in the 'trade wars' in biscuits and kava between Vanuatu and Fiji). The MSG has leveraged funding from China and the EU; and formed strategic partnerships with the Jakarta-based International Coconut Community. This positions the MSG well, reflecting its original basis for establishment: to assert Melanesian independence outside of traditional colonial influence.

The establishment of the successful regional body, the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA), to manage the Pacific's tuna purse seine fishery, was 'out of frustration largely that they [PICs] needed to have a strategy who played off the countries against each other' for tuna fisheries access.<sup>7</sup> The South Pacific Tuna Treaty [1988] between 16 Pacific states of the PIF and the US was a similar reaction to exploitative fishing practices by US commercial fisheries. Using collective negotiations as a tool of statecraft against larger partners in areas like fisheries, where PICs have an economic resource advantage, has proven effective for PICs. Recently, when the US announced it would pay the Forum Fisheries Agency \$US60 million annually over the next ten years under the Tuna Treaty at the request of the PIF, PICs suggested that this negotiating advantage could also be used for better climate change and maritime security provisions under the Treaty. Here, PICs are using economic statecraft to advance the Pacific's core priority of climate change.

PICs are deliberate about the economic assistance they seek from partners.

For example, China is perceived as a partner that can provide 'Access to markets, technology, financing, infrastructure. Access to a viable future', and most PICs maintain a 'friends to all, enemies to none' foreign policy.<sup>8</sup>

PICs leverage strategic competition between partner states. Samoa sought Chinese support for 'areas that other traditional donors were not engaged in, but we [Samoa] considered vital to Samoa's development aspirations and nation building'.9 When Solomon Islands and China confirmed a bilateral security pact in 2022, Australia suddenly reversed its previous policy of not providing budgetary support, and provided AUD\$22million. After decades of seeking additional support from the US, the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) refused to attend the Pacific Summit with President Biden in September 2022 unless it got a better deal. Subsequently, in early 2023 RMI's Compact of Free Association negotiations with the US were finalised (pending Congressional approval) with a new US\$700m tranche of support, with RMI Foreign Minister commenting that: 'It's because of China. We're not naïve'.10 The compact negotiations are themselves an example of successful Pacific economic statecraft, where RMI, Palau, and Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) negotiated unrestricted travel access to the US, including for employment.

<sup>6</sup>Regarding concerns about 'paradise' as a narrative, see: Kalissa Alexeyeff and Siobhan McDonnell (2018) Whose Paradise? Encounter, Exchange, and Exploitation. *The Contemporary Pacific* 30(2): 269–295.

<sup>7</sup>Transform Aqorau, <u>Fishing for success: lessons in</u> <u>Pacific regionalism</u>. Department of Pacific Affairs, Australian National University: Canberra, 2019, p.7

<sup>8</sup>Meg Taylor, <u>Keynote address by Dame Meg Taylor,</u> <u>Secretary General "The China Alternative: Changing</u> <u>Regional Order in the Pacific Islands"</u>. University of the South Pacific: Port Vila, Vanuatu, 8 February 2019.

<sup>9</sup>Susuga Tuila'epa Lupesoliai Sailele Malielegaoi, <u>Opening Address of Prime Minister, Susuga Tuilaepa</u> <u>Lupesoliai Sailele Malielegaoi, for the Opening of the</u> <u>Conference on China and the Pacific: "The View from</u> <u>Oceania"</u>, 25 February 2015, National University of Samoa Campus: Apia, 2015.

<sup>10</sup>Kitlang Kabua quoted in Pete McKenzie, <u>Marshall</u> <u>Islands, feeling neglected by the U.S., enjoys new</u> <u>leverage</u>, <u>Washington Post</u>, 27 January 2023.



## Diplomatic

The most visible tool of Pacific statecraft is diplomatic missions (set-out in Table 1). PIC overseas missions illustrate that diplomatic representation is not necessarily reciprocal (although it can be).

For instance, Australia has diplomatic missions in every member of the PIF, but the Cook Islands, FSM, Niue, Palau, the Marshall Islands, and Tuvalu have no diplomatic representation in Australia. New Zealand has more on-shore Pacific diplomatic representation than Australia, likely due to diasporic ties. PICs who are closely geographically located often have representation in nearby territories, indicating their close relationships and diasporic ties – for instance Vanuatu in New Caledonia; Samoa in American Samoa; Palau and FSM in Guam; and Solomon Islands and PNG have reciprocal missions.

PICs use diplomatic missions to signal relationships: in 2023 PNG announced it was withdrawing its trade office from Taipei, and Solomon Islands announced that it was seeking South-South cooperation by opening a diplomatic mission in India.

Resource constraints challenge the ability of PICs to maintain widespread diplomatic representation, so their choice of where to invest is telling.



The average PIC mission to the UN has three representatives, in contrast to Australia's 33 and New Zealand's 14 -PICs manage this collectively and share notes from meetings which others cannot attend.<sup>11</sup> However. these choices sometimes involve trade-offs. In the US. Pacific missions are predominantly based in New York, so that they can advance their goals at the UN.

However, this affects their relationship with US political representatives, who are based in Washington DC. When the US increased its interest in the Pacific in 2022, New Zealand and Australia funded Pacific diplomats to make the trip to Washington DC from New York.

Many PICs also have representation in Switzerland, Fiji, and Belgium, so that diplomats can attend meetings at the World Trade Organisation, PIF, and the EU, and associated Africa Caribbean Pacific Group. Being able to negotiate as a group in which each state has an equal vote in global fora presents the Pacific with significant opportunity, and PICs have global roles in several UN organisations to influence outcomes which benefit their countries, including the UN Environment Program (Fiji), UNICEF (PNG), and UN Women (Solomon Islands). Pacific leaders have also been elected to key positions, including Fijian diplomat Peter Thomson as president of the UN General Assembly in 2016 and Fiji's ambassador to the UN in Geneva, Nazhat Shameem Khan, as president of the UN Human Rights Council in January 2021.

Collectively, PICs have been effective caucusing as the Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS) and the PIF-focussed Pacific Group, negotiating collectively on the world stage, particularly on climate change.<sup>12</sup> Membership is important in deploying statecraft: the PSIDS is exclusive of Australia and New Zealand, which can at times affect Pacific consensus on climate change. In addition, despite not being UN members, Cook Islands and Niue are included in official PSIDS logo, statements, and letterheads to signify their interests being furthered through the fora. These groupings, alongside membership of geographically-broader collective negotiating organisations such as the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), have been effective ways for PICs to deploy diplomatic statecraft to gain global support. Their influence is strategically spread throughout the international system, including the International Maritime Organisation, where as part of the Marshall Islandsled Higher Ambition Coalition, PICs are leading the charge to decarbonise shipping. Key climate messages like '1.5 to stay alive' led by PICs in AOSIS generated global attention and solidarity, and were included in the Paris Agreement. Similarly, Vanuatu spearheaded the Loss and Damage facility which was agreed at COP27. With Samoa as the incoming AOSIS Chair, we expect further PIC influence in climate change negotiations.

Pacific leaders rely on their collective strength, with Tuvalu Foreign Minister Simon Kofe noting that: 'Everything that comes out of PIF ... has to send the strong message that, as a region, we have clear goals and we are willing to express them on the international stage, so that other nations, regions and organisations sit up and take notice'.<sup>13</sup> Pacific leaders, including then-Kiribati President Anote Tong, the late Marshallese Foreign Minister Tony de Brum, and then Fijian Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama, have all spearheaded powerful messages and negotiations on climate change through statements at the UN General Assembly. Pacific leaders use powerful visual imagery, such as Kofe giving his COP26 address filmed knee-deep in the ocean, 'we are sinking', and in 2018, Tuvaluan children sitting in water to welcome delegates to the PIF Leaders' Meeting. Each message is authoritative, increasingly passionate and blunt, intended (successfully) to garner global media attention.

PICs invest heavily in climate change negotiations as it 'remains the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific' as noted in the PIF Boe Declaration on Regional Security [2018]. Fiji presided over COP23 (although was unable to host in-country).<sup>14</sup> Vanuatu has also engaged in 'lawfare', using legal proceedings as a diplomatic tool of statecraft to pressure partner states to respond to climate change. Vanuatu and a coalition of 18 countries are seeking an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on states' legal obligations for climate action and the consequences of causing harm. The coalition gained support from 108 states for the UN resolution requesting a mandate for ICJ advice. An ICJ opinion in their favour could assist PICs to further influence climate negotiations. 'Lawfare' as a tool of statecraft has been used previously by PICs decrying nuclear testing legacies, when Australia, New Zealand, and the RMI each launched ICJ cases against France and the US and Nauru took Australia to the ICJ to claim reparations for the true cost of phosphate mining on the island.

In leading climate negotiations, PICs have embedded Oceanic diplomacy as statecraft into international negotiations. Fiji generated the Talanoa Dialogue Platform at COP21 (which continued into COP24), a Pacific way of having open and honest discussion about the impacts of climate change. In addition, Fiji and SPREP provided pavilion space for kava, talanoa, and dance at COP23 and 24, inviting delegates 'to have a personal experience of Pacific culture, as well as to learn more about a region at the frontline of climate change impacts'.<sup>15</sup> This level of personal connection to the impact of climate change has deeply affected world leaders; when Marshallese woman Kathy Jetn il-Kijiner read her poem about rising sea levels aloud at the 2014 Climate Leaders' Summit, there were few dry eyes in the room. At COP26, Barack Obama highlighted Pacific Islanders' plight against climate change, urging collaborative progress with a Hawaiian proverb 'pupukahi i holomua' (unite to move forward).16

The embedding of Oceanic diplomacy focussed on relationships into climate change negotiations exemplifies Pacific forms of statecraft. In an expansion of the 'Oceanic diplomacy' concept, Anna Naupa describes how the Mota Lava Treaty on the maritime boundary between Vanuatu and Solomon Islands was signed after ceremonial dances, feasts, customary exchanges, and 'sealed with the drinking of kava and chewing of betel nut'.<sup>17</sup>

"Fulori Manoa, The New Pacific Diplomacy at the United Nations: the rise of PSIDS in G Fry and S Tarte (eds) *The New Pacific Diplomacy*. ANU Press: Canberra, 2015, pp. 89-98.

<sup>13</sup>Quoted in Toby Manhire, <u>'Degrading to Pacific</u> nations': The view from Tuvalu on coverage of a crisis. *The Spinoff*, 9 June 2022.

<sup>44</sup>Pacific states have hosted smaller global meetings – for instance Samoa hosted the UNSIDS meeting in 2014, and will host the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 2024; PNG hosted the APEC conference in 2018.

<sup>15</sup>Secretariat for the Regional Environment Programme (2018, 7 December) <u>Kava Ceremony Brings A Taste Of</u> <u>The Pacific To COP24</u>.

<sup>16</sup>Quoted in Brahmjot Kaur, <u>Obama uses Hawaiian</u> proverb to call for protection of Pacific Islands. *NBC News*, 10 November 2021.

<sup>17</sup>Anna Naupa, <u>Sealed with Kava and Betel Nut: Lessons</u> <u>in Oceanic Diplomacy from the Mota Lava Treaty</u>. In Brief 2022/11. Department of Pacific Affairs, Australian National University: Canberra, 2022, p.1

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup>lbid

When tensions boiled over at the PIF in 2021 it was in large part due to not following the 'Pacific Way': COVID-19 restrictions had meant that the leaders could not meet face-to-face, and the prearranged 'gentlemen's agreement' to have a Micronesian Secretary-General elected was not met. Micronesian states, through the Micronesian President's Summit (MPS), wrote to the PIF advising that they were leaving the PIF. It took meeting face-to-face in 2022, and careful apologies from the leaders of Fiji, PNG, Samoa, then-Forum Chair Tuvalu, and the outgoing Secretary-General, to create the environment for the Suva Agreement to be developed. That Agreement formalised the previously informal agreement that a Micronesian would be the next PIF Secretary General, and that the office of the new Pacific Ocean Commissioner (previously also the Secretary General) would be established in a Micronesian state.

All Micronesian states (except Kiribati) agreed to the Suva Agreement in July 2022. By abstaining re-joining the PIF and signing the Suva Agreement until February 2023, Kiribati was able to negotiate for further advantage at the Special Leaders Retreat, ultimately obtaining the right to host the PIF sub-regional office.

Oceanic diplomacy was also important in bringing Kiribati back into the regional collective. One of the first acts that newlyelected Fijian Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka<sup>18</sup> took was to travel to Kiribati in efforts regarding 'reconsolidation of the region'.<sup>19</sup> Rabuka described his actions as following the Pacific Way: 'when you deviate from that, and adopt other ways of thinking that are not regional, we tend to easily offend one another, but when we think alike, we think the Pacific way, it is so easy to repair damages and straighten paths that perhaps would lead us astray or away from the Forum'.<sup>20</sup> In his inaugural Fiji address, Rabuka stated that his 'first priority' as chair of the PIF was to 'engage in the diplomacy required'.<sup>21</sup> During his visit to Kiribati, Rabuka undertook traditional ceremonies of 'boka' and 'i sevusevu' in which he proffered an apology and expressed grief to the leader and people of Kiribati to encourage them to re-join the PIF. His efforts were successful, and Kiribati sent a letter indicating its intention to re-join the PIF not long after his visit. This repairing of relationships is important in Pacific cultures, and a significant diplomatic tool of statecraft.<sup>22</sup> The focus

on relationships demonstrates that might and money does not necessarily determine outcomes in the Pacific, a perspective which should be appreciated and shared by partners.

PICs have also used diplomatic statecraft to manage their partners. The PIF hosts an annual Forum Dialogue Partners meeting to facilitate dialogue with key partners, which ensures PICs engage collectively. However, in 2022, unlike previous years when the Dialogue Partners meeting had been held immediately after the Leaders meeting, at the request of Forum leaders, the 2022 PIF Dialogue Partners meeting was separately held online. This demonstrated how PICs use regional mechanisms to constrain and influence partner states and avoid geopolitical contestation. Leaders have reiterated that they do not want to become 'the epicentre of a future confrontation' and instead will engage on their own terms.23

Geopolitical tensions escalated in 2022 when China proposed a regional security pact that they expected each state to sign individually - telling each state that they were the last one holding out. In successfully opposing the proposal, Samoan Prime Minister Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa argued that regional agreements should come through the PIF rather than be negotiated bilaterally. By contrast, the US sought to negotiate collectively with the PIF on a joint declaration later that same year. Initially, Cook Islands, Niue, New Caledonia, and French Polynesia were not invited to the Summit hosted by President Biden, likely because of their constitutional statuses as freely associated states or territories (not recognised as sovereign by the US). Demonstrating regional solidarity, at Fiamē's request all PIF leaders were eventually invited. The final US-Pacific Partnership Declaration text heavily favoured Pacific interests and aligned to the PIF's 2050 Strategy on the Blue Pacific Continent. At the Summit, Biden announced the initiation of the formal process of recognition of Niue and Cook Islands as sovereign states, which showed the level of influence PICs had by ensuring their full representation. Pacific leaders collaborated successfully through diplomatic statecraft to assert their agency in partner negotiations.

PICs are very aware of their diplomatic relationships as tools of statecraft. When Australia, the US, and New Zealand imposed sanctions on Fiji (2006-2014) and Fiji was excluded from the PIF and the Commonwealth (2009-2014), Fiji strategically sought out new partners. Using a 'Look North' approach, Fiji developed ties with Russia and China. However, regionalism was not abandoned - Fiji established the Pacific Islands Development Forum as an alternative space for PICs to meet outside of the PIF without the influence of Australia and New Zealand. Ratuva considered manoeuvres such as 'Fiji's attempt to outflank New Zealand and Australia, are actually beyond the realm of diplomacy and involve geopolitical contestation of power and influence'.<sup>24</sup> PICs are not bound by their existing relationships if there are problems, and can use diplomatic statecraft to achieve their goals by seeking out alternative partners.

In another example of diplomatic recognition as a tool of statecraft, the relationship between China and Taiwan is leveraged by PICs for influence. In 2019, Solomon Islands and Kiribati both 'switched' diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China. Domestic politics and agency are often overlooked by external analyses of Pacific foreign policy, but these were decisive moves - although China offered incentives, the decision was made by Solomon Islands on a calculated basis. Moving towards the 2019 'switch', Honiara strategically undertook to establish a bi-partisan working group to examine the viability of shifting Taiwan-China diplomatic relations, including whether to remain with Taiwan, or to shift at a later date. Coupled with advice from the bi-partisan group (which set the Solomon Islands agenda in Beijing, having toured China and PICs),25 the Solomon Islands Cabinet also received advice through a Cabinet paper from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade (MFAET) which proposed that Solomon Islands could expect a 'special treatment' from China should they switch.<sup>26</sup> Arguably, the advice and reports from MFAET and the bi-partisan task force were enough for the Cabinet to decide on the diplomatic shift (despite a contrary Parliamentary report led by Peter Kenilorea Jr). Solomon Islands pushed its socio-political and economic agenda around infrastructure development and Constituency Development Funds against the backdrop of its political economy to influence power upon international partners. Honiara positioned its agenda

and principles at the forefront of negotiations: Solomon Islands interests were at the heart of the decision and diplomatic statecraft.

PICs have also succeeded in using diplomatic tools to pursue economic objectives when partner states' regulatory requirements have restricted their trade access. Australia banned the import of kava due to health concerns in the 1990s.<sup>27</sup> Persistent lobbying by PICs led to a pilot programme being developed for the import and regulated sale of kava which has been beneficial for Pacific-based kava growers and exporters, and important to Pacific diaspora for participating in social, cultural, and medicinal traditions – kava bars are now popping up around Australia.

The most notable way that PICs have used diplomatic statecraft to influence larger partners and their economic outcomes is through labour mobility. Australia piloted the Seasonal Worker Programme in 2008 for Kiribati, PNG, Tonga, and Vanuatu, and expanded the programme in 2012 due to pressure from PICs to include Fiji, Nauru, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, and Tuvalu. Since then, PICs have strategically lobbied Australia to develop its labour mobility programmes (now collectively known as the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme). Diplomatic representatives of Samoa, Solomon Islands Tonga, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Kiribati, and PNG all appeared before the Australian parliamentary inquiry into Strengthening Australia's Relationships with the Pacific, and their comments about issues of labour mobility 'dominated feedback'.<sup>28</sup>In addition to noting the positives of the scheme, they raised concerns about access to healthcare and superannuation for workers, the impact on development, and the ability for family members to accompany workers. In many respects, their diplomatic efforts worked. A PALM scheme visa stream was announced to enable workers to stay for longer periods<sup>29</sup> and thus earn more, and in 2023-24 PALM workers will be able to bring their families (although they will not have access to Medicare). When the government removed the PALM contract from private contractor Palladium, installing the DFAT-supported Pacific Labour Facility, it appeared to recognise the government-to-government bilateral importance of the scheme. The



new Australian government has also announced a new Pacific Engagement Visa providing 3000 permanent migration spaces to citizens from PICs annually from 2023.

However, occasionally partners do not welcome perceived interference by Pacific diplomats. Vanuatu High Commissioner to Australia, Samson Fare, became aware of ni-Vanuatu citizens who were subject to exploitative practices in seasonal work, poor work conditions, and wage theft, and vocally criticised the labour mobility programmes. Records of his phone correspondence with missionaries regarding ni-Vanuatu citizens seeking safehaven were seized in a raid by the Australian Department of Home Affairs – an unusual action given his diplomatic status.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Rabuka was not new to the role of regional statesman, having previously been the Commonwealth Secretariat's special envoy to peace negotiations in the Solomon Islands prior to RAMSI.

<sup>19</sup>Felix Chaudhary, <u>PM to 'repair damage'.</u> *The Fiji Times*,14 January 2023.

<sup>20</sup>Sitiveni Rabuka quoted in Samantha Magick, <u>Fiji, Kiribati restore 'trust, respect and understanding'</u>. *Islands Business*, 21 January 2023. <sup>21</sup>Sitiveni Rabuka, <u>Prime Minister Honourable Sitiveni</u> <u>Rabuka's Inaugural Address To The Nation.</u> Fiji Government, 29 December 2022.

<sup>22</sup>Maima Koro, Henrietta McNeill, Henry Ivarature, and Joanne Wallis (forthcoming) Tā, Vā, and Lā: Re-imagining the geopolitics of the Pacific Islands.

<sup>23</sup>David Panuelo quoted in Terence Wesley-Smith and Gerard Finin, <u>Partners or pawns? The Pacific islands in</u> <u>US strategy and the Washington summit.</u> *DevPolicy*, 23 September 2022.

<sup>24</sup>Steven Ratuva, Contested Terrain: Reconceptualising Security in the Pacific. ANU Press: Canberra, 2019, p.101.

<sup>25</sup>Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (2019) Report of the Bipartisan Taskforce: Review of Solomon Islands Relations with People's Republic of China and Republic of China. Solomon Islands Government: Honiara.

<sup>26</sup>Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade (2019) Assessment Paper on the Question of China, Solomon Islands Government: Honiara.

<sup>27</sup>A European ban on kava imports was also lifted by the German courts in 2015 due to a World Health Organisation report showing that kava caused no irreversible, long-term health problems.

<sup>28</sup> Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (2022) <u>Strengthening Australia's</u> <u>relationships in the Pacific</u>, Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia: Canberra. p.45

<sup>29</sup>However, there are also negative impacts. Pacific diplomats are now highlighting the issue of workers being away for too long and the impact on the public sector when the skills are drawn away in labour mobility programmes.

<sup>30</sup>Courtney Gould, <u>'Unusual': Diplomat entangled in</u> <u>Australian Border Force raid</u>. News.com.au, 2 February 2022.

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Table 1: Pacific states' diplomatic representation (excluding Honorary Consuls)



## Soft power

Regional solidarity is central to the collective PIC strategic narrative: the Blue Pacific Continent. Asserting themselves as 'large ocean states' in contrast to perceived 'weak' and 'vulnerable' small island states, PICs have re/ presented the Pacific Ocean based on its vast geographical area, and economic, social, and cultural importance.<sup>31</sup>

The 2050 Strategy on the Blue Pacific, the PIF's key document, reaffirms this strategic narrative and fronts their negotiations. The 2050 Strategy has already been mirrored in the US-Pacific Declaration, and it is likely to be included in future PIF-led regional agreements. While there were initially concerns that the US, New Zealand, Australia, Japan, and UK had appropriated the strategic narrative when establishing the coordination tool Partners for the Blue Pacific (PBP), a recent meeting of the Partners on the topic of Illegal Unreported and Unregulated Fishing held in Honolulu included both partners and PICs, highlighting the influence of PICs' statecraft when acting as a collective.

A number of social, cultural, and educational networks across the Pacific provide avenues for the exercise of soft power by PICs. Through institutions like the University of the South Pacific, Pacific students and scholars are brought together to regional hubs and through satellite campuses in each of the 12 member states. Networks develop – between scholars and politicians who have attended university together, between those who become political leaders or regional organisation leaders, between officials and civil society practitioners.<sup>32</sup> Throughout the Pacific there are people who individuals can call upon from their university days, including to help them make connections within their country – potentially to those in power.

These networks and people-to-people relationships are critical for influencing partner states. There are large Pacific diasporas in New Zealand, Australia, and the US. Increasingly, the diaspora is becoming involved in the leadership of these partner states. For example, New Zealand Deputy Prime Minister Carmel Sepuloni is of Samoan and Tongan heritage, and other New Zealand Ministers are of Tongan, Samoan, and Cook Islands descent. The changing face of politics has led to significant foreign policy changes in New Zealand, including the 'ifoga'33 apology to Pacific peoples by then-Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern for the Dawn Raids: a series of immigration raids which disproportionately targeted Pacific peoples in New Zealand in the 1970s. This apology was largely promoted by then-Minister for Pacific Peoples, Aupito William Sio, whose own Samoan family had been raided at the time. Sio's personal connection had a significant influence on this being a policy priority.

Indigenous issues are important for Pacific peoples. During protests against the 30-metre telescope on Hawaiian sacred land of Mauna Kea, Tongan community members travelled to the protests to show their support, presenting kava, sugarcane, tapa, and mats to Kānaka Maoli, and flying the Tongan flag in solidarity. Similarly, Samoan, Tongan, Rapa Nui, and Kānaka Maoli diaspora all flew their flags and protested for Māori land rights at Ihumātao in 2019. The issues of land confiscation, sovereignty, and the right to land and water resonated with Oceanic Indigenous peoples.<sup>34</sup> Both protests influenced changes of approach by the settler-colonial governments. Protests have also been taken to court by Pacific diaspora – the 1962 case of Falema'i Lesā, a Samoan national who was resident of New Zealand, was successfully argued to ensure Samoans who had been present in New Zealand up until the court case concluded would be New Zealand citizens (although New Zealand changed the law immediately).

Diasporic ties are also maintained through the churches, which are central to Pacific ways of life. Pacific church leaders are active in partner countries' governmental inquiries,35 and are called upon regularly to provide community feedback. Churches are well-known property holders in partner states, owning halls for community use, residences for clergy, and churches. Church leaders are also involved in providing character references for their village members applying for labour mobility programmes, assisting with community-based policing, and providing disaster relief, including for seasonal workers affected by Cyclone Gabrielle. Churches helped get their members vaccinated against COVID-19; in Auckland, church leaders joined The Fono (coordinated Pasifika medical organisations in Auckland) and Tongan health providers to host a vaccination event for the Tongan community. Partner states are increasingly aware of the role of churches in the community, and Australia now funds such engagement through the Pacific Church Partnerships Program.

Outside of diasporic ties, PICs and communities also strategically establish close relationships with elites in partner states using cultural and traditional practices. Several prominent palagi<sup>36</sup> have been bestowed Samoan matai (chiefly) titles. In 2012, then-Auckland Mayor Tau'aletoa Len Brown was bestowed his title in Lepa, then-Samoan Prime Minister Tuila'epa Mailegaoi's village. New Zealand journalist Toleafoa John Campbell was given a chiefly title by Samoan Head of State Va'aleatoa Sualauvi II, and then-Head of Immigration New Zealand To'osavili Nigel Bickle and businessman To'osavili Len Thompson were both given their titles in the village of Poutasi, a village heavily involved in the New Zealand labour mobility scheme. It is uncommon for non-resident non-Samoans to be bestowed chiefly honours: these ceremonies were in gratitude for the support elites had provided to Pacific communities, Samoan rugby, and through labour mobility respectively, under the Samoan principle that the pathway to leadership is through service. These titles were not merely symbolic, instead creating an ongoing personal and professional relationship between these individuals and their villages - there is an obligation to return regularly and to continue to provide financial support. Former New Zealand Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers such as Phil Goff, Winston Peters, Bill English, and John Key, have also been given matai titles.37 Then-Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer was also bestowed a matai title, but was said to be so embarrassed by the cultural attire that he had to wear that he asked all in attendance to destroy their photographs. By contrast, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese seemed pleased to be welcomed to Wewak in PNG, including the presentation of a traditional headdress signifying his leadership by Rachael Somare, wife of late PNG Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare.

PICs also use sports to exercise soft power, portraying themselves positively on the world stage. PICs are active in regional sporting events such as the Pacific Games, and large crowds of diaspora supporters attend World Cup matches (particularly in rugby union and rugby league) and hold events for supporters to congregate and celebrate in areas with large diasporic populations like Otara and Logan. Fiji won the Rugby Sevens at the 2016 Olympics and gained global media coverage, which portrayed their 'national image and support government claims to legitimacy'.38 In 2022, PIF leaders watched the Australian rugby league State of Origin game (with many Pacific Islander) with Australian Prime Minister Albanese. This led to Albanese calling for a PNGbased Pacific Islander National Rugby League team to join the Australian national competition in 2023. The New Zealand government already funds Moana Pasifika, a Pacific Islander team, to participate in the Super Rugby (rugby union) competition that also includes teams from New Zealand and Australia. The PNG Hunters and the Fijian Kaivitia Silktails already play in the second-tier rugby league competition in Australia. Pacific rugby and gridiron players.<sup>39</sup> both diasporic and from the islands, win contracts and play globally - building the image of 'Polynesian' sport.40 Approximately 40 percent of the Australasian National Rugby League professional players are Polynesian.41 In Australia and New Zealand, the mispronunciation of Pacific Islander players' names by commentators has become an important issue, with commentators pressured to learn correct pronunciations, and Pacific Islanders increasingly leading commentary for commercial broadcasters. One of the most significant acts of statecraft was securing changes in eligibility for the World Cup - enabling players with Pacific lineage who play overseas to be able to choose to also play for their PIC in the World Cup.

In the arts, the Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture is one of the largest events in the Pacific calendar, showcasing film, dance, music, and theatrical performances from all over the Pacific every four years. Other festivals are held annually, such as Auckland's PolyFest, and Te Maeva Nui, held in Queensland, both which stage diaspora talent. Pacific culture is becoming showcased in film with Pacific landscapes, actors, and directors at the forefront of Hollywood.<sup>42</sup> Even the popularity of Disney's Moana [2016], while controversial in its merging of Pacific stories and culture, highlighted Pacific and diasporic actors and musicians. Pacific artists, carvers, tattooists, musicians and dancers (too many to mention individually) are all highly-regarded globally.

<sup>3</sup>Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, Mapping the Blue Pacific in a Changing Regional Order. In T. Wesley-Smith and G. Smith *The China Alternative*. ANU Press: Canberra, 2021, pp.41-69.

<sup>32</sup>While these education networks can be established through external educational awards such as Australian Awards or the New Zealand Aid Scholarships, individuals are often dispersed to different universities creating less of a network.

<sup>33</sup>An ifoga is a Samoan formal cultural apology, requiring the wrong doer to kneel under a mat until it is lifted in forgiveness by those who were wronged. It also requires reparations to repair the relationship.

<sup>34</sup>Emalani Case, Everything Ancient Was Once New. University of Hawai'i Press: Honolulu, 2021.

<sup>35</sup>See for example, Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (2022) <u>Strengthening Australia's relationships in the Pacific.</u>

<sup>36</sup>Foreign, non-Samoan

<sup>37</sup>In a less obligatory manner, Niue named their only duck Trevor, after then- New Zealand Speaker of the House of Representatives Trevor Mallard – who personally sent New Zealand Parliament's condolences when then duck passed away.

<sup>38</sup>John Connell, Fiji, Rugby and the Geopolitics of Soft Power. Shaping National and International Identity. New Zealand Geographer (2018) 74(2): 92–100. p.92

<sup>39</sup>For Solomon Islands, soccer is the national sport – and top players such as Raphael Leai have been signed for top clubs overseas, promotion the country on the global stage.

<sup>40</sup>Lisa Uperesa, *Gridiron Capital*. Duke University Press: Durham, North Carolina, 2022.

<sup>41</sup>Damon Salesa, *Island Futures*. BWB Texts: Wellington, 2017.

<sup>42</sup>Eliorah Malifa <u>Hollywood in the Pacific</u>. PhD Thesis: Department of Pacific Affairs, Australian National University, 2022.

## Grey-zone

There are few instances of PICs using the grey-zone (mechanisms of coercion that do not involve military cooperation but might include interference or coercive economic levers) to influence other states.

In one example, the final 2022 security agreement between Solomon Islands and China has not been released, potentially driven by Prime Minister Sogavare's (unfounded) concerns that 'the local media have joined forces with foreign entities to attack him personally or his government's decision to switch allegiances to China'.43 However, the Solomon Islands government's secrecy about its security agreement with China also highlights how PICs can restrict access to information to influence partner states - Australia, New Zealand, and the US have all expressed anxiety about not knowing the exact terms of the agreement, and have responded by making diplomatic overtures to the Solomon Islands government.

Some PICs have also constrained the freedom of foreign journalists to try to influence the reporting of sensitive issues. For example, foreign journalists have been: detained while covering the PIF meeting in Nauru, and in Kiribati while covering the diplomatic 'switch' to China from Taiwan; deported from West Papua by the Indonesia government; and banned for their reporting on sensitive issues. Recognising the influence that restrictions on the media can have, the US increased support to the Media Association of Solomon Islands in 2020, and the UKbased BBC established a partnership with Solomon Islands media in 2022.

Some PICs have also tried to control social media: the Nauruan government imposed a three-year ban of Facebook in 2015; Solomon Islands contemplated a ban in 2019, but later reneged; and the then-Samoan Prime Minister launched an investigation against an online blogger in 2019.

Deportation has also been used politically by PICs. For example, Fiji deported USP Vice-Chancellor Pal Ahluwalia and his partner after he exposed allegations of corruption and financial mismanagement under previous university administrations. He was allowed back into Fiji under the new government in February 2023. However, Nauru and Samoa both supported the Vice-Chancellor to continue working from satellite campuses, showing the strength of regionalism even when there are differences of opinion.

<sup>43</sup>Dorothy Wickham, <u>In 35 years of reporting from</u> <u>Solomon Islands, I've never seen the secrecy of the last</u> <u>few months</u>. The Guardian, 3 May 2022.

<sup>44</sup>Quoted in Camellia Webb-Ganon, <u>The NZ pilot held</u> <u>hostage in West Papua is the pawn in a conflict only</u> <u>real international engagement can resolve.</u> *The Conversation* 10 February 2023.



## Black-zone

Similarly, there been few explicit instances of the black-zone (covert activities such as political assassination or blackmail) statecraft by PICs.



In 1988, the Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front (an independence movement) took members of the gendarmerie (police) hostage in Ouvéa, New Caledonia, demanding that the French government begin independence talks.

Similarly, West Papuan rebels took a New Zealand pilot hostage in 2023, stating that 'Our new target are all foreigners: the US, EU, Australians and New Zealanders because they supported Indonesia to kill Papuans for 60 years. Colonialism in Papua must be abolished'.<sup>44</sup> Their demand is for Indonesia to recognise West Papua as an independent nation.

With Indonesia joining the MSG as an associate member in 2015, finding a united position to support West Papua concerns became further complicated – leaving West Papua with few political and traditional routes for deploying statecraft. Fijian Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka recently met with West Papuan leader Benny Wenda, where he publicly announced his support for the United Liberation Movement fir West Papua to attain full MSG membership. In doing so, this potentially re-establishes a space for West Papua to deploy diplomatic statecraft instead of using the black-zone.

Fiji and Vanuatu have both supported questionable extradition practices by China. In 2017, 77 Chinese nationals were deported from Fiji in a joint operation between Chinese and Fijian law enforcement without going through the justice process in Fiji. In the case of Vanuatu, China extradited six individuals back to China in the hands of Chinese police officers without telling the Vanuatu government what the charges to be laid were. While these actions could be seen as Chinese statecraft, PICs allowed it to occur, presumably after extracting something from China in return.

### Conclusion

In the Pacific, influence is not necessarily based on financial or security resources, instead quality relationships are the enduring currency of influence.

Focussing on the quality of relationships demonstrates that might and money does not determine outcomes in the Pacific, a perspective which should be appreciated and shared by partners. To mitigate this, PICs act collectively and intra-regionally, particularly through using diplomacy as a 'show of force' to external partners. PICs weave statecraft using the same tools as their partners, but in different ways.

PICs rely more heavily on their Oceanic tools of diplomacy and relationships to influence other states, and are less likely to use grey-zone and black-zone tools. Diplomacy in the broadest sense is not new to the Pacific. As communal societies, statecraft are the tools of their collaborative existence, and they leverage these mechanisms to their advantage. In light of increasing geopolitical competition, PICs are weaving contrasting and distinguishing different processes of statecraft to advance their interests as the Blue Pacific Continent.

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## Acknowledgements

This activity was supported by the Australian Government through a grant by the Australian Department of Defence. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Australian Government or the Australian Department of Defence.

#### Adelaide Papers on Pacific Security

The Adelaide Papers on Pacific Security are published by the 'Security in the Pacific Islands' research program of the Stretton Institute at the University of Adelaide. These papers are intended to encourage new perspectives and insights into Pacific security issues outside the 'Canberra bubble'. More detail about the 'Security in the Pacific Islands' research program is available here: <u>www.adelaide.</u> <u>edu.au/stretton/our-research/security-inthe-pacific-islands</u>

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#### Kaurna acknowledgement

We acknowledge and pay our respects to the Kaurna people, the original custodians of the Adelaide Plains and the land on which the University of Adelaide's campuses at North Terrace, Waite, and Roseworthy are built. We acknowledge the deep feelings of attachment and relationship of the Kaurna people to country and we respect and value their past, present and ongoing connection to the land and cultural beliefs. The University continues to develop respectful and reciprocal relationships with all Indigenous peoples in Australia, and with other Indigenous peoples throughout the world.