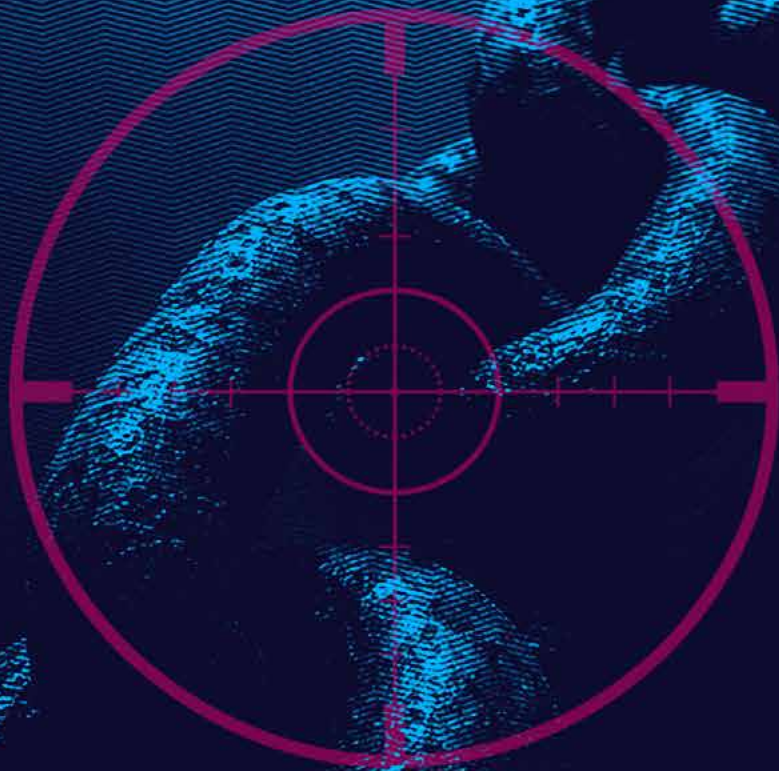


PEACE UNDER-SEA SIEGE:

ROLE OF 'ISLAND CHAINS' AS FORTIFIED
MILITARIZED WALLS OF GREAT POWER
PROJECTION IN THE PACIFIC OCEAN



By Kavita Naidu
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Introduction

As we began writing this Policy Brief, the US and Israel had started an illegal war in Iran and Lebanon, dubbed Operation Epic Fury and Operation Roaring Lion, which had rapidly escalated into a region-wide conflict with significant global consequences that were felt as far away as the South Pacific. According to news reports, the war in Iran cost approximately US\$11.3bn¹ in the first six days, with the White House seeking a 42% increase in military spending amounting to a \$1.5 trillion baseline defense budget for the 2027 fiscal year. More than 7,300 people have so far been killed in Iran and Lebanon² and children were the first victims of the US’s supposed precision bombing. The United Nations children’s agency, UNICEF³, reported on 31 March 2026 that the “intensifying conflict” had killed or injured 1,100 children. Nearly 4 million people in Iran and Lebanon have been displaced⁴, not to mention the humanitarian atrocities that continue in Palestine and across the region.

In response, Iran escalated retaliatory attacks on energy infrastructure across the Gulf and seized control of the Strait of Hormuz through which approximately 20% of the world’s oil and liquified gas are transported out of the Middle East, skyrocketing the prices of oil and gasoline above US\$100 a barrel, and creating

1- Sharma, Y. (2026, 30 April) \$25bn or \$1 trillion: How much has Iran war really cost the US?”, *Al Jazeera*, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/4/30/25bn-or-1-trillion-how-much-has-iran-war-really-cost-the-us>

2- Jeevans, C & Murphy, M. (2026, 19 June) Thousands killed in US-Israeli war on Iran - but experts say true total may never be known”, *BBC* <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cy735xlv50ko>

3- UNICEF (2026, 30 March) Humanitarian crisis for children deepens after one month of war in the Middle East <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/humanitarian-crisis-children-deepens-after-one-month-war-middle-east>

4- Ali, M & Chughtai, A. (2026, 26 March) Iran to Lebanon: Four million people displaced by US-Israeli war”, *Al Jazeera* <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/3/26/iran-to-lebanon-four-million-people-displaced-by-us-israeli-war>

global economic turmoil. While people around the world suffered increasing costs and energy insecurity, the world's top 100 oil and gas producers banked an estimated more than \$30 million every hour in excess profit in the first month of the US-Israeli war on Iran⁵. The three largest European companies Shell, Total Energies, and BP have seen the highest jump in profits betting on price changes from war-driven volatility. The International Energy Agency ordered the release of the largest government oil reserves in its history to calm markets. A fragile cease-fire was announced; however, no resolution has yet been reached.

Against this backdrop of war, in this third Policy Brief we pull back the curtain further on the hyper-militarization of the ocean, uncovering the “island chains” that constitute “fortified militarized walls,”⁶ extending both **horizontally** across the vast geography of the Indo-Pacific region, and **vertically** from the surface of the ocean to the airspace above, and deep down to the ocean floor. The theory behind ‘Island Chains’ dates back to imperial powers such as Germany, the US and Japan which regarded ‘island arcs’ as important natural geographical features providing a useful ‘protective veil’ for continental powers, in this case both the US and China; and a way to view territorial expansion – island by island - across a vast ocean space. The theory of ‘fortified walls’ was further formulated in US Cold War era strategic doctrine to contain communist expansion. Today they serve as military boundaries for great power projection through the stationing of forward force troops, missiles, aircrafts and surveillance equipment and assets as well as missile test areas in the Indo-Pacific region, all as a containment strategy against China and its allies.

Our paper focuses on the escalation of reinforcement in the second and third island chains, which extend from the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), to Guam, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Palau; further South to Papua New Guinea and Australia; and from Hawaii

5- Carrington, D. (2026, 15 April) \$30m an hour: big oil reaping huge war windfall from consumers, analysis finds, *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2026/apr/15/big-oil-huge-war-windfall-consumers>

6- Wirth, C. (2023, May) Solidifying sovereign power in liquid space: The making and breaking of ‘island chains’ and ‘walls’ at sea’, *Political Geography* 103 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0962629823000677#fig4> According to Wirth (2023) ‘China has been seen as building “a great wall at sea in the western Pacific” (Cole, 2010; Pedrozo, 2012), a “great wall in the sky” (Osawa, 2013), and a “great firewall” in cyberspace (Shen, 2014). These developments culminated in China’s construction of a “great wall of sand” (Harris, 2015)—through massive land-reclamations in the Spratly area of the South China Sea”.

through Fiji to New Zealand, which is currently the primary focus of the Trump Administration. In response, China has also initiated its own moves and counter measures, securing strategic bilateral economic, trade and security interests in the Indo-Pacific, reinforcing the Indo-Pacific theatre of war logic and the role of island chains in its war-game plans. Military analysts read the war against Iran as a possible precursor to the build-up for a war to contain China and its allies (North Korea and Russia)⁷. See map below.



We argue that the US Force Posture Initiative (USFPI), AUKUS and subsequent bilateral defense treaties between Australia and Pacific Island States [Tuvalu – Falepili Union; PNG -Pukpuk Treaty; Vanuatu - Nakamal Agreement; Fiji - the re-negotiated Vuvale Union and the Ocean of Peace Alliance also known as the Veitacini Treaty; as well as the Australia-Nauru Treaty], and between the US and certain Pacific island States (Fiji, PNG) are intended to expand the ‘Island chain’ military footprint deep into the South Pacific, weakening sovereignty, and legally binding Pacific Island states to the US-Israeli-Australia axis. Not only does this pose grave danger to global peace and stability, it also undermines the regional treaty on a nuclear-free Pacific and scuttles the vision of an ‘Ocean of Peace’. We document the operationalization of AUKUS in real time, in the context of the War

7- Lendon, B., Zhuang, S & Chang, W. (2026, 10 May) US experience fighting Iran offers lessons for China, experts say, 'CNN World', <https://edition.cnn.com/2026/05/09/china/us-experience-fighting-iran-lessons-china-intl-hnk-ml>

in Iran, and outline the concerning governance gaps that have emerged with the use of AI in advanced autonomous military weapons and surveillance systems designed for use in war.

Finally, we emphasize that the principle of ‘peaceful use’ of the ocean is under-siege as a result of the vast carve out for military in UNCLOS, including in its implementing agreements, the 1994 Agreement which brought the International Seabed Authority (ISA) into existence, and its newest agreement - Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement). Given the reimagined geographical scale of the ‘Indo-Pacific’, the role of ‘island chains’ in the theatre of war, and the scope of militarization – from critical minerals and under-sea cables, through the water column to the surface of the ocean and airspace, and from high-seas to within EEZ’s, and most recently, the role of AI in advanced warfare - we see how the carve-out for military has made for significant governance gaps for disarmament under UNCLOS. We conclude the paper by proposing policies that would be in the best interests of our region for urgent consideration by Pacific Island governments.

An Imperialist Theatre of war: the role of “Island Chains” in the Indo-Pacific

In her epic 2007 poem and essay, ‘To Island’, the late Dr. Teresia Teiawa proposed making the word ‘island’ a verb, saying ‘island’ as a noun is ‘vulnerable to impinging forces.’⁸ This is especially true when applied to the military logic of ‘Island Chains’ which turns our ‘sea of islands’ into a theatre of war.

The so-called ‘Indo-Pacific region’ has its origins in Cold War-era containment strategies involving alliance-building and ‘forward-basing’ military structures that included physical deployment and presence. It follows the Obama Administration’s ‘Asia-Pacific Pivot,’ a confrontational stance to counter the

8- Teaiwa wrote: ‘Let us turn the energy of the island inside out. Let us “island” the world! Let us teach the inhabitants of planet Earth how to behave as if we were all living on islands! For what is Earth but an island in our solar system? An island of precious ecosystems and finite resources...Once islanded, humans are awakened from the stupor of continental fantasies...’ See Kathy Jetřil-Kijiner et al (eds) (2022) Indigenous Pacific Islander EcoLiteratures, *University of Hawaii Press*, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824893514-041>

perceived growing threat of China and its ally (North Korea). Today, the Indo-Pacific region hosts more than 375,000 US military personnel, deployed across at least 66 distinct defense sites⁹.

The scale of militarization raises serious concerns such as the foundational legality of U.S military presence, and by extension, that of its closest ally (Australia), in the Indo-Pacific region. The infringement of indigenous rights, continuing environmental harm, increasing emissions from military exercises and the perpetuation of aid dependency of Pacific nations raise the broader question of who controls ‘security’ in the Pacific, and for whom? The most symbolically and legally significant challenge involves the Pōhakuloa Training Area on Hawai’i Island, the US-Indo-Pacific Command Center’s (INDACOM) primary land training installation used for live-fire and maneuver training. It spans more than 108,000 acres of lands seized by the US after the 1898 annexation. The facility has been operating on a 65-year lease, for a token payment of one US dollar per year.

In 2014, two Kānaka Maoli residents filed a lawsuit challenging the US military’s environmental and cultural harm.¹⁰ In 2018, a circuit court ruled that the state had breached public trust. The Hawai’i Supreme Court upheld this ruling in 2019, mandating that the state develop and execute a strict plan to regularly inspect and monitor the lands for military debris and hazards.¹¹

9- This defense infrastructure network performs and supports numerous military functions: including basing for military personnel and weapon systems; domain awareness and area defense; maintenance and repair; training and exercises such as RIMPAC, storage and prepositioning of materiel; and research, development, testing, and evaluation activities. See Jon Mitchell (2021) Poisoning the Pacific, *Japan Policy Research Institute*, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R47589>

10- Hogue, R.H (2022) Empire and Environment: Ecological Ruin in the TransPacific, *University of Michigan Press*, pp179-191, 2022 https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/166/oa_edited_volume/chapter/3249973

11- Yoshioka, K.A., Extern, C., & Tanaka, W. (2025, June) Pōhakuloa at a Crossroads: What Happened, and What’s Next? <https://sierraclubhawaii.org/blog/pohakuloa-june-2025>

‘Tip of the Spear’ US Territories and ‘Possessions’ – the role of the 2nd ‘Island Chain’

From 2011, in flagrant disregard of the UN General Assembly Resolution 57/140¹² on “Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and People”, the US constructed new installations in Guam and expanded its existing installations across the region. As US’s western-most “tip of the spear,” Guam is the strategic military hub of the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy.¹³ Since World War II, the US has turned one third of the island into a military fortress, destroying cultural sites, food and water sources and limestone forests.¹⁴ Chamorro medicine women, known as yo’ãnte, are limited in accessing their traditional harvesting grounds for medicinal plants, affecting their traditional healing practices for the community and the passing on of their medicinal knowledge to a new generation¹⁵. The Northern Guam Lens Aquifer is the primary freshwater source supplying 80-90% of Guam’s total drinking water, which has been extensively contaminated by PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl).¹⁶

In 2023, Human Rights Watch¹⁷ investigated US military encroachment. Chamorro activists and academics assert that the US is actively undermining decolonization and permanent sovereignty over their own natural resources.

12- United Nations, General Assembly (3 July 2003) *Report of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples for 2003*, A/57/23 - Part II <https://www.refworld.org/reference/themreport/unga/2003/47741>

This resolution calls for decolonization worldwide and for administering colonial powers to safeguard the political, economic, social wellbeing and human rights of occupied peoples. The right to self-determination is fully protected with restrictions placed on military and economic activities to not violate local communities’ human rights, prevent environment degradation and resource exploitation.

13- Mitchell, J. (2021, March) Poisoning the Pacific, *Japan Policy Research Institute* <https://jpri.org/2021/03/25/poisoning-the-pacific/>

14- Naputi, T. (2022, 8 February) Decolonisation for Guam still matters, *Island Business* <https://islandsbusiness.com/features/guam/>

15- Ahmed, K. A. (2024, October) Guam’s indigenous groups challenge US militarization, colonization US should respect, protect, and fulfill Chamorro human rights”, *Human Rights Watch* <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/10/29/guams-indigenous-groups-challenge-us-militarization-colonization>

16- Rabogo, M. (2025, June) Tests show ‘forever chemicals’ in CNMI, Guam, *RNZ* <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/pacific/564337/tests-show-forever-chemicals-in-cnmi-guam>

17- Ahmed, K. A (2024)

Militarization in Guam carries a long history of chemical contamination with veterans and families exposed to severe health crises such as rare neurological diseases (Lytico-Bodig a fatal neuro-degenerative disorder unique only to Chamorro people in the world combines ALS, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's simultaneously),¹⁸ elevated cancer rates, and chronic non-communicable diseases without adequate health services or infrastructure.

In 2024, the Biden Administration renewed the Compacts of Free Association (COFAs) between the US and Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and the Marshall Islands.¹⁹ Under the renewed COFAs, Palau, FSM and Marshall Islands, known as “Freely Associated States” (FAS) effectively granted the US access to a geographical area larger than the US itself, providing unfettered, exclusive military access including rights to airspace, land and territorial waters across the vast Northern Pacific maritime region, in exchange for federal funding and protective measures against any external military incursions or threats from China and North Korea.²⁰

The renewed COFAs reinforced the US's exclusive rights to the Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Range (Reagan Test Range), part of the ‘fortified wall in the sky’ on Kwajalein Atoll, and provided \$7.1 billion in economic assistance in return.²¹ The site, which has been operational since 1959, is a vast, world-class missile testing and space surveillance infrastructure and the US's

18- Shcherbakova, A. (2023, August 16) The mystery of the Guam disease, *The Oxford Scientist* <https://oxsci.org/mystery-of-guam-disease/>

19- Nishiuwatoko, L (2024, April 3) Building Pacific Relations: President Biden Signs Compacts of Free Association Amendment Act 2024, *Asia Matters* <https://asiamattersforamerica.org/articles/building-pacific-relations-president-biden-signs-compacts-of-free-association-amendment-act-2024>

20- ‘Compacts of Free Association’ (COFA) treaties were first signed between the US and the Federated States of Micronesia (1982), the Republic of the Marshall Islands (1982) and the Republic of Palau (1986) in their transition to political independence. The COFAs limited the sovereignty of these new states by allowing the US to retain strategic access and security control. The three groups of islands had been administered by the US from 1947 to 1986 under a specially mandated UN ‘Strategic Trust’ arrangement, approved by the UN Security Council in 1947 and known as the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI). While under trusteeship, Bikini and Eniwetok atolls in the Marshall Islands were subjected by the US military to 67 nuclear weapons tests.

21- Joint Economic Committee (2024, May 16) How the Renewed Compacts of Free Association Support U.S. Economic, National Security, and Climate Goals <https://jec.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/democrats/2024/5/how-the-renewed-compacts-of-free-association-support-u-s-economic-national-security-and-climate-goals>

exclusive rights to the site under the renewed COFAs are locked in until 2066, with an option to extend to 2086.²² The site conducts 24/7 ‘space situational awareness and protection of key space assets supporting the U.S. Central Command, U.S. Pacific Command and U.S. Northern Command’.²³ According to Peace Action Wellington, the US has conducted at least 10 Intercontinental Ballistic Missile tests in the Pacific since 2022, most of which landed in Kwajalein Atoll.”²⁴

In 2025, the U.S. Army designated a Commander of U.S. Army Pacific (USARPAC) for Kwajalein atoll.²⁵ Commonly referred to as the ‘airspace dome’, the Commander has exclusive control over the defense site, airspace, its surrounding ocean and the skies. What is troubling is that despite Marshallese independence in 1986, the dome has continued and expanded its operations uninterrupted, most recently in the surge of hypersonic weapons experiments.²⁶ This is significant as the Reagan Test Range has been elevated from a relatively standalone missile testing range to being directly integrated into the Pacific theatre command.

The 2024 COFAs also accelerated the securitization and militarization of Palau and the FSM. Aside from providing the largest per capita recruitment of Pacific people into the US defence force, Palau has established The Tactical Mobile Over-the-Horizon Radar (TACMOR) which will ‘enhance air and maritime domain situational awareness’ or ‘spying’ for the US on Chinese military movements. This radar is described as part of the extension of the ‘great wall in the sky’.²⁷

22- Justicia (2003, July 15) Compact of Free Association an assessment of the amended compacts and related agreements, *United States Government Accounting Office* (GAO ID GAO-03-1007T <https://gao.justia.com/departments-of-the-interior/2003/7/compact-of-free-association-gao-03-1007t/>)

23- US Army Space and Missile Defense Command (2023) Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site at Kwajalein Atoll (RTS), Fact Sheet, Distribution A 0323-03, https://www.smdc.army.mil/Portals/38/Documents/Publications/Fact_Sheets/RTS%20-%20TC%20-%200226_09.pdf?ver=pqyd4IQE4wzZsySvEf7G7Q%3D%3D

24- Peace Action Aotearoa (July 7, 2026) No Missile Launches Wanted in the Pacific. <https://pacific.scoop.co.nz/2026/07/no-missile-launches-wanted-in-the-pacific/>

25- GlobalMilitary.Net Marshall Islands Military Forces <https://www.globalmilitary.net/countries/mhl/>

26- Gruss, M. & Hofacker, C. (2025, January 1) Can Kwaj survive?, *Aerospace America* <https://aerospaceamerica.aiaa.org/features/can-kwaj-survive/>

27- Helfrich, E. & Rogoway, T. (2022, December 30) U.S. building advanced over-the-horizon radar on Palau, *TWZ* <https://www.twz.com/u-s-building-advanced-over-the-horizon-radar-on-palau>

In 2024, a group of students supported by Blue Ocean Law and the Center for Constitutional Rights and on behalf of the Ebiil Society, a Palauan grassroots environmental organization, wrote submissions to the UN Special Rapporteurs on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, regarding the denial of free, prior and informed consent of communities to increased military expansionism, and the potential for environmental harm and human rights violations.²⁸ Five special rapporteurs ‘raised concerns about harms that have already been caused by these [military] projects, including the destruction and disturbance of environments that are the sites of important subsistence and cultural practices, provide coastal protection essential to climate adaptation and mitigation, and provide essential habitats for endemic and endangered species.’²⁹

To support US Air Force training, a \$400 million upgrade to the international airport on Yap Island in the Federated States of Micronesia is underway. FSM has an exclusive economic zone larger than continental US and in return for its use, the US supplies more than 60 percent of FSM’s national budget. A 447-acre military construction footprint, increased aviation fuel handling and the transformation of a civilian airport into a forward military base present serious risks, among them, soil contamination, toxic runoff, damage to coastal reef ecosystems and disruption to artisanal fisheries.³⁰ The Pentagon plans to invest as much as \$2 billion in FSM to operationalize US Air Force’s Agile Combat Employment (ACE) framework, which requires access to dispersed airfields. While FSM is being physically redeveloped to serve US strategic objectives, no comprehensive independent environmental impact assessment has been made public. Relations between the national government, state government,

28- Pearl, H. (2024, December 19) Teenagers fight US militarization of Palau with UN complaint over rights violations, *Benar News* <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/pacific/palau-us-military-12192024170659.html>

29- Pacific Daily News (2025, Decembe 26) 5 UN special rapporteurs raise ‘deep concerns’ over US military projects in Palau https://www.guampdn.com/news/5-un-special-rapporteurs-raise-deep-concerns-over-us-military-projects-in-palau/article_aa18dc18-6a5f-4345-94d2-390faa5fd271.html

30- Joint Economic Committee, Democrats (2024, May 16) How the renewed Compacts of Free Association support US economic, national security and climate goals <https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/democrats/2024/5/how-the-renewed-compacts-of-free-association-support-u-s-economic-national-security-and-climate-goals>

traditional leaders and the Department of Defense have been described as fraught, signaling that meaningful free, prior and informed consent was not undertaken.³¹

We argue that the COFAs are a deeply asymmetrical arrangement, with the US eroding the national sovereignty of FAS by controlling defense and denying any third-party military presence, subverting foreign policy, and enjoying unfettered strategic access in exchange for entrenching economic dependency. It goes without saying that no amount of aid and finance can reverse the permanent loss and damage experienced by Pacific countries or compensate for the harm caused by military pollution. Yet this imposed economic lifeline also cannot be refused as these Pacific countries are some of the world's smallest economies, and are experiencing the worst impacts of the climate crisis.

The irony is that the US military is the world's largest institutional emitter of greenhouse gases, with an annual carbon footprint that exceeds the emissions of more than 140 individual countries. The US military accounts for 5.5 % of global greenhouse gas emissions, excluding those arising from ongoing conflicts and wars.³² Military exercises, activities, testing and expansionism are causing devastating levels of planetary heating, climate induced disasters, environmental contamination, pollution, biodiversity loss, sea level rise, and warming and acidifying oceans, crippling the livelihoods of Pacific peoples. In 2024, the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) in its groundbreaking advisory opinion expanded the definition of marine pollution under UNCLOS to include greenhouse gas emissions. This opinion triggers State due diligence and responsibility to prevent and minimize climate-caused adverse impacts on the marine environment.³³

31- Cagurangan, M. (2025, 8 August) Backdoor deal? Yap-US military agreement criticized as a sellout, *Pacific Island Times*, <https://www.pacificislandtimes.com/post/backdoor-deal-yap-us-military-agreement-criticized-as-a-sellout>

32- Lakhani, N. (2025, 30 May) How the US became the biggest military emitter and stopped everyone finding out, *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/30/donald-trump-geopolitics-could-deepen-planetary-catastrophe-expert-warns>

33- Afzal, J. & Ahmad, I (2025, June 30) The ITLOS Advisory Opinion on Climate Change and Marine Pollution: Some Reflections, *Sage Journals* 55 (2-3) <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/18785395251353059>

A core reason why Pacific leadership is at the forefront of global climate negotiations to reduce global temperature rise to 1.5 is that the existential threat is so heavily present in our region. Yet recognition that the US military-industrial complex is contributing directly to threatening Pacific lives – on both the climate and security fronts - appears not to register with Pacific leaders.

Australia's Secret Role in Supporting US Military-Security Agendas

1. Pine Gap: 'Wall in the Skies – Eyes and Ears'.

Deep in the Australian desert, on the unceded lands of the Arrernte people near Alice Springs, sits one of the most powerful and deliberately obscured intelligence facilities on earth. For nearly six decades, Joint Defence Facility Pine Gap has operated behind a veil of official secrecy, extending American military power across the Eastern Hemisphere while remaining beyond the reach of democratic accountability. Pine Gap commands four geosynchronous signals intelligence satellites positioned 36,000 kilometres above the equator, intercepting civilian, commercial and military communications across the Middle East, Europe and Africa. That intelligence is processed by the US National Security Agency (NSA) and translated into lethal operational support targeting coordinates for drone strikes across Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen and beyond.³⁴

David Rosenberg, a former senior NSA contractor who spent eighteen years at Pine Gap, has stated on record that the facility is monitoring the Gaza Strip with all of its resources, gathering intelligence specifically assessed to be useful to Israel. The targets of this intel are hospitals, schools, refugee camps, homes, offices and civilian lives.³⁵ Australia hosts this infrastructure yet the Australian

34- Friends of the Earth Australia (2024, October) Anti-Militarism, *Chain Reaction 148* https://assets.nationbuilder.com/foe/pages/8001/attachments/original/1748488433/CR_148_softcopy.pdf?1748488433

35- Cronau, P. (2023, November 3) Targeting Palestine, *Declassified Australia* <https://declassifiedaus.org/2023/11/03/targeting-palestine/>

public, even Cabinet, remains uninformed about its operations providing territory, legitimacy and silence for operations it does not control, cannot scrutinize, and may not legally sanction.

The Australian law firm, Birchgrove Legal, supported by 100 lawyers, submitted a 92-page dossier to the International Criminal Court (ICC) accusing Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles, and Foreign Affairs Minister Penny Wong of individual criminal responsibility as accessories to genocide in Gaza. The submission specifically invites the ICC Prosecutor to investigate Australian leadership under Article 25 of the Rome Statute. Amongst several grounds for investigation such as halting humanitarian aid and providing political cover for Israel's war crimes is also the approval of defense exports and providing weapons parts (such as components for F-35 fighter jets) used by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in Gaza. The dossier also cites intelligence-sharing and ambiguous Australian military deployments to the region.³⁶ Pine Gap's Advanced Orion satellites also now provide complete surveillance coverage of Iran and the Middle East. This is the same surveillance used against Gaza, now turned on a second theatre of US military operations.³⁷

Pine Gap is part of the 'Five Eyes Alliance' of five English-speaking countries, the US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Together they form a mass global surveillance on phone, radio and satellite communications, operating above the legal frameworks of the individual countries.³⁸ On 25 May 2021, the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights, prompted by revelations from Edward Snowden in 2013 relating to the mass surveillance practices of the Five Eyes alliance, issued a landmark ruling on the compatibility of systems of mass surveillance with the ECHR. The judgment challenged both the TEMPORA³⁹ bulk

36- Gregoire, P. (2024, March 5) Australian law firm files case against PM for complicity in Gaza genocide, *Sydney Criminal Lawyers* <https://www.sydneycriminallawyers.com.au/blog/australian-law-firm-files-case-against-pm-for-complicity-in-gaza-genocide/>

37- Pillarisetty, A. (2025, 14 October) Protest and power on the road to Pine Gap, *Declassified Australia* <https://declassifiedaus.org/2025/10/14/protest-and-power-on-the-road-to-pine-gap/>

38- State of Surveillance, (2026) *The five eyes alliance* <https://stateofsurveillance.org/articles/surveillance/five-eyes-alliance-mutual-surveillance-explained/>

39- By placing taps at key undersea fibre-optic cable landing stations, TEMPORA is able to intercept a significant portion of the communications that traverse the UK. The majority of global internet traffic flows through undersea cables, many of which land in the UK. This single program captures a substantial share of humanity's digital communications.

interception programme and cooperation in bulk interception with the Five Eyes — the US (using PRISM⁴⁰ and Upstream), UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The Court found violations of the right to privacy under Article 8, and to freedom of expression under Article 10 ECHR.⁴¹

In 2024, the US Space Force was reported to be launching five new ballistic missile early warning infrared sensor tracking satellites at Pine Gap. These will be used to detect heat signatures from ballistic missiles from all stages of launch, tracking target locations and incoming missiles. In other words, Pine Gap is being upgraded for a potential nuclear war.⁴²

2. The US Force Posture Initiative (USFPI) and AUKUS

In addition, the US Force Posture Initiative (USFPI) and the AUKUS security pact are key frameworks for joint deterrence and defense posture in the Indo-Pacific. Since 2019, the USFPI operates an annual, six-month deployment of approximately 2,500 U.S. Marines and sailors to the Northern Territory in Australia. It focuses on intensive ground combat training, crisis response, and improving interoperability between the U.S. Marine Corps and the Australian Defence Force (ADF), regional partners and, in specific situations, the activities of US contractors in Australia.⁴³ A number of class actions have been led by aboriginal communities against PFAS contamination, and damage to fragile ecosystems from heavy vehicle use, live fire exercises and oil/fuel spills.⁴⁴

The militarization of the Northern Territory occurs against a backdrop of longstanding denial of First Nations political sovereignty. Under international law, Article 30 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

40- PRISM is a surveillance program that collects data held by Google, Facebook, Apple, Microsoft and other major platforms.

41- Frigo, M. (2021, 4 June) Big brother watch v. UK: a landmark judgment missing the mark, *Opinio Juris* <https://opiniojuris.org/2021/06/04/big-brother-watch-v-uk-a-landmark-judgment-missing-the-mark/>

42- Cronau, P (2024, June 25) Pine Gap's secret expansion, *ICAN Australia* <https://icanw.org.au/pine-gaps-secret-expansion/>

43- Australian Government Defence, Marine rotational force Darwin <https://www.defence.gov.au/defence-activities/programs-initiatives/united-states-force-posture-initiatives/marine-rotational-force-darwin-initiative>

44- Hay, D (2025, March 5) Where are US military bases in Australia, *Social Justice Australia* <https://socialjusticeaustralia.com.au/us-military-bases-in-australia/>

states that “military activities shall not take place in the lands or territories of Indigenous peoples, unless justified by a relevant public interest or otherwise freely agreed with or requested by the Indigenous peoples concerned,” and that “States shall undertake effective consultations with the Indigenous peoples concerned through appropriate procedures and in particular through their representative institutions, prior to using their lands or territories for military activities.”⁴⁵

In 2023, Larrakia Elder, Tibby Quall, launched legal action against the 800 defence houses being built on 132 hectares of old-growth coastal bushland at Binyabara. His claims included a failure to consult traditional owners and their rights to cultural artefacts on sacred sites. The court ordered the government to make a due diligence assessment but they refused to acknowledge Larrakia cultural significance and went ahead with clearing the forest. Clearing outside the permitted area also led to destroying the habitat of the endangered Gouldian Finch which holds deep cultural significance for Larrakia people.⁴⁶

Defence driven development is frequently presented as economically beneficial for the Northern Territory, when the reality is that First Nation Peoples suffer human rights violations with lack of housing, health, education, poverty, water insecurity, arbitrary incarceration and dispossession.⁴⁷ The economic benefits flow largely to defence contractors, non-Indigenous businesses and a transient military workforce while pricing out Indigenous Peoples from Darwin.⁴⁸

45- United Nations General Assembly (2007). United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples (Resolution 61/295) https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf

46- Environmental Justice Australia (2023) Save Binyabara Lee Point <https://envirojustice.org.au/legal-work/first-nations-justice/binyabara-lee-point/>

47- Thomson, S. (2025, 16 July) The future of US facilities in northern Australia, Australian Strategic Policy Institute <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-future-of-us-facilities-in-northern-australia/>

48- Thompson, M. (2011, November 2011) Is a US Marine base in Darwin really a good idea? The Conversation <https://theconversation.com/is-a-us-marine-base-in-darwin-really-a-good-idea-4260>

3. The Operationalization of AUKUS in Real Time: The Case of the War in IRAN

USFPI focuses on logistical networks, physical infrastructure and operability from Australia, laying the groundwork for the AUKUS security pact. The partnership is structured around two pillars: Pillar I, which involves the purchase of three (possibly five) second-hand US Virginia-class nuclear powered submarines is covered in detail in our Policy Brief 2. This Policy Brief focuses on Pillar II which covers advanced capabilities such as hypersonic missiles, quantum technology, cyber warfare, a deep-space advanced radar capability program, artificial intelligence (AI), and lethal autonomous underwater vehicles.⁴⁹ The entire security agenda of AUKUS is to patrol the Pacific Ocean against Chinese incursions.

Anti-nuclear campaigners have argued that AUKUS undermines the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (Treaty of Rarotonga) and will lead to destabilizing the region.⁵⁰ Former Environment Minister, Peter Garrett along with trade unions, civil society, public and political figures have launched a public inquiry into AUKUS.⁵¹

The inquiry⁵² will focus on:

- 1) the fundamental question of whether securing nuclear-powered attack submarines enhances Australia's true safety;
- 2) the uncertain timeline regarding when Australia will eventually take possession of the vessels for which financial contributions have already commenced;

49- Channer, H. (2023, March 21) Explainer: AUKUS' economics – the price of a megaproject, *Unites States Studies Center* <https://www.ussc.edu.au/explainer-aukus-economics-the-price-of-a-megaproject>

50- Hurst, D. (2023, November 19) A four-decade-old Pacific treaty was meant to preserve the 'peaceful region'. Now experts say it's being exploited, *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/19/a-40-year-old-pacific-treaty-was-meant-to-maintain-the-peaceful-region-now-experts-say-its-being-exploited>

51- McIlroy, T. (2026, June 2) Peter Garrett to head independent inquiry into the Aukus submarine pact, *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/jun/02/peter-garrett-to-head-independent-inquiry-into-the-aukus-submarine-pact>

52- Lam, L. (2026, 2 June) Australian ex-minister launches crowd-funded inquiry into Aukus submarine deal, *BBC* <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn7p3ky2yl10>

- 3) the extent to which the AUKUS pact erodes and undermines Australia's national sovereignty;
- 4) the unresolved issue of nuclear waste disposal sites, given Australia has assumed the legal burden of storing spent fuel from both American and British nuclear-powered fleets;
- 5) the diplomatic and economic repercussions of AUKUS on Australia's intricate relationship with China; and
- 6) the long-term consequences for Australia's credibility and position regarding the maintenance of regional peace and stability.

Already some concerning implications of the AUKUS pact have become clear. On 4 March 2026, a US Navy submarine torpedoed the Iranian frigate IRIS Dena (on a formal visit to India) without warning in international waters in the North East Indian Ocean killing 140 sailors. Three Royal Australian Navy personnel were on-board the fast-attack submarine as part of their operation training under AUKUS Pillar 1 (preparing for crewing Australia's future nuclear-powered submarine). The Prime Minister denied any complicity in the direct attack against Iran. However, Australian personnel were effectively participating in an act of war against Iran.⁵³

On 10 March 2026, the Australian government issued a joint statement announcing a package of military support to the UAE for their defense against Iranian attacks. This included 85 defence personnel, a Boeing E-7A Wedgetail and stocks of AIM-120C-7/8 AMRAMM medium-range air-to-air missiles.⁵⁴ The Australian government falsely claimed the Wedgetail to be a passive surveillance aircraft but it is 'one of the most advanced airspace battle management capabilities in the world' used to 'coordinate a joint air, sea and land battle in real time' - it is a war command and control center.⁵⁵ The intel gathered by Wedgetail is sent to the Combined Air Operations Center in Qatar where the US conducts its air assaults.

53- Lowrey, T. & Dziedzic, S. (2026, March 6) Anthony Albanese confirms Australian navy personnel on US submarine that sank Iranian vessel, *ABC News* <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-03-06/australian-navy-personnel-on-us-submarine-that-sunk-iran-vessel/106423710>

54- Australian Government (2026, March 10) Australia to provide defensive military assistance to Gulf <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2026-03-10/australia-provide-defensive-military-assistance-gulf>

55- Boeing (2026) E-7A wedgetail <https://www.boeing.com.au/products-services/defence-space-security/wedgetail>

Australia is playing an active and direct role in the planning, targeting and execution of strikes on Iran. This is clear from the joint Pine Gap satellite surveillance and war-targeting base in central Australia, to the now Australian-controlled US submarine communications base ‘Naval Communication Station Harold E. Holt’ on the North West Cape in Western Australia, and the embedding of Australian forces in the US military-intelligence apparatus and supplying intel and missiles. In 2020, Australia’s Defence Department allocated \$9.3 billion for high-speed long-range strike and missile defence, precisely the kind of weapons being used against Iran.⁵⁶ In the Pacific context, the US-Israel-Australia military buildup, while being framed as ‘deterrence’ and ‘security’, is in fact becoming the primary theatre for AI warfare development.

The central political structure driving AI militarisation in the Pacific is AUKUS. As the cornerstone of Australia’s 2026 National Defence Strategy, AUD15 billion has been allocated to unmanned and autonomous systems and AUD 4.3 billion to the Advanced Strategic Capabilities Accelerator (ASCA) clearly exposing Australia positioning itself to having one of the region’s most advanced AI warfare architecture. The AUKUS AI and Autonomy working group, comprising Australia, the UK and the US, aims to accelerate the joint development, testing and deployment of AI models on autonomous military systems. The Working Group oversees the Resilient and Autonomous Artificial Intelligence Technologies (RAAIT) which collects data, and trains AI systems by “delivering artificial intelligence algorithms and machine learning to enhance force protection, precision targeting, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.”⁵⁷

56- Australian Government (2020, December 1) Australia collaborates with the US to develop and test high speed long-range hypersonic weapons www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2020-12-01/australia-collaborates-us-develop-test-high-speed-long-range-hypersonic-weapons

See also Australian Defence Business Review (2020, 30 June), reported in Australian Government Re-sets Defense Strategy, Defense.info (2020, 7 July), confirming \$6.2-9.3 billion allocated under the 2020 Force Structure Plan for research and development into high-speed long-range strike, <https://defense.info/re-thinking-strategy/2020/07/australian-government-re-sets-defense-strategy/>

57- Library of Congress (2024) AUKUS Pillar 2 (Advanced Capabilities): Background and Issues for Congress, R47599 www.congress.gov/crs-product/R47599

Millions have also been invested (without democratic oversight or public debate) in Australian universities and tech firms, funding AI and data projects designed to strengthen ‘defence’ which includes live war-fighting experiments, and trialing anti-submarine-warfare AI algorithms on the RAAF P-8A Poseidon aircraft in the Indian Ocean.⁵⁸

Pillar II is integrating the entire digital knowledge infrastructure of allied states into a single war fighting apparatus without governance, regulation and oversight. UN Secretary-General António Guterres has called on member states to set clear regulations and prohibitions on autonomous weapons systems by 2026,⁵⁹ however States continue to bypass the militarisation of AI. For example, the EU AI Act omits AI applications used in defence and national security contexts. Australia is failing to acknowledge the humanitarian risks of weaponising AI and is moving headfirst into unregulated AI warfare.⁶⁰ This is evident in the AUKUS Maritime Big Play (MBP), a trilateral Pillar II exercise series focused on rapidly testing uncrewed undersea vehicles, autonomous payloads, one-way attack munitions, AI and electronic warfare in real-world operational environments.⁶¹

In a recent summit, Australian Defence Minister, Richard Marles, claimed the “seabed is a battlefield” in a combative speech urging Beijing to be more transparent about its maritime operations, and taking aim at weak international controls over so-called “shadow-fleet” vessels’.⁶² They are the precise domains in

58- Ludlow, E. (2026, February 24) Militarisation of Australian universities intensifies: More than \$200 million in defence contracts since 2024, World Socialist Website <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2026/02/25/gkjb-f25.html> See also: Degrees of Defence: Ties between Australian Universities, the Defence Industry and Autonomy Research, *SafeGround: Reducing Impacts of War*, <https://safeground.org.au/degrees-of-defence/>

59- United Nations (2023) Our Common Agenda: A New Agenda for Peace. Policy Brief 9. <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-new-agenda-for-peace-en.pdf>

60- United Nations, Office of the Secretary-General (2023) Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9: A New Agenda for Peace, recommending that States conclude, by 2026, a legally binding instrument to prohibit lethal autonomous weapon systems that function without human control or oversight, and regulate all other autonomous weapons systems, <https://www.un.org/en/common-agenda/summit-of-the-future>

61- Australian Government Defence (2026, February 19) Defence tests cutting-edge autonomous capabilities during AUKUS Maritime Big Play <https://www.defence.gov.au/news-events/releases/2026-02-19/defence-tests-cutting-edge-autonomous-capabilities-during-aukus-maritime-big-play>

62- Doherty, B (2026, May 31) New Aukus drone tech to protect critical undersea cables as Marles warns: ‘seabed is a battlefield’, *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2026/may/31/richard-marles-defence-summit-singapore-china-transparency-pete-hegseth#img-1>

which the Iran war is currently being fought: in the Strait of Hormuz, the Indian Ocean, and the Persian Gulf, using submarines, surface vessels, mines and drone swarms, which have defined the character of war in present times.

The build-up and deployment of traditional submarines and warships, combined with the rapid expansion of frontline AI military technologies, openly violate the Pacific's vision of an "Ocean of Peace." Australia's attempt to justify its acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines as the "use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes" under Article 4 of the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is untenable. The transfer of nuclear propulsion technology and weapons-grade highly enriched uranium from nuclear-weapon states to Australia exposes the claim as a legal and political fiction, particularly when paired with the warfighting logic driving AI-enabled military systems. These proliferation risks strike at the heart of the Treaty of Rarotonga. Australia's increasingly aggressive maritime posture against China is not stabilising the region; it is accelerating instability, hardening military alliances, and driving the Pacific into a dangerous new arms race.

Re-colonizing 'sovereign states' through binding defense and security treaties

Today, defense treaties are legally binding in nature and are expanding in scope beyond traditional military and security aspects to capture and reshape development and economic cooperation, infrastructure, aid and even to address climate insecurities. Further, we contend that these defence treaties bind and extend the 'island chain' military logic from the north Pacific to further down south by providing access to third parties, and obliging states to come to each other's defence in the event of an attack on one. Highly unpopular and lacking any social license for impinging on sovereignty, these defense treaties exploit the vulnerability of island nations, many of which are saddled with mounting debt while faced with existential threats from climate crises.

Further down in the South Pacific, the United States has reaffirmed its partnerships with Papua New Guinea and Fiji. In 2023, the US signed a Defense Cooperation Agreement with PNG and a second agreement on law enforcement

and tackling transnational maritime crimes. Papua New Guinea Defence Force participated in Talisman Sabre – a multilateral military exercise alongside the US and Australia in 2025.⁶³ The following year, the US (former) Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin signed a new defense pact with Fiji, marking the first time a high-ranking US defense secretary visited the country.⁶⁴ Both the PNG and Fiji security agreements seek to enhance the US security partnership and to assist with upgrading their respective militaries and hardwire their interoperability into the US industrial military complex.

On the 26th of May 2026, the press reported that the QUAD (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue), an informal strategic and diplomatic partnerships between the US, Australia, Japan and India, had announced a newly minted ‘enhanced [maritime] surveillance and critical minerals cooperation deal’.⁶⁵ In that deal Penny Wong, Australia’s foreign minister, confirmed that the QUAD was cooperating on assisting port development under the Blue Ports initiative with Fiji as a pilot project – a direct response to China’s perceived growing influence in Fiji. In July, Australia renegotiated the Fiji-Australia Vuvale Union and signed a new treaty with Fiji, the Ocean of Peace Alliance (Veitacini Treaty)⁶⁶. One of the alarming elements of the Veitacini Treaty is contained in Article 6 on Mutual Defence, which implicitly obliges each party to come to the defence of the other in the event of an attack on either party. This undermines Fiji’s long held foreign policy of ‘friends to all, enemies to none’ – a non-aligned stance.

In effect, Pacific countries are locked into multiple security agreements which capture trade and economic arrangements with colonial powers and seriously endanger their sovereignty, environment, lands, ocean, water, food sources and culture.

63- US Department of State (2023), Media Statement: The United States and Papua New Guinea sign new defence cooperation agreement. <https://2021-2025.state.gov/the-united-states-and-papua-new-guinea-sign-new-defense-cooperation-agreement-and-an-agreement-concerning-counter-illicit-transnational-maritime-activity-operations/>

64- Office of the Prime Minister (2024). PM Rabuka meets with US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin. <https://www.pmooffice.gov.fj/pm-rabuka-meets-with-u-s-secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iii/>

65- Indo-Pacific Defence Forum (2026, June 9) Quad launches maritime surveillance, critical minerals initiatives <https://ipdefenseforum.com/2026/06/quad-launches-maritime-surveillance-critical-minerals-initiatives/>

66- Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2026) Fiji -Vuvale Union Treaty and Ocean of Peace Alliance. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/fiji>

China's Moves and Counter Measures

According to the US Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving PRC (2025)⁶⁷, China's stated ambition is to field a 'world-class' military by 2049. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has made significant progress in rapidly modernizing and building up its military forces and capabilities, propelled in part by China's increased defense spending and technological development. China continues to accelerate its development of military technology, including military artificial intelligence (AI), biotechnology and hypersonic missiles. In fact, one of the key concerns is that apart from dominating in the critical minerals sectors, China is the world's leading drone manufacturer, and the number of unmanned weapons systems its manufacturers can produce is staggering, some analysts warn.

The report further asserts that, "China maintains a large growing arsenal of nuclear, maritime, conventional long-range strike, cyber and space capabilities that can directly threaten US security. Although China's military focus is currently on the First Chain of Islands (which runs from Japan, Taiwan, down to the Philippines), in 2025 PRC demonstrated great power projection beyond the First Island Chain, ramping up its far-seas training and operations that year. In early February 2025, Chinese Naval vessels also conducted drills around the waters of Australia and New Zealand, underscoring China's presence in the Pacific. In July this year, the Chinese government test launched what they called a routine test of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) from a submarine which landed in the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone (close to Tuvalu waters). The test came within hours of the signing of the Veitacini Treaty and the re-negotiated Fiji-Australia Vuvale Union – China said that the test should not be misread. The test was swiftly condemned by governments and civil society alike with a notable difference – most Pacific island governments have remained silent on similar US ICBM tests in the northern Pacific.

67- US Department of Defense (2025) Annual report to the congress: military and security developments involving the Peoples Republic of China <https://media.defense.gov/2025/Dec/23/2003849070/-1/-1/1/ANNUAL-REPORT-TO-CONGRESS-MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA-2025.PDF>

The Chinese government signed a security pact with the Solomon Islands in 2022 and an economic and technical cooperation deal with the Cook Islands in 2025. The latter rang alarm bells in Wellington as Cook Islands is ‘constitutionally subordinate to New Zealand’ on foreign policy and defense policy decisions.⁶⁸

SUMMARY OF ISSUES OF CONCERN AND POLICY PROPOSALS TO PACIFIC GOVERNMENTS

The Pacific Ocean is not a battlefield – despite the growing number of security and defence treaties that our countries are signing onto that bind us into the military logic of ‘island chains’ and extend their influence deep into the South Pacific. As pointed out in Teresia’s poem – to Island the World, the Islander is called to protect our ocean from the continental stupor of war and war mongering.

Military-driven ‘development’ is a fiction. Like the fabled Trojan horse, it comes in the guise of benefits, but is a vehicle of dispossession and despoilation - seizing control of lands, ocean and skies; polluting our environment, contaminating our food and water sources, and eroding our sovereignty and our capacity to be self-sufficient; and to think for ourselves. Our ‘economic well-being’ and ‘security’ cannot be guaranteed by stock-piling weapons and sabre-rattling, even less by open warring. As Pacific Island people we must make clear that we do not wish to make enemies of any state; or to become pawns in any big power war games.

The military-industrial complex – i.e. the big private companies which manufacture weapons, munitions, warheads, military hardware and software, including electronic surveillance systems, and AI coordinated and directed warring systems - are the only beneficiaries of increased defence spending, of an arms race, and of wars.

68- Alex Blackburn (2025, March 5) Chinese military drills near Australia disrupt flights and raise security concerns, Asia Pacific Diplomacy and Security, *Bloomsbury Intelligence and Security Institute* <https://bisi.org.uk/reports/chinese-military-drills-near-australia-disrupt-flights-and-raise-security-concerns#:~:text=On%2021%20February%202025%2C%20Chinese,by%20Australia%20and%20its%20allies>

The policy proposals outlined below build on and support the Pacific Regional Civil Society Calls for a genuine Ocean of Peace.

POLICY PROPOSALS TO OUR LEADERS AND GOVERNMENTS:

1. No enemies, no wars: Pacific Island states must not be drawn into hostilities with China, the United States or any other power. China is not our enemy, and neither is any other state. We are friends with all, allies to none in war. We intend to keep it that way.

2. No harvesting of Pacific soldiers: Pacific Island states must not contract their people to engage in hostilities with any state, nor allow them to be contracted as so-called ‘peacekeepers’ by any foreign state waging war against its own citizens or against an ‘enemy’ state. Our people must never become casualties for someone else’s war.

3. Condemn every missile test, without exception: unequivocally condemn all missile tests conducted in or across the Pacific Ocean, whether undertaken by China, North Korea the United States, France or any other power. Selective condemnation is not neutrality but complicity. Our ocean is not a firing range.

4. Reject the expansion of foreign military footprint: reject the continued militarisation of the Blue Pacific not limited to the US Force Posture Initiative, AUKUS submarine rotations, expanding basing on Guam, the CNMI, Kwajalein and Yap, and the locking-in of the Reagan Test Range until 2066 and beyond. Demand a public, region-wide accounting of every foreign military installation, lease and access arrangement currently operating in Pacific lands, waters and skies, and a timeline for winding it down.

5. Reaffirm the Treaty of Rarotonga: reaffirm and strengthen the Treaty of Rarotonga as the cornerstone of Pacific regional security, and formally challenge the legal fiction advanced by Australia under Article IV of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty — that nuclear-powered submarines under AUKUS constitute ‘peaceful use’ of nuclear energy. Raise this incompatibility directly with the Treaty’s Consultative Committee.

6. Push for a nuclear-weapon-free world: support the universalisation of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, and press Australia now hosting nuclear-powered submarines and deepening its role in US nuclear strategy to sign and ratify without further delay.

7. Refuse to be anyone's nuclear dumping ground: reject, absolutely, any suggestion that Pacific states store, recycle or otherwise host nuclear waste generated by AUKUS submarines or any nuclear power, regardless of the sum offered. No amount of money can recover a poisoned reef or a contaminated aquifer.

8. Keep the Ocean of Peace Pacific-led: insist that any future Ocean of Peace framework is negotiated, drafted and owned by Pacific peoples through Pacific regional institutions, and centred on human security, environmental stewardship, decolonisation, Indigenous rights and demilitarisation and not repackaged as a security architecture for great-power competition.

9. No infrastructure without consent: demand independent, publicly available environmental and human rights impact assessments, and genuine evidence of free, prior and informed consent, before any further defence-linked construction proceeds — including the Yap Island airport upgrade, Palau's TACMOR radar and continuing US Force Posture Initiative works in the Northern Territory. Where consent has been denied or bypassed, as in Palau, the Northern Territory and Guam, construction must stop.

10. Renegotiate the treaties that trade sovereignty for aid: review and, where necessary, renegotiate asymmetrical defence and security arrangements, the Compacts of Free Association, the Falepili Union, the Pukpuk Treaty, the Vuvale Union, Veitacini Treaty and the Australia–Nauru Treaty to insert enforceable sovereignty safeguards, sunset clauses and independent dispute resolution, in place of open-ended military access including third parties that are locked in for decades.

11. Regulate/ BAN AI weapons: demand binding international regulation, not voluntary guidelines, on the development and deployment of autonomous weapons systems and military AI, in line with the UN Secretary-General's call for

prohibitions by 2026. Bring AUKUS's AI and Autonomy Working Group and the RAAIT programme within a transparent, internationally accountable governance framework, and reject any testing of AI-enabled weapons surface, sub-surface or aerial in Pacific waters absent that framework.

12. Close the military carve-out in ocean law: use Pacific leverage within UNCLOS, the International Seabed Authority and the BBNJ Agreement to press for 'peaceful use' and marine protection provisions to be read consistently with, not overridden by, military exemptions extending the logic of the 2024 ITLOS advisory opinion on greenhouse gas emissions to military activity across the water column, seabed and airspace. Further call on island states to further regulate military activities within their Exclusive Economic Zones requiring prior informed consent by coastal states.

13. Real security is climate security: require independent accounting of the climate and environmental cost — emissions, contamination, ecosystem loss — of every foreign military deployment, exercise and installation in the region, including the US military's own emissions footprint, and publish it alongside national climate reporting. Every dollar spent fortifying the Pacific for someone else's war is a dollar not spent adapting to the climate crisis we did not cause.

14. Let Pacific peoples decide Pacific security: insist that the future of Pacific security is determined by Pacific peoples, through Pacific institutions, according to Pacific priorities not ratified after the fact, once the base is built, the treaty is signed, or the missile is fired.

'The Pacific has already paid the price of being treated as a testing ground, a military frontier and a dumping ground for other nations' ambitions. Our ocean is not a theatre for great-power rivalry, it is our home, the foundation of our cultures, our livelihoods and our futures. If the Blue Pacific is to become a genuine Ocean of Peace, militarisation must give way to justice, cooperation and Pacific-led security, founded on sovereignty, self-determination and the wellbeing of our peoples.' PRNGO Statement.

69- Pacific Regional Non-Governmental Alliance Media statement (2026, 13 July) Pacific Civil Society Calls for a Genuine Ocean of Peace: The Pacific is NOT a battleground <https://pang.org.fj/pacific-civil-society-calls-for-a-genuine-ocean-of-peace-the-pacific-is-not-a-battleground/>



DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES
WITH WOMEN FOR A NEW ERA