

China-Solomon Islands Security Pact: Implications in Maritime Domain

Dr. Hasan Yaser Malik Dr. Deanna Anderlini**

Abstract

In April 2022, China and the Solomon Islands concluded a security pact to cement the political foundation of their relations by primarily supporting each other's sovereignty, integrity, maritime protection, and development of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The security pact has impacted not only China and the Solomon Islands, but also the US dominance of Oceania in particular and the Indo-Pacific in general. The security pact will not only allow Beijing to strengthen itself in the Indo-Pacific Oceans against the diminishing influence of the US, but it will also allow Beijing to strengthen its position in the Atlantic Ocean to further trap the already-trapped US. Following the US Island Chain Strategy, under which the US established three island chains in the Pacific Ocean to check the Chinese and Russian expansion after World War II, China now has the capability and capacity to establish a 4500 km-long island chain in the Atlantic Ocean from the Azores to Trinidad, which will assist it in creating a global balance for economic and social development through blue diplomacy.

Key words: *China, Solomon Islands, Security Pact, Island Chains and Atlantic Ocean.*

* Independent Researcher, PhD in International Relations. He can be reached at hasanyaser91@gmail.com.

* Adjunct Lecturer, The University of Queensland, Australia. She can be reached at Anderlini.deanna@tiscali.it.

Introduction

On 19 April, 2022, Reuters released the news that China has signed a security pact with the Solomon Islands.¹ This came just days before a high-level US delegation, led by National Security Council for Asia – Craig Hart, visited Honiara to discuss concerns about China and the eventual reopening of the U.S. embassy.² The pact represented China's entry into the US island chain policy, established in 1952 following the end of World War II. However, China seems to be applying a soft power approach to fill the economic, political, and administrative vacuum created by the sudden withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan.³ President Bush, with his doctrine of pre-emption in 2002, continued to expand US power. The China-Solomon Islands Security Pact (CSISP) has reinvigorated China-US strategic competition not only in the South China Sea but even beyond the second and third island chains, further extending to the Atlantic Ocean.

Due to the fact that the signing of the CSISP is very recent, the number of research investigations carried out is very limited. More importantly, the discussion mainly describes the US point of view by supporting the ideas that Chinese ingress in the Asia-Pacific will disrupt regional and international peace and weaken the Australian defence capability against China. In fact, few writers have also tried to project an Indian role in this geo-political strategic concept between Beijing and Washington in the Indo-Pacific Ocean.⁴ On the other

¹ Jon Fraenkel and Graeme Smith. "The Solomons-China 2022 Security Deal: Extraterritoriality and the Perils of Militarisation in the Pacific Islands," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Volume 76, Issue 5, (January, 2021):21.

² Iroga Robert, "Statement from the White House on U.S top officials' meeting with PM Sogavare," <https://sbm.sb/statement-from-the-white-house-on-u-s-top-officials-meeting-with-pm-sogavare/>.

Accessed on, June 23, 2024.

³ Yoram Schweitzer and Oded Eran, *US Withdrawal from Afghanistan Portends a Vacuum and Uncertain Future* (Institute for National Security Studies, 2022).

⁴ Cleo Paskal, "Island-Hopping with Chinese Characteristics—What the PRC Is Doing in the Pacific Islands, Why It Matters, and Why the Time Has Come to "Block and Build"," *Naval War College Review* 76, no. 4 (2023).

Atlantic Ocean region have been ignored.⁵ The purpose of this paper is to investigate the implications of the pact first on the regional geo-politics involving countries in the Indian, Pacific and Atlantic Oceans; second, its influence towards the establishment of the Sixth Island Chain.

China's Relations with the Solomon Islands

According to the Lowy Institute for International Policy, China's aid to the Pacific region since 2006 has totaled US \$ 2 billion.⁶ Some scholars argue that China's goal is to become the dominant power in the region, replacing the US.⁷ Others read China's diplomacy as an outreach towards the developing world, not driven by competition with the US or interest in natural resources.⁸ One interesting feature is its 'soft power approach rather than a "hard" military rivalry.⁹ It should be kept in mind that in 2007, the US, Australia, Japan, and India started the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD), which later evolved into Quad in 2021.¹⁰

The concept of a shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific was revealed to counter Chinese maritime claims. Moreover, again in 2021, another trilateral security pact between Australia, the UK, and the US (AUKUS) was announced with the aim of helping Australia acquire nuclear-powered submarines to counter China's influence.¹¹ Before discussing Chinese relations with the Solomon Islands, it will be pertinent to understand the

⁵ Hasan Yaser Malik. *Gwadar Dominating Blue Diplomacy* (London: Austin Macauley Publishers;2021), 63.

⁶ Jonathan Pryke and Alexander Dayant, "Shining More Light on Aid in Pacific",

<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/shining-more-light-aid-pacific>, Accessed on, July 4,2022,

⁷ John Henderson and Benjamin Reilly, "Dragon in paradise: China's rising star in Oceania." *The National Interest*, (2003): 94-105.

⁸ Terence Wesley-Smith. "China's Rise in Oceania: Issues and Perspectives," *Pacific Affairs*, (2013):86 (2): 351, 372.

⁹ Marc Lanteigne. "Water Dragon? China, Power Shifts and Soft Balancing in the South Pacific." *Political Science*, (2017):64(1), 21-38.

¹⁰ Tomohiko Satake, "Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" and its Implication for ASEAN," *Southeast Asian Affairs*, (2019), 69.

¹¹ Julia Masterson. "US, UK Pledge Nuclear Submarines for Australia. Arms Control Today., (2021):51(8):25,7.

historic Solomon Islands diplomatic scenario. During the 19th century, the islands were colonies of both Germany and Britain, until they were divided in 1893 and became the British Solomon Islands Protectorate.¹² The name changed to Solomon Islands in 1975, just three years after independence. Australia maintained colonial rule over the eastern half for almost 70 years. Demonstrations and violent riots occurred in the Solomon Islands in November 2021, triggered by widespread poverty and corruption. A month later, in 2019, China dispatched anti-riot gear and police advisers after Honiara severed its ties with Taiwan.¹³ Honiara signed a security pact with Australia in 2017.¹⁴

The Sixth Island Chain

Within the realm of international politics, there is a prevalence of the idea that there is an expanding strategic competition for dominating maritime affairs.¹⁵ In addition, it is thought that China will outplay the United States by establishing a Sixth Island Chain (Map 1) in the North Atlantic, which will reach from the archipelago of the Azores to the islands of Trinidad, and will cover a distance of over 4,500 kilometers. This will allow China to strategically expand its dominance in the Atlantic Ocean region. The autonomous area of Portugal known as the Azores is comprised of nine islands that extend over a distance of more than 1500 kilometers apart.¹⁶

¹² Monica Costa and Rhonda Sharp, "The Pacific Island Countries Fiji, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Tuvalu," University of South Australia, 2011, <https://www.unisa.edu.au/siteassets/episerver-6-files/documents/eass/hri/genderbudgets/pic.pdf>.

¹³ Transform Aqorau "Solomon Islands' Foreign Policy Dilemma and the Switch from Taiwan to China, *The China Alternative*, (2021), 319.

¹⁴ Clive Moore, "The End of Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (2003–17)," *The Journal of Pacific History* 53, no. 2 (2018).

¹⁵ Barbara Lippert and Volker Perthes (eds), "Strategic Rivalry between United States and China: Causes, Trajectories, and Implications for Europe," SWP Research Paper (2020). https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/research_papers/2020RP04_China_USA.pdf.

¹⁶ Minghao Zhao, "The belt and road initiative and China–US strategic competition," *China International Strategy Review* (2021).



Map 1. *Perceived Sixth Island Chain*¹⁷

Because of its location 2,200 miles east of New York and 900 miles west of Lisbon, the archipelago serves as a connection between Europe and the United States of America and Africa. As a result, Beijing is able to take advantage of considerable economic, political, and military advantages. Since President Obama cut funding by \$35 million and lowered the number of personnel from 1100 to 178, the United States' influence at the Lajes air base on the Azores has decreased, despite the fact that President Obama owns the base.¹⁸ The first indication of Chinese interest in the Azores was President Xi Jinping's trip to the island in July 2014, which he made on his way back from South America.¹⁹ In contrast to the interests of the US, Portugal welcomed the presence of non-military Chinese forces because it will

¹⁷ "Emergence of Sixth Island Chain in Contemporary Blue Economy," The DAILY Spokesman, August 14, 2022, <https://dailyspokesman.net/live/emergence-of-sixth-island-chain-in-contemporary-blue-diplomacy/>.

¹⁸ Henry Carson, Matthew Howard, and Illicit Finance, "Expansion of Chinese Interests in Portugal and the North Atlantic", (2020), <https://www.counterterrorismgroup.com/post/expansion-of-chinese-interests-in-portugal-and-the-north-atlantic>.

¹⁹ Eduardo Baptista, "China-US Tension: Portugal feels Washington's ire as Beijing comes wooing with an eye on strategic Azores." Daily *South China Morning Post* November 2, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3106844/china-us-tension-portugal-feels-washingtons-ire-beijing-comes>.

enable Beijing to capitalise on the islands for immediate economic gains by developing business initiatives in the Caribbean through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China's ability to pursue its regional political and military objectives will be strengthened as it grows its influence in the North Atlantic.

Additionally, China's influence in the South China Sea will be diminished as a result of this expansion of China's influence in the North Atlantic. The United States is losing its dominance in the Atlantic region, while China is expanding its influence in the Indo-Pacific region and in Africa. This is the reason behind this phenomenon. Beijing's dominance in the South China Sea will increase as a direct result of this consequence. Portugal will be able to alleviate thirty percent of the economic pain that has been caused by the repatriation of United States troops from the Azores with the assistance of Portuguese investments; without a doubt, China's support will give the Azores with the much-needed economic space.

It is highly probable that the Azores will become another military facility, joining Djibouti in this regard. As part of its efforts to increase its geopolitical and military footprint, Beijing has created a military post in the country of Djibouti. By establishing a military facility in the Azores, Beijing will be able to strengthen and protect its economic interests as they pertain to South America. The Chinese government has also shown interest in Trinidad and Tobago, as evidenced by the fact that in 2011, China committed 850 million US dollars in order to purchase a ten percent stake in Atlantic LNG. Huawei and ZTE are two examples of Chinese corporations that have successfully created a large market presence.

When it came to the Western Hemisphere, Trinidad was the first country to purchase a military ship and a patrol vessel that were both manufactured in China. By the year 2035, market access in Latin America is expected to reach \$US 700 billion, according to the predictions of industry experts. China is attempting to enhance its military ties with Trinidad, as stated in the Defence Strategy White Paper from 2015. This comes at a time when the United States government has moved its focus towards the Indo-Pacific and Middle East regions. This frustration on the part of the United States has led to the imposition of sanctions

on a number of Latin American countries in an effort to maintain its supremacy; nevertheless, the tactic is not succeeding because China has more time at its mercy.²⁰

For the purpose of ensuring the security of the Chinese Pacific Ocean Sea lines of communication (SLOCs) beyond the First Island Chain and over Taiwan, the Chinese government adopted the strategy of dominating the South and East China Sea by establishing bases on reclaimed reefs. This was done in order to strengthen their position in the region. Ever since the year 2014,²¹ not only has China employed islets and cays in the Spratly Islands, such as "Fiery Cross" and "Subi Reefs," to expand its Exclusive Economic Zone, but it has also utilised these features to secure a Bashi Channel that is 400 kilometres wide between Taiwan and the Philippines, as well as a Miyako Strait that is 1100 kilometres wide and is a part of the East China Sea between Taiwan and Japan.

When considering the significance of the China-Singapore-Pacific Partnership (CSISP), it is essential to comprehend that it would eclipse the power of the United States in the Indo-Pacific Ocean and expand the influence of China in Oceania towards Guam and Hawaii. It is much more possible that Beijing would extend its presence in the Atlantic Ocean and, as a result, construct a Sixth Island Chain with the intention of not only preventing the expansion of the United States but also enhancing the various aspects of economic and social development in South America.

Contemporary Asia-Pacific Scenario Leading to Atlantic Ocean

The US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles proposed the US Island Chain Strategy in 1951,²² for Pacific Ocean disposition against China and the USSR, with a view not only to limit their naval bases in the entire Indo-Pacific Region but also to secure its extension

²⁰ Christopher Sabatini, "America's Love of Sanctions will be Its Downfall," *Foreign Policy*, July 24, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/07/24/united-states-sanctions-debt-china-venezuela/>.

²¹ Yann-Huei Song, "Fiery Cross Reef and Strategic Implications for Taiwan," Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, 2014 <https://amti.csis.org/fiery-cross-reef-and-the-strategic-implications-for-taiwan/>.

²² Christopher P. Cavalas, "Powers jockey for Pacific Island chain influence," *Defense News* February 2, 2016, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/asia-pacific/2016/02/01/powers-jockey-for-pacific-island-chain-influence/>.

and maritime interests. The US established three island chains in the Pacific. The Centre for Strategic and International Studies then proposed the fourth and fifth island chains in the Indian Ocean.²³ This signifies the growing Chinese influence not only in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) but also in the Atlantic Ocean. As indicated in Map 2, the Fourth Island Chain originates from the Pakistan's Gwadar Port in the north and terminates in the south of the Maldives while passing through Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka. The Fifth Island chain starts from the Gulf of Aden in the north and runs south along the Eastern African coasts. All this suggests that China is expanding its influence from the East to the Atlantic Ocean in the West.



Map 2: 1st to 5th Island Chains²⁴

Apart from securing its trade in the Pacific Ocean, Beijing's 'String of Pearls Policy' aims to secure Chinese SLOCs in the Indian Ocean and spread them from China to Sudan.²⁵ 'String of Pearls' articulates Beijing's increasing influence as it expands its reach into harbors and airports, fostering political-economic relationships to establish 'harmonious oceans'. Since 1993, Beijing, being an oil importer, controls 40 percent of global oil growth and is

²³ Wilson Vorndick, "China's reach has grown; so should the island chains," *Center for Strategic and International Studies* 22 (2018).

²⁴ Wilson Vorndick, "China's Reach Has Grown; So Should The Island Chains," Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, October 22, 2018, <https://amti.csis.org/chinas-reach-grown-island-chains/>.

²⁵ Jean-Pierre Cabestan, "Avery Goldstein, Rising to the Challenge. China's Grand Strategy and International Security. *China Perspectives*, (2007): 98(1):122-4.

the largest oil consumer, with an ever-increasing demand of 10.81 million barrels per day.²⁶ Sudan and Middle East meet fifteen percent of China's oil requirements.

The surge in piracy close to the Horn of Africa and the political unrest in Darfur have compelled Beijing to handle such bellicosities. In September 2002, President Bush adopted the Pre-emption Doctrine in order to secure US sovereignty and national interests, as it provided an excuse to US in the case of Iraq invasion. However, the policy did not achieve the desired results.²⁷ The implications of the policy botched the US efforts because it adsorbed a lot of its resources by waging wars in Afghanistan and ME and ultimately lost its military, economic, and diplomatic influence.²⁸

Consequently, in 2012, strategic pressure forced the US government to revise its policies and adopt a new defense strategy to maintain its global leadership. The 'New Defence Strategy' adopted a new perspective by taking the decision to cut down US \$ 987 billion from the US defence budget, to maintain its domination by shifting 60 percent of its naval resources to the Indo-Pacific Region. This repositioning of US naval vessels to the South Pacific, by establishing a base at Jeju Island in Southern South Korea to influence China, Russia, and North Korea, and by relocating its naval assets towards the Indian and Pacific Oceans, including the South China Sea (SCS).²⁹

While Washington was asserting its global leadership, Beijing continued to pursue its principles of mutual respect.³⁰ In pursuit of regional and global socioeconomic development, Chinese President Xi Jinping introduced the BRI. Estimates suggest that the Chinese initiative will boost the Chinese economy by developing infrastructure at a rate of

²⁶ Andrew Haley, Chen Aizhu, "China's 2023 crude oil imports hit record as fuel demand recovers", (2024), <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/chinas-2023-crude-oil-imports-hit-record-fuel-demand-recovers-2024-01-12/>., Accessed on June,26, 2024.

²⁷ Paul Reynolds, "Obama modifies Bush Doctrine of Pre-Emption", BBC, May 27, 2010, <https://www.bbc.com/news/10178193>.

²⁸ Michael E O'hannon, Susan E Rice, and James Steinberg, *The New National Security Strategy and Preemption* (Brookings Institution, 2002).

²⁹ "Obama Unveils new Defence Strategy with Greater Emphasis on Asia," *The Guardian*, January 5, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jan/05/obama-unveils-defence-strategy-asia>.

³⁰ Guocang Huan, *China's "Open Door" Policy: 1978-1984* (Princeton University, 1987).

6,000 km per year, reducing trade time by 12 percent, and enhancing trade among BRI members to 9.7 percent. By 2021, China had signed a BRI collaboration with ten Pacific Island Countries (PICs) (Map 3), establishing diplomatic relations.³¹ Chinese investment in PICs had risen from \$910 million in 2013 to \$4.5 billion in 2018 due to the BRI. Chinese companies have invested more than \$2 billion in Pacific mining over the past two decades. About dozens of Chinese companies have financed the fisheries sector in six PICs.

Taiwan's status has caused division in the region on a diplomatic front. Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, and Tuvalu maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan among the total fifteen countries in the world. The Solomon Islands and Kiribati were the last two to switch their relations from Taipei to Beijing in September 2019.³² A violent political unrest that claimed the lives of four men sparked the action, prompting China to promptly offer anti-riot gear. A team of six Chinese police officers was sent to equip and train Solomon Islands police. China also promised the Solomon Islands \$730 million in financial aid. The US despite all its support for India, has not been able to affect Indo-China relations to their desired level, mostly due to Indo-China trade and border disputes.

However, India sent three of its ships in the SCS and conducting combined naval exercises with the US in the Indian Ocean. According to many analysts the deployment of three warships to SCS is considering a balancing behavior of India against China. In fact, Southeast Asian states acknowledged India's presence.³³ Another important aspect of Chinese interests is ASEAN neutrality, as the ASEAN nations would like to continue their trade with China pragmatically and prudently. The Chinese ingress in Micronesia is further strengthening its presence in the eastern Pacific towards Guam and Hawaii against the US.

³¹ Liu Zoe Zongyuan, "What the China-Solomon Islands Pact Means for the US and South Pacific," *Council on Foreign Relations* (2022).

³² Lyons Kate, "The Solomon Islands and Kiribati were the last two who Switched their Relations from Taipei to Beijing," *The Guardian*, September 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/20/taiwan-loses-second-ally-in-a-week-as-kiribati-switches-to-china>.

³³ Maria Siow, "South China Sea: India Sends Warships as 'Subtle Reminder' to Beijing," *South China Morning Post*, May 20, 2024, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3263326/south-china-sea-india-sends-warships-subtle-reminder-beijing>.

Considering the Chinese trade and economic expansion, many European countries, like Germany, are also enhancing trade with China.

In April 2022, Beijing signed the China-Solomon Peace Agreement. Beijing's BRI projects and the Solomon Islands are the primary targets of the pact. However, some view it as a tool to establish a Chinese naval base between Australia's backyard and the Second and Third Island Chains. Before delving deeper into the pact's analysis, it's important to understand the following provisions:³⁴ Both sides firmly agreed to safeguard each other's territorial integrity, sovereignty and core interests.

1. Both will jointly develop BRI and enhance developmental strategies for prudent collaboration. Beijing will make an effort to encourage trade and investment without imposing a tariff on 98 percent of items.
2. To mutually implement, Chinese proposed Global Development Initiative. China will help in the reconstruction of the capital Honiara and the execution of Beijing funded projects.
3. Beijing strongly backs Solomon Islands' resolve to maintain internal stability and will continue to carry out law enforcement and security collaboration to make its police system prudent.
4. Both agreed to mutually promote connectivity through collaboration in aviation and visa exceptions.
5. Agreement to mutually resolve the climate change issue and strengthen collaboration in maritime protection, disaster relief, emergency response and blue economy.
6. To mutually encourage sub national exchanges at city and provincial level to foster closer relations.

³⁴ Xinhua, "China, Solomon Islands reach eight-point consensus", <https://english.news.cn/20220527/1d4e6c45d43f488f88f2b6e4e410dfef/c.html>, Accessed on May 27, 2024.

7. Agreed to uphold and defend the interests of developing countries and will collaborate for multinational mechanisms like UN while opposing coercion and interference in internal affairs of other countries.

Subsequently, feeling precarious in response to China's move closer to the Third Island Chain, the US adopted a strategy to re-establish and enhance relations with PICs, with the aim of diminishing the growing Chinese influence and reclaiming the lost space for itself and Australia. To pursue this strategy, the US President called for a US Pacific Island Country Summit on 28 September 2022.³⁵ The summit aimed at increasing collaboration to deal with climate change, people-centred development, pandemic response, economic recovery, trade, maritime security, and environmental protection.

In ten years, the United States pledged \$1.4 billion for fourteen countries, compared to Beijing, which pledged \$7.3 billion only for the Solomon Islands. The US has launched an initiative named 'The Partners in the Blue Pacific' (PBP) together with Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and the UK. Canada and Germany also plan to join. PBP is looking forward to the engagement of France, the EU, South Korea, and India to focus on six issues: climate change, technology and connectivity, ocean and environment protection, economic development, and political regionalism.

However, Washington has also recognized the Cook Islands and Niue after following the appropriate consultations. Washington will increase its diplomatic presence by establishing embassies in the Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Kiribati, as well as increasing relations with Papua New Guinea, the Marshall Islands, and this inaugural US-Pacific Island Country Summit is considered a significant milestone in the US-Pacific Collaboration. People perceive this strategy as an extension of the US Indo-Pacific Strategy, aligning with

³⁵ "USAID Announces Expansion in the Pacific Region and Reaffirms Commitment to Bolster Resilience in the Pacific Islands at the 2022 U.S.-Pacific Island Country Summit," USAID, September 29, 2022, <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/sep-29-2022-usaid-announces-expansion-pacific-region-us-pacific-island-country-summit>.

the Pacific Islands Forum's 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent.

Discussion

Is the China-Solomon security pact a pre-emptive policy? Is it an independent foreign policy behavior? To better understand the meaning of this action, we need to go back in time and read about previous happenings. Following the signing of the CSISP in 2022 and the US reaction, it's crucial to examine which side the Pacific Island nations, situated between the Second and Third Island Chains, will select. The US established diplomatic relations with the Solomon Islands by financing the construction and opening of the US embassy in 1978. However, in 1993, the US closed its embassy in Honiara.³⁶

In 2019, Mike Pence, US Vice President, cancelled a meeting with Sogavare, the Premier of the Solomon Islands, as retaliation because Sogavare switched diplomatic relations from Taiwan to China.³⁷ In addition to this, the United States also reviewed its assistance to the Solomon Islands.³⁸ In response, the Solomon Islands stopped a US coast guard ship from entering its area in 2022, as it was more interested in improving its relations with Beijing.³⁹ It will be significant to note that after the US-Pacific Island Country Summit

³⁶ "US Plans to Reopen Solomon Islands Embassy in Push to Counter China," *The Guardian*, February 12, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/12/us-plans-to-reopen-solomon-islands-embassy-in-push-to-counter-china#:~:text=US%20plans%20to%20reopen%20Solomon%20Islands%20embassy%20in%20push%20to%20counter%20China.-This%20article%20is&text=The%20United%20States%20plans%20to,is%20rapidly%20expanding%20its%20influence.>

³⁷ Rampton Rampton, "Pence Rebuffs Solomon Islands PM after Nation Cuts Ties with Taiwan," *Reuters* September 18, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-diplomacy-pence-exclusive/exclusive-pence-rebuffs-solomon-islands-pm-after-nation-cuts-ties-with-taiwan-idUSKBN1W22WK/?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=Social.

³⁸ "U.S. Reassessing Aid to Solomon Islands after Taiwan Ties Cut, September 19, 2019, *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN1W32RK/>.

³⁹ Felton Beniami, "Solomon Islands Blocks All Naval Port Visits After U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Denied Entry, US Naval Institute, August 30, 2022 , <https://news.usni.org/2022/08/30/solomon-islands-blocks-all-naval-port-visits-after-u-s-coast-guard-cutter-denied-entry#:~:text=China-.Solomon%20Islands%20Blocks%20All%20Naval%20Port%20Visits.Coast%20Guard%20Cutter%20Denied%20Entry&text=Solomon%20Islands%20Prime%20Minister%20Sogavare.Coast%20Guard%20Cutter%20last%20week.>

in September 2022, the Solomon Islands did not endorse the joint declaration.⁴⁰ It is important to understand two focal points: on one side, China alone is taking responsibility for securing the Solomon Islands' maritime interests, and on the other side, the US is making new promises with the support of its regional allies and Europe against the Russian War in Ukraine. Despite the recent summit with PICs and other efforts by the US to curb the growing Chinese influence in the Third Island Chain, it appears that Washington won't be able to secure the necessary military and diplomatic support by spending a mere few million dollars over a decade.

Beijing could have significantly increased its diplo-economic influence in the PICs and even in the Atlantic, further entangling the US which is already encircled by the Pacific to the West and the Atlantic to the East. Given the previously discussed aspects and the conducted analysis, it is clear that the PICs would not overlook their relations and agreements with Beijing in the American Lake region. Since 2018, Australia too has an agreement with the Solomon Islands: the 'Australia-Solomon Islands Bilateral Security Treaty'. The treaty permits the deployment of Australian police, defence, and civilian personnel in the Solomon Islands to address security threats. In 2021, the Solomon Island Government requested that the Australian Government support its police during a US-initiated political unrest on Malaita Island against the decision to formally recognise China instead of Taiwan. However, despite the agreement, the Australian response was slow, even with its proximity (Map 4), and Beijing took the timely initiative to support the Solomon Islands' police.

⁴⁰ Michael E. Miller, "Solomon Islands Rejects Biden's Pacific Outreach as China Looms Large," *The Washington Post*, September 28, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/09/28/solomon-islands-us-pacific-biden-china/>.



Map 4: *Solomon Islands in proximity to Australia*⁴¹

China is determined to expand its influence in the Atlantic Ocean by establishing the Sixth Island Chain, with the aim of reducing the US influence in both the East Pacific and Atlantic. On the other hand, the US finds it difficult to maintain its leadership despite the support of its allies. The strategic competition between Beijing and Washington, as claimed by the US doesn't only involve the Indo-Pacific region but also the Asian mainland. Unlike the US and other colonial powers, China is enhancing its influence across the continents through connectivity and trade on the mutually agreed agenda of BRI.

⁴¹ Michael E. Miller and Frances Vinall, "China Signs Security Deal with Solomon Islands, Alarming Neighbors," The Washington Post, April 20, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/20/solomon-islands-china-security-agreement/>.

While failing to maintain its global leadership even in its own backyard, the US is trying to involve China in a military crisis by fuelling a military adventure between China and Taiwan. With the provision of weapons to Taiwan in September 2022, the US has approved the sale of weapons worth \$1.09 billion, including Harpoon, Sidewinder missiles, and logistics support packages.⁴² The US has also assured Taiwan that it will protect against a potential Chinese invasion. However, China, being an emerging power with time on its side, can wait. The annexations of Hong Kong and Macao are two examples of the Chinese strategy.

The recent efforts to strengthen the First Island Chain by placing the carrier strike group USS Ronald Reagan in South Korea about 200 km away from China. It appears to be another US effort to pressurize Beijing to restrain from enhancing its influence beyond the Third Island Chain.⁴³ After strengthening its position beyond the three Pacific Ocean Island chains and the two Indian Ocean Island chains, China will be in a position to establish the sixth island chain in the Atlantic from the Azores archipelago to the Trinidad Islands, stretching over 4500 km.

Considering the advantages that the Solomon Islands are going to accrue in partnership with Beijing, it appears that other PICs will also follow suit to sign understandings and agreements with Beijing. Initiatives such as Quad, AUKUS, Blue Dot Network, B3W, and CASA are unlikely to significantly influence China's IPR policies. The US will strive to enhance the Israel-India-US-UAE Alliance (I2U2) to counter China and make it more prudent. Last year, the US moved Israel from the European Command to the Central Command. This move allowed Israel to play a police role in the Persian Gulf, reinforcing US assertions against China and Russia.

⁴² Matthew Lee, "US Ok \$ 1 B Arms Sale to Taiwan as Tensions Rises with China", *AP News*, September 3, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/taiwan-china-congress-government-and-politics-8901fc7feafdbfc94e01055a7b1d997>.

⁴³ Sam Lagrone, "Carrier USS Ronald Reagan Headed Back to Korean Peninsula After North Korean Missile Launch", US Naval Institute, October 5, 2022, <https://news.usni.org/2022/10/05/carrier-uss-ronald-reagan-headed-back-to-korean-peninsula-after-north-korean-missile-launch>.

Conclusion

Taking everything into consideration, the CSISP has huge repercussions for the geopolitical situation on a global scale, particularly in the Indian and Atlantic oceans. As Beijing continues to strengthen its own military and economic influence, the United States will continue to lose its influence in both areas. Similarly, to what occurred in Afghanistan, the US government is experiencing a decline in the level of diplomatic connections it desires with its allies in the South China Sea and Oceania. In addition, the signing of the treaty has produced uneasiness in the relations between the United States and Australia, which has made it difficult for Australia to align itself with Washington in opposition to Beijing's efforts to advance its interests.

With the establishment of the Sixth Island Chain in the Atlantic Ocean, the US will have less naval might in a region that has been dominated by the United States for a considerable amount of time. The US will not be able to utilise the Solomon Islands as a pawn in order to limit China, which brings us to our final point. Even if the lives of millions of people in the Pacific region are improved, the situation is still dangerous because superpowers will rule small local communities, which will make it impossible for those communities to compete with the superpowers in the global market or economy. Without a doubt, the China-Solomon Islands Security Pact has rekindled the strategic competition that exists between the US and China, which extends beyond the South China Sea.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.