



PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM



PACIFIC  
FUSION  
CENTRE

# THE PACIFIC SECURITY OUTLOOK REPORT

2025

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## Secretary General's Foreword



In 2018, as Forum Chair, I had the pleasure of welcoming Forum Leaders to my home in Boe, Nauru, to discuss regional development priorities and launch the Boe Declaration on Regional Security.

The message that the Forum shared that day remains equally true today; while the security of nation-states is always a paramount concern for Governments, in the Pacific, the peace and wellbeing of Pacific peoples – the human element of security- must always be at the forefront of our minds.

That is especially the case with regards to our Blue Pacific Continent, and the devastating impacts of climate change. As this year's Pacific Security Outlook Report highlights, and as Forum Leaders have regularly reiterated, climate change is the single greatest threat to the peace and security of Pacific Islands peoples.

Addressing climate change remains our principal priority, especially as trade wars and geopolitical manoeuvring intensify and our rules-based global order is threatened.

The expanded concept of security in the Boe Declaration was re-emphasised in the Peace and Security thematic area of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, endorsed by Forum Leaders in 2022.

In the Strategy, Forum Leaders' set a vision for a resilient Pacific region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion and prosperity, that ensures all Pacific peoples can lead free, healthy and productive lives.

To achieve this vision, we must work together as communities and as a region to support each other, to speak with one voice, and to build our future effectively, efficiently and sustainably.

We know that we are stronger together, using our collective expertise and Pacific knowledge.

I am proud to share this year's Pacific Security Outlook Report as a further contribution to the region's collective understanding of the challenges we face, and the opportunities that are coming our way.



**Baron Divavesi Waqa**  
Secretary General



# GLOBAL OUTLOOK

In line with last year's report and the Pacific Fusion Centre Director's Mid-Year Assessment, the security landscape of the Pacific will continue to be shaped by geopolitical competition and geostrategic manoeuvring, many of which will impact the region over the next 12-24 months.

Climate change remains the single, greatest threat to Pacific security, wellbeing and prosperity. All climate indicators continue to worsen, with the globe likely to exceed the 1.5c above pre-industrial levels in the next five years (at least temporarily).<sup>1</sup> Climate change will continue to exacerbate existing and future security challenges, globally and regionally, and will limit Pacific countries' ability to improve wellbeing and outcomes for their citizens. With some movement on climate financing a positive development over the last 12 months, whether this momentum continues within the context of other competing global priorities remains to be seen.

Environmental and resource security challenges continue to worsen in some parts of the region. Transnational Organised Crime (TNOC) actors continue to expand their operations, with commensurate increases in domestic illicit activities and drug consumption in some countries. Biodiversity loss continues to occur throughout the region, particularly within the context of unsustainable logging, mining and fishing. And food, health and human security issues remain challenging and difficult to address amongst the myriad other challenges facing Pacific countries.

Concurrent security challenges in the Middle East (Israel, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Lebanon, Iran, Yemen (Red Sea)) and Europe (Ukraine, Russia), combined with increasing tensions in potential flashpoints in the South China Sea, on the Korean Peninsula and across the Taiwan Strait, will continue to impact the Pacific. Countries will continue to be faced with complex decisions requiring deft approaches and nuance within this increasingly complex strategic environment. These challenges and flashpoints, although geographically distant from the Pacific, will likely have implications for, and impacts on, Pacific countries over the next 12-24 months. As per last year's report, within this environment the multilateral system will remain strained, and Pacific priorities (including climate change) may not receive the attention they warrant.<sup>2</sup>

Dynamic geopolitical competition will continue over the forecast period. Pacific Island countries continue to experience increased interest from a broad range of external actors. US-China competition will continue to result in flow-on impacts for the Pacific, including bi-furcation of sensitive and critical technologies and sectors. How the result of the US election will impact US-China competition in a range of sectors (i.e., economic, trade, security, defence, technology) remains unclear,<sup>3</sup> however President Trump has indicated that the US will seek to take a more US-first approach to its global engagements and, pursuant to ongoing legal challenges within the US, US foreign aid is likely to be severely curtailed, with global ramifications.<sup>4</sup> The US has already initiated proceedings to withdraw from certain multilateral organisations and treaties (e.g. the World Health Organization and the Paris Agreement).<sup>5</sup>

1 Global temperature is likely to exceed 1.5°C above pre-industrial level temporarily in next 5 years

2 The role of geopolitics in a multipolar world | World Economic Forum

3 China faces economic upheaval and political opportunity with Trump's return | CNN

4 Tariffs, tech and Taiwan: how China hopes to Trump-proof its economy | China | The Guardian

5 What Trump can do to reverse US climate policy and what he probably cannot change



Global growth will continue to be impacted by concurrent global crises, both traditional and non-traditional.<sup>6 7</sup> IMF forecasting has the US as the engine of global growth, with China's economic growth forecast to decrease year-on-year from 2024 to 2025.<sup>8</sup> The impact that US economic policies will have globally and in the Pacific under President Trump remains volatile with 10% tariffs imposed on Chinese goods and 25% tariffs on Mexican and Canadian goods suspended for a period of 30 days. Further tariffs have been discussed however it is unclear if these will be applied or form the basis of a negotiating tactic. President Trump's pre-election stated intention to raise tariffs on all global goods by 10% and by 60% for goods from China is projected to reduce global growth if adopted.

Within this complex environment, the Pacific remains well placed to leverage regional and external expertise and support to address these multifaceted problems and shift the dial on meeting the needs of the Pacific community.

## CLIMATE SECURITY

### Current Situation

All climate indicators<sup>9</sup> – greenhouse gases, temperature, ocean heat and acidification and sea level rise continued to worsen, resulting in a continued decline in the state of our global climate.<sup>10</sup> The Pacific continues to face a climate “code red”.<sup>11</sup> The 15<sup>th</sup> Pacific Islands Climate Outlook Forum (PICOF-15), convened on 14-15 October 2024, highlighted that the Pacific has shifted from an El Niño to an El Niño-Southern Oscillation neutral phase, with a moderate likelihood of a short La Niña phase to develop towards the end of 2024 and remain until early 2025.<sup>12</sup> The PICOF-15 report also highlighted that coral bleaching has been prevalent, especially in the central Pacific, and that record warm sea temperatures were seen in Tokelau, Tuvalu, Solomon Islands, Palau and Federated States of Micronesia.

At the global level, the United Nations General Assembly adopted, without a vote, the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI), developed after decades of advocacy by Small Island Developing States (SIDS).<sup>13</sup> The MVI will provide a non-binding mechanism to measure vulnerabilities and lack of resilience that are particular to SIDS, which may provide improved access to development and climate financing from multilateral banks.

On the advocacy front, discussions at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) have commenced in earnest, with over 100 oral statements presented between 2 December 2024 and 13 December 2024 on the landmark decision to consider a non-binding advisory opinion on climate change obligations of countries and legal consequences for countries that are significant polluters.<sup>14</sup> The Association of Small Islands States (AOSIS) recently declared that their statehood and sovereignty are protected

6 Geoeconomic Fragmentation Threatens Food Security and Clean Energy Transition (imf.org)  
7 US remains engine of global growth in latest IMF forecasts | Reuters  
8 People's Republic of China and the IMF  
9 <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20230317-the-state-of-the-climate-in-2023>  
10 September 2024 Global Climate Report | National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI)  
11 [forumsec.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/Pacific-Climate-Security-Assessment-Guide.pdf](https://forumsec.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/Pacific-Climate-Security-Assessment-Guide.pdf)  
12 PICOF-15 Regional Statement.pdf  
13 UN General Assembly Adopts Multidimensional Vulnerability Index – SDG Knowledge Hub  
14 Vanuatu's landmark Climate Change case advances with 100 oral statements now scheduled at ICJ hearings

and will remain despite the effects of climate induced sea-level rise.<sup>15</sup> The AOSIS declaration builds off the declaration made by PIF Leaders in 2023 that affirmed the continuation into perpetuity of their statehood and sovereignty in the face of climate change induced sea-level rise.<sup>16</sup> The recently completed Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Samoa saw the adoption of the 'Apia Commonwealth Ocean Declaration for One Resilient Common Future' that recognises national maritime boundaries in the face of climate change, and urges finalisation of the Global Plastics Treaty and ratification of the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdictions Treaty (BBNJ) agreement, amongst several other key policies designed to protect and restore the ocean.<sup>17</sup>

## Horizon 2026

The shift towards La-Niña like conditions towards the end of 2024 will influence weather patterns across the Pacific into early 2025. A triple La-Niña impacted the Pacific in 2020, 2021, and 2022, resulting in prolonged periods of above or below average rainfall for parts of the Pacific. Historically, a La-Niña event sees countries in the central Pacific region such as Kiribati, Nauru, Tuvalu and the northern Cook Islands receiving lower than average rainfall, while countries towards the south and western Pacific will see higher amounts of rainfall than normal.<sup>18</sup> This will have an impact on some climate change indicators.

The Australia-Pacific Island Countries (PICs) bid to host Conference of Parties (COP31) remains unresolved, however, if successful will bring a global focus to the climate concerns of Pacific Island Countries (PICs) and be an avenue for the Pacific to again advocate greater climate ambition and commitments being realised rather than pledged.

Key outcomes for (COP29) include a tripling of the climate finance for developing countries from US\$100 billion annually to US\$300 billion by 2035 in order to mobilise US\$1.3 trillion, from public and private sources by 2035.<sup>19</sup> (COP29) also agreed on carbon markets which will assist countries deliver their national determined contributions quicker. Notably, the Pacific's focus on reaching outcomes that progress ambitious climate targets which are impactful for Pacific island communities has been progressed with the new climate finance goal.<sup>20</sup> Efforts to ensure that the Fund for Loss and Damage (FLD) and the New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance (NCQG) are accessible and directly support Pacific led programs that are grant-based and new and additional funding must continue.<sup>21</sup>

As assessed in last year's outlook, it is likely that meeting the new climate finance goals in the short to medium term will prove difficult given the on-going focus by major donors on Russia's war against Ukraine; there is now the additional focus and financial implications of the conflict in Israel-Gaza, as well as the on-going possibility of a further increase in tensions between Israel and Iran. Furthermore, the re-election of Donald Trump as US President will see an increase in US domestic production of oil and natural gas, as well as the confirmed withdrawal of the US from the Paris Agreement.<sup>22</sup> This will have an impact on global greenhouse gas emissions and the trajectory of broader climate ambition and climate financing.

15 AOSIS Leaders Declaration on Sea Level Rise and Statehood – AOSIS

16 2023 PIF Declaration on Statehood and Protections of Persons.pdf

17 Commonwealth nations adopt pivotal ocean declaration in Samoa | Commonwealth

18 Ibid.

19 COP29 UN Climate Conference Agrees to Triple Finance to Developing Countries, Protecting Lives and Livelihoods | UNFCCC

20 COP29 outcome: Pacific countries demand more finance and ambition to fight climate change | Pacific Environment

21 Ibid.

22 Here Are The Policies Trump's Advisers Say He'll Target First



## Opportunities

- Global advocacy efforts at the ICJ and the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and through United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) mechanisms may need to be strengthened through concerted and coordinated efforts which may include strengthened efforts to encourage or disincentivise increased carbon production and emissions in particular by Forum Dialogue partners such as US, China, Canada and members like Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea.
- PICs may need to accelerate engagement and advocacy with as many partners as possible, including private donors/philanthropists to be able to meet their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), fund mitigation and adaptation activities at a national level through the FLD and NCQG, whilst still ensuring there is funding support available to be mobilised for the Pacific Resilience Facility.
- With Donald Trump resuming the US Presidency in January, Pacific countries may need to work harder and in concert with others, both inside and outside the region, to ensure that progress continues to be made on climate issues of particular importance to the Pacific, including climate or resilience building finance.

## HUMAN SECURITY

The human security of Pacific peoples will continue to be shaped by disasters, food, and health security challenges, amongst other enduring and emerging risks. Enduring risks highlighted in last year's outlook report, violence against women and girls, nuclear legacy issues, current nuclear risks posed by the Runit Dome and Advanced Liquid Processing System (ALPS) discharge by Japan, remain as issues of great concern for the Pacific.

Recently, in August 2024, Pacific Islands Forum Women Leaders recognised the importance of information on gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender responsive planning and budgeting to improve outcomes for women and girls across the Pacific.<sup>23</sup> In October, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) considered the nuclear testing legacy in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) which has some of the highest rates of cancer globally.<sup>24</sup> The US Department of Energy has also recently released a report on the impact of climate change on the Runit Dome in the RMI.<sup>25</sup> In November, PICs and Australia supported the establishment of an independent international scientific panel by the UN to report on the physical and societal consequences of nuclear war through a resolution led by New Zealand.<sup>26</sup> China recently agreed with Japan to “gradually resume” importing seafood from Japan after initial concerns over the safety of ALPS treated water released from the Fukushima nuclear plant.<sup>27</sup>

Emerging issues of concern are the increased consumption of hard drugs in the Pacific and the impacts labour mobility is having on children that are left behind.

23

FINAL 2024 PIFWLM Outcome.pdf

24

UN rights council examines nuclear legacy consequences in the Marshall Islands | UN News

25

Impact of Climate Change on Runit Dome in the Marshall Islands

26

Pacific push sees UN launch first nuclear war impact study in 35 years | PINA

27

China to 'gradually resume' seafood imports from Japan after Fukushima row | Fukushima News | Al Jazeera



*Impact of increased consumption of illicit drugs in the Pacific*

Increasing availability of illicit drugs, socio-economic challenges and limited access to mental health services are driving addiction and related social and health impacts<sup>28</sup> in several PICs. In Tonga, the youngest person identified recently for harm reduction programs was an 8-year-old who was pushing drugs for adults and being paid with money and pornography.<sup>29</sup> In Fiji, meth, now widely available has been linked to “chemsex” (using drugs to heighten sexual experiences) and “bluetoothing” (re-injecting drug-infused blood into a second person).<sup>30</sup> Children as young as 9 years old are being treated for addiction to methamphetamines, and a rapid increase in Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infections has been observed.<sup>31</sup> There is a coinciding public view that the break-down of family structures and values is playing a role in the meth crisis.<sup>32</sup>

*Impact of Labour Mobility on Children*

The unintended negative consequences of Pacific labour mobility<sup>33</sup> on some Pacific workers, families and PICs economies has been seen in terms of social disruption, labour and human rights violations, and increasing social and economic inequalities between people. A recent study carried out by United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) covering Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu has identified several impacts that labour mobility is having on Pacific children that are left behind.<sup>34</sup> The report highlights that family breakdowns and extramarital affairs due to long absences by a parent; unenforced court orders for maintenance for children left behind; lack of communication; lack of proper management of remittances impacting children’s education and daily support; and care for children left behind has shifted to older siblings, relatives and grandparents is negatively impacting their wellbeing.<sup>35</sup> Work continues at the regional level to develop ‘principles’ for Pacific labour mobility and work at national level is aimed at addressing challenges and opportunities for labour mobility.

## DISASTERS

### Current Situation

At their meeting in Tonga<sup>36</sup> this year, Pacific Islands Forum Leaders reaffirmed the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP) as critical to developing inclusive and innovative approaches and solutions to building resilience across the Pacific to the impacts of climate change.<sup>37</sup> Forum Leaders also incorporated the Pacific Disaster Risk Management Ministers Meeting (PDRMMM) on a biennial basis into Forum architecture and created a Pacific Ministerial Champion for Disaster Risk Management.<sup>38</sup>

28 Opinion: Silent epidemic: The devastating impact of drugs on Fiji’s health and wellbeing

29 Tonga’s meth crisis: Impact on children, families becoming evident

30 Meth addiction, HIV and a struggling health system are causing a perfect storm in Fiji

31 Ibid.

32 ‘The problem is the family’: Fiji drug use crisis | RNZ News

33 The Unintended Consequences of Pacific Labour Mobility | PACIFIC FUSION CENTRE

34 UNICEF Information and Communication Technology Division: 2022 Annual Report

35 Ibid.

36 53rd Pacific Islands Forum Communique FINAL.pdf

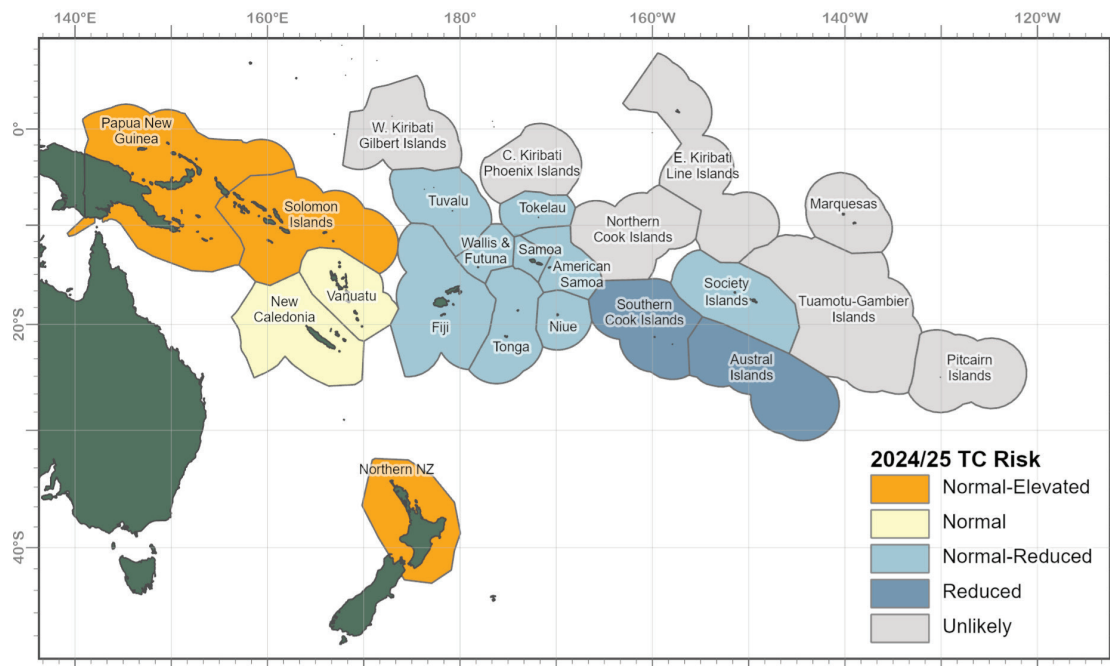
37 Aquarium Products in the Pacific Islands: A Review of the Fisheries, Management, and Trade

38 53rd Pacific Islands Forum Communique FINAL.pdf



## Horizon 2026

The New Zealand National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) has assessed that there will be normal to below normal TC activity for the Southwest Pacific (November 2024-April 2025)<sup>39</sup> with TC risk expected to be higher near the Coral Sea, Solomon Islands and PNG.<sup>40</sup> Expected trends are depicted below (the Australian Bureau of Meteorology also issues a TC Outlook for the region):



NIWA is forecasting between six to ten named TCs for this season, with the long-term average being around nine.<sup>41</sup> The normal to below normal TC risk does not mean a lessening of the devastating impacts of TCs or weather-related hazards such as flooding on PICs. Countries like PNG, Solomon Islands and New Zealand may need to prepare for elevated TC activity.

Notably, several initiatives are currently underway in the security and defence sector targeted at humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HADR) which may have a positive impact in mitigating a number of risks posed by disasters across the Pacific. These include the establishment of a Pacific Response Group (PRG)<sup>42</sup> by the South Pacific Defence Ministers Meeting (SPDMM)<sup>43</sup> and the Pacific Police Support Group (PPSG)<sup>44</sup> as part of the Pacific Policing Initiative (PPI).

Notably, at the request of Samoa, the first deployment of the PPSG provided security support for CHOGM. The Pacific Policing Initiative deployed over 45 Pacific police from 11 Pacific Island countries to Samoa as part of the PPSG, including Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Cook Islands,

39 Tropical-cyclone outlook 2024-25 NIWA.pdf

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Pacific defence ministers' approve creation of disaster response group for region | RNZ News

43 South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting - Joint Communique | Defence Ministers

44 Joint policing a success at CHOGM - Post Courier

Fiji, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu, and Australia.

In addition, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom formed a combined maritime group which provided maritime security support to Samoa.

### Opportunities

- Continue to advocate for innovative climate and disaster risk financing including the Pacific Resilience Facility and insurance products such as the Pacific Catastrophe Risk Insurance Company, which are geared to ease accessibility issues and transaction costs.
- Implementation of existing regional frameworks, including the Pacific Climate Security Assessment Framework (PCSAF) and the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP) may inform the development of a regional security response mechanism by the Forum in collaboration with partners.

## FOOD SECURITY

### Current Situation

Food security in the Pacific continues to be influenced by several interrelated factors, including climate change and economic pressures. The increasing incidence of rising sea levels and extreme weather events has led to a reduction in arable land and has disrupted food production.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, in recent years, economic downturns and global supply chain disruptions have rendered food less affordable and accessible, particularly in PICs that heavily rely on imports.<sup>46</sup>

A recent UNICEF report found that 1 in 6 children in the Pacific, under 5 years of age, experience severe child food poverty<sup>47</sup> making them vulnerable to wasting and life-threatening forms of malnutrition and impacting their survival, growth and brain development.<sup>48</sup> Malnutrition presents a challenge in the region, characterised by the coexistence of both undernutrition (including micronutrient deficiencies) and overweight and obesity. This is a function of poor diets and lack of affordable and accessible healthy eating choices. In countries like Tuvalu and Kiribati, nearly 100% of food is imported, as cultivating crops proves to be a significant challenge.<sup>49 50</sup> Although Tuvalu has initiated some community gardening projects to tackle this issue, their scale remains limited. As sea levels rise, this dependency on imported food is expected to intensify. In response, various initiatives have emerged to support domestic food production aimed at, creating prosperity and strengthening food systems and nutrition security for all in the region.<sup>51</sup>

45 Climate Change transforms Pacific islands

46 Water and Food Security in the Pacific

47 UNICEF defines child food poverty as children's inability to access and consume a nutritious and diverse diet in early childhood.

48 1 in 6 children in the Pacific region live in severe child food poverty due to hardship, inequity, and climate crises – UNICEF

49 Tuvalu Food Consumption pattern

50 Food Security in the atoll countries of the South Pacific

51 Pacific Island Countries To Step Up For The Future Of Food In The Region



## Horizon 2026

The statistics from UNICEF on children under five in the Pacific being malnourished highlights 35% of children in Kiribati, 29% of children in RMI, 23% in Samoa, 14% in Tuvalu, 13% in Tonga and 8% in Fiji are living in child food poverty.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, of the 1,700 children under five that die in the Pacific, 80% die before reaching the age of 1 due to nutrition related illnesses driven by lack of access to healthy and affordable food.<sup>53</sup> Childhood malnutrition will impact early childhood development, economic security and health security across the region into the future if left unaddressed.

Given worsening climate conditions, production of staple foods and livestock are likely to encounter difficulties as changing weather patterns continue to impact farmers' capacity to sustain production and maintain healthy livestock populations, which may, in turn, increase the region's reliance on food imports.<sup>54 55 56</sup> The impact on food security due to La Niña-like from December 2024 and into early 2025 will vary from country to country in the Pacific, but historically, the central and eastern Pacific may be more prone to drought conditions, while countries in the south-west Pacific will be more at risk to flooding and landslides due to higher rainfall.<sup>57</sup>

Work continues to strengthen local food production and enhance resilience through the implementation of various community-based agricultural projects and sustainable fishing practices.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, international and regional organisations are playing a vital role by providing essential support through funding, technical assistance, and capacity-building programs. For instance, relevant Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP) agencies and partners, including China, are actively involved in addressing the impact of climate change on soil quality.<sup>59</sup> China has established a China-Pacific Island countries Juncao Technology Demonstration Center in Fiji<sup>60</sup> and Australia's Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO)<sup>61</sup> continues to implement a dedicated Climate Resilient Agriculture in the Pacific program with PICs.<sup>62</sup>

## Opportunities

- Address early childhood malnutrition through effective policy, monitoring and support to strengthen and inform timely programming assistance and awareness programs.
- Prioritise existing and new data collection methods and monitoring systems to identify existing and emerging risks to food security and inform policy development and responses.
- Accelerate strategies and programs that target community engagement and build awareness of healthy lifestyle and nutritional choices.

52 1 in 6 children in the Pacific region live in severe child food poverty due to hardship, inequity, and climate crises – UNICEF

53 Ibid.

54 El Niño weather patterns could impact global food production. Here's how

55 How El Niño may impact the world's wheat and global food supply

56 Tropical cyclone outlook summary for the Pacific Islands

57 La Niña 2021 - Anticipatory Action for Food Security & Livelihoods in the Pacific Islands - Kiribati | ReliefWeb

58 The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) Report - 2024

59 China's Juncao technology empowers Fijian woman

60 China-Pacific Island countries Juncao technology center activated in Fiji

61 Australia's national science agency

62 Climate change information for the Pacific



- Implement targeted capacity building programs through a broad range of ways (including technical and practical areas) to promote climate resilient agriculture and fisheries, not just limited to science.

## HEALTH SECURITY

### Current Situation

The region continues to be challenged by non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and high vulnerability to systemic shocks, climate change and disasters.<sup>63</sup> There has been progress across the Pacific in addressing NCDs, particularly related to tobacco and alcohol control with several PICs implementing taxation measures and graphic health warnings on tobacco and alcohol.<sup>64</sup> Some measures addressing foods and drinks linked to NCDs have also been introduced.<sup>65</sup> The majority of PICs now have national guidelines or frameworks to diagnose and manage NCDs, including identifying essential medications required for their treatment,<sup>66</sup> however, effective monitoring and evaluation is required to enable better policy interventions around prevention and mobilising resources for effective treatment.

The Pacific remains vulnerable to outbreaks of infectious diseases given variable access to health facilities and low ratios of health care workers to population, as well as environmental conditions such as overcrowding and inadequate access to safe water and sanitation. In April 2024, the Public Health Communication Centre, based with the University of Otago, warned that one thousand more children become vulnerable to contracting measles every month.<sup>67</sup> New Zealand's 2019 measles outbreak spread to Samoa<sup>68</sup> and measles outbreaks were also recorded in Tonga and Fiji in that year.<sup>69</sup>

### Horizon 2026

COVID-19 has been assessed to become a significant danger to public health over the next 12-24 months, particularly in the US.<sup>70</sup> The XEC variant has been recorded in 27 countries across Europe, North America and Asia.<sup>71</sup> XEC is being closely monitored in case there is a change in the behaviour of SARS-CoV-2 – the cause of COVID-19<sup>72</sup> – which could have significant implications for global public health if it results in a major change in severity or transmissibility.

Cases have risen globally with 300,000 cases in 2023 and data pointing to 2024 figures matching or exceeding recorded cases in 2023.<sup>73</sup> Global increases in measles cases have been attributed to gaps in vaccination coverage and disease surveillance and increased mobility post COVID-19.<sup>74</sup> Across the

63 WHO Conference Draft Discussion Paper - Economic and commercial determinants of health in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), mental health conditions, injuries and violence.docx

64 2024 PHoH Agenda 4.0 Scaling up Implementation on regional commitments and national priorities to tackle NCDs.pdf

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Public health experts warn New Zealand is close to large measles epidemic, 1000 more children susceptible every month - NZ Herald

68 Ibid.

69 Pacific Measles Outbreak

70 COVID-19 to endanger public health until 2025, says study | Latest news for Doctors, Nurses and Pharmacists | Respirology

71 COVID XEC variant shows up in 27 countries already, expert says

72 Just as COVID Levels Start to Dip, a New Variant Emerges

73 Measles cases across Europe continue to surge, putting millions of children at risk

74 Western Pacific countries at risk of measles outbreaks due to immunization and surveillance gaps



Pacific, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has been supporting 11 PICs with vaccination campaigns for measles and rubella<sup>75</sup> and the group of 21 Pacific island countries and areas are considered on-track to eliminate measles and rubella by 2025.<sup>76</sup> However, Papua New Guinea in particular remains vulnerable to measles outbreaks, with measles-containing vaccine coverage at around 50%.<sup>77</sup>

In August 2024, WHO declared the upsurge of mpox Clade Ib in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and several other countries in Africa a Public Health Emergency of International Concern under the International Health Regulations (IHR).<sup>78</sup> Australia, as of 21 November 2024 recorded 1260 cases of mpox Clade II<sup>79</sup> and as of September 2024 New Zealand had recorded six cases of mpox in 2024<sup>80</sup>. Military and police personnel from Fiji<sup>81</sup> and Vanuatu<sup>82</sup> currently serve in South Sudan<sup>83</sup> which borders DRC and may potentially be a vector for mpox into Pacific countries that serve there.

The WHO is currently working with its 194 member states to finalise an international agreement on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response by May 2025.<sup>84</sup> The agreement will cover vaccine sharing and preparedness.<sup>85</sup> US support for the WHO including funding will be impacted by the return of Donald Trump to the US presidency who has again begun the process to withdraw the US from the WHO.<sup>86 87</sup>

### Opportunities

- Accelerate ongoing vaccination programs including strengthening regional supply chains for vaccines and pre-positioning lifesaving equipment and supplies across the Pacific in conjunction with relevant partners to build health resilience across the Pacific.
- Continue to prioritise resourcing and efforts on combatting NCDs across the Pacific including encouraging collaborative efforts with non-health sectors to accelerate implementation of regional frameworks such as the Pacific NCD Roadmap.
- Prioritise efforts in support of the development of the international agreement to address pandemics and assist countries to implement the IHR, to undertake robust assessments/evaluations of health security capacities, and to work with countries to increase capacities where indicated.

75 Ibid.

76 Paving the way for eliminating measles and rubella in the Pacific by 2025

77 WHO Immunization Data portal - Western Pacific Region

78 WHO Director-General declares mpox outbreak a public health emergency of international concern

79 Dashboard NINDSS Portal

80 Update on mpox cases linked to Winter Pride Festival – Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora

81 Begg part of UNMISS contingent in South Sudan

82 6 Vanuatu Officers Deployed to East Africa for Peacekeeping | News | dailypost.vu

83 South Sudan's Mpox Readiness Assessed Amid Raging Outbreak – Africa CDC

84 Global pandemic treaty to be concluded by 2025, WHO says | Reuters

85 Ibid.

86 The 'Pandemic Agreement': What it is, What it isn't, and What it Could Mean for the U.S. | KFF

87 WHO: Trump announces US withdrawal from World Health Organization | CNN Politics



## ENVIRONMENTAL AND RESOURCE SECURITY

### Current Situation

As per last year's report, nuclear issues have remained a focus, although to a lesser extent than 2023.<sup>88</sup> They included: ongoing monitoring by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of Japan's discharge of ALPS-treated water from the Fukushima Daiichi power plant,<sup>89</sup> and Australia's continued program to acquire conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines.

Also of growing concern is the on-going testing of ballistic missiles that have the potential to be armed with nuclear warheads by the US and now also China.<sup>90 91</sup>

The region has remained divided on deep-sea mining, with discussions underway at the International Seabed Authority (ISA) to progress work on the regulations.<sup>92 93</sup> A PIF Talanoa on deep seabed minerals is scheduled for early 2025 for PIF members to engage in open and constructive high-level dialogue on this topic. Negotiations continue over the implementation of the UN Plastics Treaty, with the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) meeting in Ottawa in April and again in Busan in November/December.<sup>94</sup>

Logging, mining and fishing have continued to result in environmental degradation throughout parts of the Pacific, with ongoing increases in global consumption driving the expansion of these activities.<sup>95</sup> These activities have significant impacts on human security throughout the Pacific across a range of vectors, with recent reports linking some of these activities with human trafficking, slavery-like conditions and tribal violence.<sup>96 97</sup>

For most parts of the Pacific region, El Niño conditions for 2024 were not as severe as originally forecast. With the exception of Micronesia, drought-like conditions were limited across much of the rest of the Pacific.

### Horizon 2026

Across the Pacific, there may be a weak La Niña system developing towards the end of 2024 and which could last until around early 2025.<sup>98</sup> The region will likely start moving towards a neutral El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) pattern through the early part of 2025.

As per last year's report, work remains underway to implement the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdictions Treaty (BBNJ) and the Global Framework on Chemicals. BBNJ is open for signature by

88 FORUM MEETING OUTCOMES: 2024 Forum Foreign Ministers Meeting Outcomes Document | Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat

89 IAEA Initiates First Practical Steps of Additional Measures at Sea Near Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station | IAEA

90 'Not Welcome': China's ICBM Test Raised Alarms in the Pacific Islands – The Diplomat

91 Minuteman III Test Launch Showcases Readiness of U.S. Nuclear Force's Safe, Effective Deterrent > Vandenberg Space Force Base > Article Display

92 Deep-sea mining's future still murky as negotiations end on mixed note

93 Inside the battle for top job that will decide the future of deep-sea mining | Deep-sea mining | The Guardian

94 Fifth Session | UNEP - UN Environment Programme

95 Global Resources Outlook 2024 | UNEP - UN Environment Programme

96 Logging in Solomon Islands sees women 'sold' into relationships with foreign workers - ABC News

97 Tribal warfare kills at least 20 near Porgera mine in PNG, estimates UN - MINING.COM

98 Pacific Islands Climate Outlook and Stakeholder Forum (PICOF-15) | DEV ENVIRONMENT



all states and regional economic integration organisations until 20 September 2025.<sup>99</sup> The Global Framework on Chemicals Fund was launched on 1 October and will support projects to prevent and minimise harm from chemicals and waste.<sup>100</sup>

The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) on Plastic Pollution should complete its work on developing a legally binding treaty, including in the marine environment, in 2025.<sup>101</sup> This treaty is likely to be instrumental in reducing plastic pollution globally, and is an issue of particular importance for the Pacific – which is disproportionately affected by global plastic pollution while contributing less than 1.3%.<sup>102</sup> The High Ambition Coalition to End Plastic Pollution, a body that a number of Pacific countries have now joined,<sup>103</sup> will continue to play a key role in shaping this treaty and its implementation. Notwithstanding the above, and in line with last year’s report, plastics, marine litter, and marine pollution will continue to be issues of significant concern across the Pacific over the next 24 months, impacting environmental, economic, human and food security.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC’s) ‘2024 Transnational Organized Crime in the Pacific’ report highlights that crimes affecting the environment have continued to grow throughout the region.<sup>104</sup> Without coordinated and effective enforcement actions to curtail these activities, it is very likely that these environmental crimes will continue and expand into the future, further damaging the Pacific’s unique and fragile ecosystems. Unethical or illegal resource extraction, illegal logging, wildlife trafficking, Illegal, Unreported, Unregulated (IUU) fishing, and pollution crime will all continue to be issues of concern over the next 24 months.<sup>105</sup>

Biodiversity loss will remain a key issue of concern at global and regional levels, caused by a range of factors and industries.<sup>106</sup> Extractive industries and deforestation will remain key drivers of biodiversity loss in many Pacific countries, with current regulations very likely insufficient to ensure the sustainability of these industries or to effectively protect countries’ natural environments. Biodiversity in the marine space remains a complex issue, with economic and food security through fishing being balanced against ecological preservation aspirations. Some Pacific countries, often with support from non-government and philanthropic organisations,<sup>107</sup> are taking preventative steps to establish expanded maritime protection areas in an attempt to address this issue.<sup>108</sup>

## Opportunities

Many opportunities to address environmental and resource security remain extant from last year’s report. Further to these, countries may wish to consider the below:

- The environmental and resource security landscape in the Pacific region will remain challenging in both the short and long term. For those issues occurring within national boundaries (i.e., deforestation and biodiversity loss), addressing them through forward-

99 <https://www.un.org/bbnjagreement/en>

100 Global Framework on Chemicals | UNEP - UN Environment Programme

101 Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution | UNEP - UN Environment Programme

102 Pacific Islands urge global leaders to seize a ‘once-in-a-generation’ opportunity to halt the plastics crisis | Pacific Environment

103 Pacific Leaders support for High Ambition Coalition to End Plastic Pollution | Pacific Environment

104 TOCTA Pacific 2024.pdf

105 Ibid.

106 Forging a new relationship between people and the earth

107 Our Programs | Bezos Earth Fund

108 Fiji’s Lau Seascape - Blue Nature Alliance



thinking and sustainable regulatory reform, possibly aligned with relevant international treaties, and active community engagement will be essential.

- In line with outcomes from this year's Forum Foreign Ministers Meeting, the region should explore options for a long-term approach to provide interpretation, guidance and assessment of scientific data on all nuclear-related discharge and contamination issues.<sup>109</sup>

## CYBER SECURITY

### Current situation

As per last year's report, the cyber environment in the Pacific continues to change at pace, with both opportunities and risks for the region. Announcements to expand subsea cables to a number of Pacific countries, coupled with the growth of Starlink and new Low Earth Orbit Satellite (LEO) communications systems across the region, will result in internet being more accessible for more people.<sup>110 111</sup> This gives effect to the desired goals of the Lagatoi Declaration,<sup>112</sup> but also opens up a range of threats, many of which the region is poorly equipped to address.<sup>113</sup> ICT working groups, who are supporting the development of the Lagatoi Declaration Action Plan, are considering how best to tackle legislative and regulatory capacity, capability, infrastructure and budgetary constraints into the future. Bilateral agreements between countries are also a promising development in addressing these challenges.<sup>114 115</sup>

Threats from cybercriminal and state-sponsored actors continues to increase globally, and Pacific systems – which often lag behind global standards in safety, security and sophistication – are increasingly vulnerable. PaCSON's 2023 Annual Report highlights fraud, phishing, malware, and ransomware as some of the most common cyber threats throughout the region.<sup>116</sup> Cyber-enabled crimes – traditional crimes facilitated by technology-are also becoming more prevalent, and include activities such as fraud, cyberextortion, and online child sexual exploitation.<sup>117</sup> National and regional data on cyber incidents and crimes in the Pacific remains an ongoing intelligence gap.

As per last year's report and as highlighted in regular reporting by the Pacific Fusion Centre, cyber incidents remain a significant and persistent threat to Pacific systems. This is illustrated by recent high profile cyber incidents in Palau and in Fiji (at the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat),<sup>118 119</sup> but can be seen more broadly in cyber incidents in Fiji (Suva City Council),<sup>120</sup> Solomon Islands,<sup>121</sup> and elsewhere.

Regional cooperation and awareness raising remain crucial elements to addressing the fast-moving

109 FORUM MEETING OUTCOMES: 2024 Forum Foreign Ministers Meeting Outcomes Document | Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat  
 110 cloud.google.com/blog/products/infrastructure/introducing-bulikula-and-halaihahai-subsea-cables-to-connect-the-central-pacific  
 111 Pacific nations gradually embracing Elon Musk's Starlink | RNZ News  
 112 Lagatoi Declaration – Pacific Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Dialogue  
 113 Pacific Cybersecurity Operational Network (PaCSON) Annual Report – 2023  
 114 PNG into discussions with Vanuatu on ICT Cooperation - NBC PNG  
 115 PNG, Solomon Islands Forge Stronger Ties in ICT Collaboration – DICT | PNG  
 116 PaCSON Annual Report – 2023  
 117 TOCTA Pacific 2024.pdf  
 118 Palau hit by cyberattack which 'traces back to China': President - Nikkei Asia  
 119 Pacific cyber hack raises China concerns - ABC listen  
 120 SCC cyberattack - The Fiji Times  
 121 CBSI Confirms Cyber Attack On System But Impact "minor" – Solomon Business Magazine



cyber challenges facing the Pacific region. Support through bodies such as PaCSON and Cyber Safety Pasifika remains crucial,<sup>122</sup> as does awareness raising and capacity building through conferences like the Pacific Cyber Capacity Building and Coordination Conference (P4C).<sup>123</sup> Support from external partners remains pivotal for many Pacific countries in addressing cyber incidents and threats in a timely manner.<sup>124</sup>

## HORIZON 2026

As per last year's report, over the next 24 months there will be a net increase in the instances of cybercrime and cyber incidents across the Pacific. Efforts to mitigate and address these threats will continue to be outstripped by incentivised cybercriminals and other threat actors, with inconsistencies in national and regional capabilities, resources and responses ensuring that the region remains an attractive target.

Community cyber safety will remain an enduring and difficult challenge to address, with low cyber comprehension across much of the region. Of particular concern is the rise in cyber-enabled child sexual exploitation, highlighted in previous Pacific Fusion Centre reporting and in the UNODC's recent '2024 Transnational Organized Crime in the Pacific' report.<sup>125</sup> Exploitation of this nature, as well as exploitation more generally (i.e., sexual and labour exploitation), will continue to be promulgated through the internet, with regions like the Pacific very likely targeted due to permissive regulatory environments and limited law enforcement capacity. Increasing community awareness of cyber safety issues remains crucial to safeguarding Pacific communities from malicious actors.

The UN Convention Against Cybercrime was adopted in 2024 and will become the first legally binding instrument on cybercrime under the auspices of the United Nations. This convention has the potential to enhance international cooperation, law enforcement efforts, technical assistance, and capability building on cybercrime throughout the region and the globe.<sup>126</sup> Convention notwithstanding, support from within the region and from trusted external parties will remain key to addressing the Pacific's cybersecurity needs.

Artificial intelligence (AI) remains an emerging issue for Pacific countries to consider over the next 24 months, and beyond. How tools like AI intersect with existing intellectual property and traditional knowledge management issues in the region, as well as with data protection and privacy issues, mean that countries should be seeking to get on the front foot to better understand the benefits and risks associated with AI.<sup>127</sup> Adaptive legislation, oversight and monitoring will be crucial to the effective management of the rollout of AI across the Pacific, and to ensure that the Pacific can maximise the benefits of this new technology.

The development of the Lagatoi Declaration Action Plan – scheduled to be provided to the ICT Ministers Meeting in late 2025 – aims to provide greater clarity and a clear roadmap for Pacific countries seeking to address the ever-widening range of cyber-related issues impacting the Pacific. Ongoing engagement with working groups supporting the Action Plan is pivotal to ensuring a broad

122 CSP Coming Soon

123 Pacific nations unite to address cybersecurity challenges - Oceania Cyber Security Centre

124 Cyber Affairs and Critical Technology | Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

125 TOCTA Pacific 2024.pdf

126 United Nations: Member States finalize a new cybercrime convention

127 The-State-of-Artificial-Intelligence-in-the-Pacific-Islands.pdf



range of views are captured and considered.

### Opportunities

Many opportunities to address cybersecurity challenges remain extant from last year's report. Further to these, countries may wish to consider the below:

- Consider supporting the UN Convention Against Cybercrime and using it – coupled with the Lagatoi Declaration Action Plan – to shape responses to addressing the cyber needs of the region in a comprehensive and effective way.
- Continue to seek to improve data collection and sharing on cyber issues within the region. Although needed across a broad range of cyber threats, countries may wish to dedicate particular effort to better understanding threats impacting people who may be vulnerable (i.e., children and trafficked persons).

## TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

### Current Situation

As per last year's report, TNOG activity remains a significant security threat across the Pacific.<sup>128</sup> However, underreporting or a lack of reporting of specific crime types, coupled with limited information sharing, means that the scope and scale of TNOG in the region largely remains an intelligence gap.

The region's geographic isolation, vast ocean expanse and porous borders continues to make it an attractive route for drug trafficking, and – increasingly – as a destination for drugs. TNOG actors continue to adapt and explore new opportunities to undertake their business in the region, forming partnerships, leveraging emerging technologies, and embracing new business models.<sup>129</sup> Resource constraints and limited regional collaboration have continued to hinder effective response efforts, however the launch of the Pacific Regional TNOG Disruption Strategy has provided a coherent roadmap for Pacific countries to address TNOG activities.<sup>130</sup> Other initiatives such as the involvement of Australia and Fiji in the Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats<sup>131</sup> and on-going regional collaboration through mechanisms such as the Pacific Transnational Crime Network (PTCN) continue to positively impact the TNOG environment through detecting transnational crimes and disrupting criminal networks across the Pacific.

As per last year's report, deportations from countries like the United States, Australia, and New Zealand continue to be linked with criminal activity in the receiving Pacific countries.<sup>132</sup> However, the UNODC's recent '2024 Transnational Organized Crime in the Pacific' report highlights that criminal groups from

128 UNODC report exposes escalating threat of organized crime in the Pacific

129 TOCTA Pacific 2024.pdf

130 Regional Transnational Organised Crime Disruption Strategy.pdf

131 Participating Countries | Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats

132 The down-low on deportations and drugs in Tonga | Lowy Institute



East Asia are increasingly becoming an area of concern, particularly in regard to human trafficking, illegal gambling and money laundering.<sup>133</sup> The UNODC's '2023 Regional Report on the Existing Capacities to Measure Trafficking in Persons in the Pacific Islands' and the US State Department's '2024 Trafficking in Persons Report' highlighted the region as a destination for trafficked persons for sexual exploitation or forced labour, particularly in the fishing, hospitality, domestic and agricultural industries.<sup>134 135</sup>

Data on the scale of money laundering, human trafficking and exploitation, and child sexual exploitation in the Pacific remains limited, however these issues continue to be raised as key concerns for Forum members and external countries/organisations.<sup>136 137</sup>

### Horizon 2026

The forecast for the region for the next 24 months remains broadly in line with last year's report. TNOC actors will continue to seek to increasingly take advantage of limited Pacific capabilities and porous borders to ensure their activities are undetected or uninterrupted. Drug demand in Australia and New Zealand, and increasingly in parts of the Pacific, will drive these activities.

Criminal deportees will remain an issue of concern for receiving Pacific countries, with ongoing efforts needed to improve support from sending countries to ensure effective integration and limit a return to criminality.<sup>138</sup> Overseas motorcycle gangs (OMCGs) are establishing themselves across several Pacific countries, and have been linked to a rise in illegal activities inclusive of drug trafficking.<sup>139</sup> With insufficient regulations, and limited monitoring and enforcement capabilities, TNOC actors will continue to seek to operate through and/or establish themselves within parts of the region. Corruption will remain a key enabler for TNOC activities over the next 24 months.<sup>140</sup>

Revenue generating mechanisms like citizenship by investment schemes may increase across the region<sup>141</sup> and coupled with deficiencies in anti-money laundering and countering terror financing frameworks can increase the attractiveness to bad actors to use these mechanisms and Pacific financial systems for illicit activity.

The implementation of the Pacific Regional TNOC Disruption Strategy will likely lead to improved clarity for countries seeking to take a more comprehensive and collaborative approach to addressing TNOC activities in the region. This may lead to more effective enforcement actions against TNOC actors and improve information sharing across the region and with key external stakeholders.

### Opportunities

Most opportunities to address TNOC activities remain extant from last year's report, which also align

133 TOCTA Pacific 2024.pdf

134 UNODC RegionalReport PacificIslands 2023.pdf

135 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report - United States Department of State

136 Pacific Environmental Scan Report 2024

137 UNODC RegionalReport PacificIslands 2023.pdf

138 Sasa'a le fafao?: Approaches to Return and Reintegration of Criminal Deportees (Returnees) into Samoa | International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy

139 Outlaw motorcycle gangs have established their presence in Fiji and are involved in drug dealing/organized crime

140 TOCTA Pacific 2024.pdf

141 Nauru Citizenship Program | Nauru Program Office

with the recommendations of the UNODC's '2024 Transnational Organized Crime in the Pacific' report. Further to these, countries may wish to consider the below:

- Improved national integration frameworks for criminal deportees into the Pacific, similar to Samoa's Returnees Charitable Trust,<sup>142</sup> may reduce criminal activities associated with deportees. Greater assistance from sending countries can assist in supporting these efforts.
- Ongoing prioritisation of compliance with the Financial Action Taskforce (FATF) Standards will remain critical to mitigating identified money laundering, terror financing and proliferation financing risks and assist with Pacific efforts to sustain correspondent banking relationships and avoid targeted measures such as grey-listing and de-risking.
- Further enhance data collection on, and establish national frameworks to, address human trafficking and exploitation that is occurring within the region, as well as work with partners to address trafficking flows at their source.
- Implement the action items articulated in the Pacific Regional TNOG Disruption Strategy through the development of aligned national level plans/strategies to ensure the region is taking a consistent and collaborative approach to addressing TNOG, including strengthening border security to detect and/or disrupt transnational crime and drug imports.

## TRADITIONAL SECURITY

### Current Situation

Since last year's report, the global and regional security environment has further deteriorated. These global issues are directly and indirectly impacting the Pacific. Flow-on impacts from the Russia-Ukraine conflict and ongoing tensions in the Middle East are likely impacting the prices of key commodities important to the Pacific (i.e., food, fuel, etc.),<sup>143</sup> however it remains difficult to determine the exact inflationary impact this is having due to the complexity of Pacific supply-chains.

Social unrest has been a feature in some parts of the Pacific over the last 12 months. Tribal conflict in Papua New Guinea has continued to escalate with increasing use of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and concerning attacks aimed at people/women and girls who may be vulnerable.<sup>144</sup> Political tensions remain elevated in Bougainville as the PNG Government and Autonomous Bougainville Government continue to work through processes outlined in the Era Kone Covenant.<sup>145</sup> Unrest in New Caledonia has shown that significant challenges remain in determining New Caledonia's institutional future.<sup>146</sup> The valuable role of influential voices from within the region being used to support efforts to promote resolutions to traditional security challenges and call for peace and stability was clearly

142 The down-low on deportations and drugs in Tonga | Lowy Institute

143 Explainer: What Middle East conflict means for the global economy | Reuters

144 Enga tribal violence: PNG's top security threat comes from within - Devpolicy Blog from the Development Policy Centre

145 Indonesian Imperialism Is Alive - And Brutal - in West Papua - The Diplomat

146 Violence returns to New Caledonia after activists sent to France | Politics News | Al Jazeera



demonstrated through the recent Forum Troika Plus mission to New Caledonia in October.<sup>147</sup>

The launch of regional security initiatives like the Pacific Policing Initiative (PPI) and the Pacific Police Support Group (PPSG) are substantial developments from the last 12 months, with the region expressing an increasing desire to work together to address security challenges.<sup>148</sup> This follows discussions at the Joint Heads of Pacific Security (JHoPS) meeting where regional efforts to collectively address shared security challenges was a key focus.<sup>149</sup>

## Horizon 2026

As per last year's report, traditional security threats will continue to be a key area of concern for Pacific countries over the next 24 months. Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine shows no indication of abating, with future sanctions, trade disruptions and destruction of economic assets likely to continue impacting on global commodity prices, although the exact extent of how this will negatively impact the Pacific remains unclear.<sup>150</sup> The human cost for this conflict is high, and the direct support of North Korea to Russia's acts of aggression towards Ukraine is a concerning and unwelcome development.<sup>151</sup>

The escalation of the Israel-Hamas conflict to a further conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, and the direct use of force between Israel and Iran, has further increased global security risks. Due to the geographic position of Iran and its proxies, further escalations in violence in this region have the potential to further impact the security of maritime trade routes.<sup>152</sup> Future escalations in conflict in the Middle East, therefore, offer the potential for increased disruption of trade routes resulting in reduced trade flows, increased shipping times and an inflationary effect on the prices of shipped products, both globally and to the Pacific region.

With tensions continuing to rise in the Middle East, Pacific countries will very likely be pushed to make difficult decisions – diplomatically and in multilateral organisations- around these complex security and humanitarian issues. How the US election outcome will shape these, and other dynamics remains unclear.<sup>153</sup> The possibility of a significant escalation in direct conflict between Israel, a nuclear armed state, and Iran, an aspirational nuclear state, also has the potential to have a negative impact on global non-proliferation efforts.

As per last year's report, the Bougainville referendum will be a significant issue during this period, which – if not managed carefully – could have significant security implications for the region. The appointment of a moderator is a positive development,<sup>154</sup> and one that will hopefully assist in managing disputes over the process to resolve the status of the semi-autonomous region.

The way forward on New Caledonia remains unclear as pro-independence and pro-France parties continue to deliberate on how best to proceed without further increases in violence.<sup>155</sup> Without clear

147 RELEASE: High level Forum mission to visit New Caledonia | Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat

148 <https://nit.com.au/28-08-2024/13378/australia-announces-pif-endorsement-for-pacific-police>

149 <https://www.defence.gov.au/news-events/releases/2024-08-16/pacific-security-chiefs-meet-advance-operational-cooperation>

150 Update: how is the war in Ukraine affecting global food prices? - Economics Observatory

151 NATO - Opinion: Doorstep statement by NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte following the North Atlantic Council briefing on the DPRK's troop deployment to Russia, 28-Oct-2024

152 <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2024/10/5/a-year-after-october-7-houthi-red-sea-attacks-still-torment-global-trade>

153 2024 Election: Donald Trump elected 47th President of the United States | AP News

154 Bougainville independence talks moderator Sir Jerry Mateparae in Port Moresby | RNZ News

155 Overseas Minister buffeted by New Caledonia crisis - Islands Business



consensus from both sides on a workable way forward – which may be difficult to achieve considering entrenched positions – a return to violence is possible over the next 12-24 months.

West Papua (Papua) independence remains an issue of concern over the next 12-24 months. How Indonesia's new President Prabowo Subianto will handle this issue remains unclear, however recent reports on the possible resumption of transmigration into West Papua (Papua) is a concerning development.<sup>156</sup>

Ongoing simmering tensions in the South China Sea,<sup>157</sup> on the Korean Peninsula and across the Taiwan Strait all have the capacity to impact the Pacific should there be a substantial or unforeseen escalation.<sup>158 159</sup> Although there continues to be increases in tensions, it remains unlikely that these flashpoints will boil over in the next 12-24 months. However, as per last year's report, the risk of miscalculation remains and the impact that a Trump presidency will have on these flashpoints remains unclear. Although of a distance from each of these theatres, the Pacific remains firmly connected to any future outcomes.

Under AUKUS, visits to Australia by US and UK conventionally-armed nuclear powered submarines have already increased, and from as early as 2027 AUKUS partners intend to establish a rotational presence in Australia through Submarine Rotational Force-West (SRF-West) to contribute to Australia's security and deterrence efforts in the region, engaging with regional partners in a transparent and open manner.

Elections in most parts of the Pacific, to be held in the next 12-24 months, are largely unlikely to result in civil disorder or political instability, with the possible exceptions of New Caledonia (no later than December 2025) and PNG (no later than July 2027).

### Opportunities

Many opportunities to address traditional security challenges facing the region remain extant from last year. Further to these, countries may wish to consider the below:

- Spaces for dialogue or 'talanoa' will be vital for addressing both global and regional strategic issues. Within the region, with numerous lines of effort underway in relation to New Caledonia, West Papua (Papua) and Bougainville, the region will need to work together, in line with the Biketawa Declaration, to ensure a nuanced and effective approach to addressing these complex issues.

## ECONOMIC SECURITY

### Current Situation

Growth in the Pacific region contracted from 5.8% in 2023 to 3.6% in 2024.<sup>160</sup> This slowdown was

156 West Papuan outcry over Prabowo's plan to revive transmigration | Asia Pacific Report

157 Philippine military drills to seize an island in the South China Sea | AP News

158 North Korea boasts of 'the world's strongest' missile, but experts say it's too big to use in war | AP News

159 Senior Taiwan security official says pressure on Taiwan from China is 'not light' | Reuters

160 SUMMARY-Pacific-Economic-Update-October-2024.pdf



driven by the Fiji and Solomon Islands economies.<sup>161</sup> Fiji saw a spike in inflation to 5.2% in 2024 due to VAT increases and a slowdown in its peak post pandemic growth of up to 20% in 2022 off the back of tourism arrivals, to 8% in 2023 down to 3.1% in 2024.<sup>162</sup> Solomon Islands also saw a slowdown from 3% in 2023 to 2.5% in 2024 due to the completion of preparations for elections as well as the hosting of the Pacific Games.<sup>163</sup> PNG's economic growth was forecasted to increase from 2.7% in 2023 to 4.8% in 2024 following the resumption of mining at the Porgera gold mine earlier in the year, however the mine recently stopped operations due to ongoing disputes.<sup>164 165</sup> Generally, average growth in other PICs accelerated from 3.8% in 2023 to 4.9% in 2024.<sup>166</sup> Inflation rates across the region have reduced significantly from an average of 6.8% to 4% in 2024. This is off the back of global disinflation with inflation rates falling from 6.7% in 2023 to 5.8% in 2024.<sup>167</sup>

A key uncertainty identified in last year's outlook was de-risking and the effects it was having on correspondent banking relationships (CBRs), key for cross-border transactions. PICs saw a decline in CBRs with a reduction of 60% over the last decade against the global average of 30%.<sup>168</sup> Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) with the support of the World Bank convened a meeting of Pacific finance ministers, central bank Governors and stakeholders and development partners to identify strategies to address this issue.<sup>169</sup> This was followed by a forum hosted by the US and Australia in partnership with the Forum Secretariat which resulted in commitments to maintain CBRs in the Pacific.<sup>170</sup> In September 2024, the World Bank announced funding of US\$68M in credit and grant financing for Fiji, Kiribati, RMI, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and the PIFS to maintain CBR.<sup>171</sup>

### Horizon 2026

Global growth in 2024 and 2025 is expected to remain the same, forecasted at 3.2%.<sup>172</sup> As assessed in last year's outlook, escalating geopolitical tension, geoeconomic fragmentation, and multiple conflicts, will continue to impact the global economic outlook. This will have a flow on effect on Pacific economies.<sup>173 174</sup>

The IMF in its latest report highlighted that the US would remain the engine of global growth with China's economic growth forecasted at 4.5% for 2025, down from 4.8% in 2024.<sup>175</sup> US economic and trade policies may have an impact on global growth with the re-election of President Trump, given his proposed policy to impose a 10% tariff on all global imports to the US and 60% tariffs on Chinese imports. Such a move is projected to result in reducing global economic growth by 0.8% in 2025 and a further 1.3% in 2026.<sup>176</sup> This may result in an intensification of protectionist policies, not only by the US

- 161 Ibid.
- 162 Pacific-Economic-Update-Full-Report-October-2024.pdf
- 163 Ibid.
- 164 Greater Investment in Education Key to Driving Stronger Economic Growth, Economic Diversification
- 165 Barrick Gold suspends operations at Papua New Guinea mine after violence kills at least 20 | Reuters
- 166 SUMMARY-Pacific-Economic-Update-October-2024.pdf
- 167 World Economic Outlook, October 2024: Policy Pivot, Rising Threats
- 168 World Bank Works to Ensure Pacific Island Countries Stay Connected to Global Financial System
- 169 RELEASE: Pacific Islands Forum & World Bank event puts focus on Corresponding Banking Relationships (CBR) in Pacific | Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
- 170 RELEASE: Pacific's first Banking Forum ends, outcomes to Economic Ministers | Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
- 171 World Bank approves credit financing for Pacific islands - Central Banking
- 172 Ibid.
- 173 Geoeconomic Fragmentation Threatens Food Security and Clean Energy Transition (imf.org)
- 174 US remains engine of global growth in latest IMF forecasts | Reuters
- 175 People's Republic of China and the IMF
- 176 US remains engine of global growth in latest IMF forecasts | Reuters





but other economies, disrupting global supply chains and impacting supply chains into the Pacific.<sup>177</sup>

Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (BRICS) expansion and growing influence could provide new opportunities for cooperation in critical areas such as trade, financing, investment and sustainable development. At the same time, however, it could lead to further global fragmentation and volatility, resulting in greater economic divergence and financial instability.

Against this global backdrop, projections for economic growth in the Pacific over the next 12 months may see a bounce back from 3.6% in 2024 to 4.1% in 2025.<sup>178</sup> Inflation is expected to decrease again in 2025 to 2.6% in anticipation of continuing global disinflation.<sup>179</sup> However, economic growth over the next 12 to 24 months is also expected to be impacted by weak investment, climate change and natural hazards.<sup>180</sup> The adoption of the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI) at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in September 2024<sup>181</sup>, although voluntary, will provide a mechanism for SIDS to “*capture exogenous vulnerabilities and lack of resilience to exogenous shocks of...developing countries*”<sup>182</sup> which may provide concessional development and disaster risk financing to bolster Pacific economies response and recovery. The constant cycle of response and recovery for some PICs will continue to limit fiscal space and exert pressure on their ability to service debts.<sup>183</sup> Labour shortages may also be a factor impacting economic growth over the next 12 to 24 months.<sup>184</sup> Public debt had decreased in 2023 given fiscal consolidation and increased government revenues, however, given the regions vulnerability to climate change impacts and the need for development financing, public debt levels will remain an issue of concern.<sup>185</sup>

Noting the growing convergence between business interests, financial crimes and transnational crimes<sup>186</sup> efforts on de-risking and strengthening CBRs in the Pacific will continue over the next 12 to 24 months. However, the funding from the World Bank is seen as a temporary measure and includes a feasibility study to explore longer term solutions that may require more investments for compliance efforts across the Pacific financial sector to comply with international financial standards and anti-money laundering Anti-Money-Laundering (AML) regulations.<sup>187</sup>

Pacific Island countries (PICs) may face growing energy supply chain vulnerabilities due to geopolitical tensions,<sup>188</sup> economic pressures,<sup>189</sup> and infrastructure constraints.<sup>190</sup> The region remains heavily reliant on imported fuels, which are subject to fluctuating global markets and supply disruptions. Papua New Guinea (PNG) recently highlighted the precariousness of these systems when fuel shortages in early 2024 led to widespread power outages, attributed to delayed fuel shipments, foreign exchange

- 177 World Economic Outlook, October 2024: Policy Pivot, Rising Threats
- 178 Asian Development Bank on X: 'ADB forecasts the Pacific's growth to be 3.4% this year and 4.1% in 2025. ADB Economist John Beirne talks about the drivers of growth, inflation forecasts, and the main risks facing the region's outlook. More in ADB's flagship economic report. #ADO2024' / X
- 179 The Pacific (Asian Development Outlook – September 2024)
- 180 SUMMARY-Pacific-Economic-Update-October-2024.pdf
- 181 UN General Assembly Adopts Multidimensional Vulnerability Index – SDG Knowledge Hub
- 182 Ibid.
- 183 The Pacific (Asian Development Outlook – September 2024)
- 184 Ibid.
- 185 WB-PEU-Summary-4March2024-WebHighRes.pdf
- 186 Virginia-Comolli-An-industry-of-crime-Foreign-businesses-and-illicit-practices-in-the-Pacific-GI-TOC-April-2024.pdf
- 187 World Bank approves \$68 mln cross-border bank lifeline for remote Pacific Islands | Reuters
- 188 How does the war in Ukraine affect oil prices? | World Economic Forum
- 189 A practical way to resolve Papua New Guinea's electricity crisis | Griffith Asia Insights - Griffith Asia Insights
- 190 RS: Pacific Energy Transition Challenges, Opportunities, and Way Forward - Asia Clean Energy Forum



shortfalls,<sup>191</sup> and financial challenges faced by state utility company, PNG Power.<sup>192</sup> These disruptions underscore broader regional challenges, such as inadequate storage capacity, reliance on single suppliers, and the high cost of renewable energy transitions.<sup>193</sup> Efforts to enhance energy resilience through local renewable energy projects and improving and upgrading energy infrastructure are critical to addressing the Pacific's long-term energy needs, but require sustained investment and external technical support to overcome financial and logistical barriers.<sup>194</sup>

#### Opportunities:

- Progress the implementation of the Pacific Roadmap for Economic Development (PRED) and emphasise investment in new sources of growth in high potential sectors; including building up infrastructure; mainstreaming resilience into development plans and ensuring macro-economic stability by diversifying Pacific economies and growing fiscal buffers against shocks.
- Ensure greater regional economic and financial cooperation and integration by promoting intra-regional trade, harmonisation of standards and regulations across the region and encourage free movement of people and businesses.
- Continue to implement national labour mobility strategies framed within national development plans to ensure adequate labour supply in PICs economies whilst enabling labour mobility opportunities with recipient countries. Support the assessment of socio-economic impacts of human mobility in the Pacific economies especially in sending countries and implement its recommendations.
- Strengthen regulatory and compliance frameworks across Pacific economies including public financial management systems (PFM) to ensure PICs meet standards by donors to access development and climate finance as well as AML/ Combating the Financing of Terrorism (CFT) monitoring and compliance which may address de-risking and create a more conducive environment for foreign direct investment.

## PRESERVING THE RULE OF LAW

### CURRENT SITUATION

The Pacific region continues to navigate a landscape of political uncertainty, governance challenges, and limited access to resources, all of which collectively test the integrity of democratic systems.<sup>195</sup> Corruption remains a significant hurdle, impeding progress and economic development while undermining democratic institutions and the rule of law.<sup>196</sup> As emphasized by Transparency

191 Forex shortage remains the problem for Papua New Guinea's fuel supplier Puma Energy | RNZ News

192 PNG Power need funds, says Nale | The National

193 The costs of achieving the SDGs: Energy transition | UNCTAD

194 Integrating renewable energy sources into grids | McKinsey

195 Pacific predictions: Elections, security and regionalism top 2024 agenda

196 UNDP Pacific Office in Fiji

International's 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index, addressing corruption and achieving the Teieniwa Vision remains a pressing priority.<sup>197 198</sup> Progress remains constrained as long as governments maintain the authority to dictate the operations of anti-corruption organisations and the legislative framework governing them. It is imperative that these organizations possess robust powers under the law, accompanied by safeguards that ensure their independence.

Compounding these issues is the rise in misinformation and disinformation fuelled by increased internet connectivity and social media usage.<sup>199</sup> Moreover, the current geopolitical landscape has negatively impacted on the sovereignty and social cohesion of Pacific Island Countries, with a growing reliance on social media for news heightening the region's susceptibility to these challenges.<sup>200</sup>

Foreign interference poses an ongoing threat, prompting some areas of the region to highlight it as a critical issue.<sup>201</sup> Effectively guarding against such interference remains a formidable challenge for Forum members, particularly for those still developing essential capabilities to address foreign influence and cybersecurity concerns.<sup>202 203</sup>

## HORIZON 2026

As the Pacific region becomes increasingly connected through the internet, the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation is expected to intensify, particularly in the lead-up to national elections and during critical legislative processes.<sup>204</sup> The presence of a strong, independent, and well-trained media will be critical. Concerns have emerged regarding media outlets and correspondents being funded by external countries to propagate narratives that align with their interests, underscoring the necessity of safeguarding the integrity of free media from harassment.<sup>205</sup> Furthermore, critical media perspectives are essential to the principles of democracy, and it is imperative that media organizations possess the capability to identify and effectively counteract disinformation<sup>206</sup>. Given these challenges, the scale and intent of these misinformation campaigns will likely shift in response to the evolving global geopolitical landscape, creating a more complex information landscape for Pacific Island Countries. With the reliance on external partners for digital transformation and the sophisticated technologies like deep fakes and the weaponisation of data, distinguishing authentic information and disinformation will become increasingly difficult.<sup>207</sup>

Over the next 24 months, Pacific Island Countries will continue to be vulnerable to foreign interference as global geopolitical tensions rise.<sup>208</sup> This vulnerability is exacerbated by the limited institutional capabilities designed to counter such threats, hampering effective responses and fostering an environment where external influences can exploit local vulnerabilities. The impact of this interference

- 197 Corruption Perceptions Index
- 198 Teieniwa Vision
- 199 United States Embassy Statement on Disinformation Regarding our Election Partnership with Solomon Islands and Presence in the Pacific Islands
- 200 'Playing loose with the truth': Fact-checking key in Pacific's heightened geopolitical landscape
- 201 Geopolitics in the Pacific Islands: Playing for advantage
- 202 Why the Pacific Islands Is Seeing a Rise in 'Defense Diplomacy'
- 203 PIF's General Secretary Baron Waqa confirms cyber-attack on PIF's office in Fiji
- 204 The rising risk of misinformation and disinformation
- 205 China is trying to buy influence with media in the Pacific as it aims to strengthen its presence in the region
- 206 Australia proud to support Tonga's media on World Press Freedom Day
- 207 Beneath the surface of Pacific digital infrastructure investments
- 208 Safeguarding Democracy in an era of geopolitical competition



may manifest in various forms, including influencing public opinion, manipulating electoral outcomes, and undermining national sovereignty.

Corruption is projected to remain a pervasive threat to the democratic health of the Pacific region.<sup>209</sup> Many Pacific countries will struggle with inadequate anti-corruption review mechanisms, which are essential for identifying and addressing weaknesses in existing regimes. As a result, opportunities to strengthen these frameworks may be missed, perpetuating a cycle of corruption that hinders progress toward good governance and sustainable development. The UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) Conference resolution to strengthen its implementation in SIDS, along with ongoing workshops by international organizations, offer the potential to develop anti-corruption mechanisms and improve governance in the Pacific.<sup>210 211</sup>

#### OPPORTUNITIES

- Enhance implementation of UNCAC and its principles through the Teieniwa Vision by strengthening linkages and information sharing between anti-corruption bodies in the region to enhance collective efforts in combatting corruption.<sup>212</sup>
- Strengthen awareness on misinformation and disinformation by building understanding of this issue in greater depth at the regional and national level, with a focus on initiatives that promote media literacy and fact-checking with a view to develop policy or legislative measures to address mis and disinformation.
- Explore existing legal and policy frameworks within and external to the region that provide flexible and agile approaches to identifying and addressing undue foreign influence.

## IMPLICATIONS OF DYNAMIC GEOPOLITICS

### Current Situation

Issues relating to implications of dynamic geopolitics and the Pacific have been largely in keeping with what was raised in last year's report. The strategic significance of the Pacific to external actors remains high. Contestation between the US and China continues to put pressure on the international system and limits the effectiveness and utility of multilateral systems.<sup>213</sup> External actors remain increasingly interested in expanding influence in the Pacific. Security cooperation has remained a focus of some of these engagements, including offers for training in the defence, law enforcement, maritime domain awareness, and security sectors.<sup>214</sup>

The most significant development of the last 12 months has been the re-election of Donald Trump to

209 Addressing corruption in the Pacific to build better now  
210 Conference of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption  
211 UNDP Pacific Office in Fiji  
212 Pacific Islands Law Officers' Network  
213 Geopolitics Is Corroding Globalization  
214 Pacific Island Countries' Seesawing Security Diplomacy – The Diplomat



the US Presidency.<sup>215</sup> Trump's presidency will have repercussions for the Pacific and the world, with President Trump very likely to adjust the strategic and foreign policy settings of the US.<sup>216</sup>

## Horizon 2026

In line with last year's report, external engagement with the Pacific will remain a priority for many external actors, particularly within the context of future geopolitical manoeuvring of the US and China. Although it remains unclear how exactly President-elect Trump will approach strategic competition with China, from his statements to date and in looking at his previous presidency, he has a strong focus on US military primacy and putting the US first. How this will translate into actions against China and how exactly this will impact his approach to the rest of the world remains unclear.<sup>217</sup>

It will remain crucial to identify how PICs respond to external actors' offers in the development, economic, defence, and security sectors. Specifically, it will be necessary to understand which areas have dependencies on specific actors and if this is affecting regional dynamics. Difficulties in assessing the risks and benefits of particular offers, industries and technologies will continue, as will finding trusted technical support to ensure decisions are in the best interests of countries and the region.

Geostrategic competition will continue to increase over the next 18-24 months, both globally and within the region. Pacific countries will remain vulnerable to security threats in other parts of the globe, such as those impacting on maritime trade routes. Threats to infrastructure on which Pacific countries rely, but which sit outside of national boundaries, will remain a potential area of vulnerability, both in terms of physical disruption and espionage.<sup>218</sup>

Multilateral systems intended to protect the international rule of law, most notably the UN Security Council, are likely to remain impacted by the geopolitical self-interest of their members. In the absence of UN leadership, the development of international norms and protection of infrastructure on which Pacific Island Countries depend, such as subsea cables and space-based communications systems, will be advanced by mini-lateral groupings,<sup>219</sup> which may limit Pacific voices and involvement in these issues.

## Opportunities

Opportunities to address the implications of dynamic geopolitics remain extant from last year's report.

215 Foreign leaders and governments react as Trump wins 2024 U.S. presidential election - CBS News

216 America under Donald Trump: views from ASPI analysts | The Strategist

217 Ibid.

218 <https://www.wsj.com/politics/national-security/china-internet-cables-repair-ships-93fd6320>

219 <https://www.nasa.gov/artemis-accords/>









PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM



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