



Hawai'i and its Asia-Pacific Connections

Perspectives from the APAL 2026 Young Leaders

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Introduction

For over two decades, one of Pacific Forum's priorities has been the development of the next generation of Asia-Pacific scholars and policy practitioners. An underappreciated component of that effort is the Asia-Pacific Affairs Leadership (APAL) program, which focuses on nurturing young leaders with an enduring connection to the state of Hawai'i. Hawai'i has a unique relationship with the Asia-Pacific, a product of its location at the center of the Pacific Ocean, its status as the most western US state, rich ethnic diversity born of the many communities with Asia-Pacific roots, and the fact that it hosts the headquarters of the Pacific Command.

The APAL program has enjoyed generous support from the Takitani Foundation, which seeks to help young people in Hawai'i acquire an understanding of the state's unique situation, be better prepared to contribute to a future in which this region plays a larger global role, and articulate its perspectives to the world. This year's carefully selected cohort met every month, where they joined experts and officials in discussions of issues. Speakers included senior Pacific Forum staff, University of Hawai'i professors, a state senator, a foreign diplomat, and an expert on regional nonprofits and philanthropy. The program aimed to give them a broad cross-section of views regarding key concerns, to both learn from those experts as well as give participants the opportunity to share their perspectives on these topics.

Their primary assignment was a research paper on an issue of interest to them. Those papers make up the bulk of this volume. They cover a wide range of topics, ranging from gender-based violence to deepsea mining. All make clear the authors' interest in and passion about these topics. They also evidence a deep commitment to Hawaiian perspectives: program participants are acutely aware of Hawai'i's intimate relationship with the environment and the circumstances that shape the island's engagement with the wider world.

Half of our APAL cohort also made a short research trip to Japan. There, they heard experts provide Japan's perspective on the region and the world, with considerable attention to relations with the United States. They met members of the Pacific Forum's Tokyo Young Leaders chapter, another of our next-gen initiatives. In a moderated discussion, the young people shared perspectives and then participated in a tabletop exercise that addressed a regional security crisis. They later met Kusama Tsuyoshi, a member of Japan's parliament, and after discussions with him, he led them on a tour of the Diet. They also visited cultural sites ranging from shrines and temples to the Team Lab art space. Participants' trip reports make up the final section of this publication. (The trip agenda and simulation are included in appendices.)

This year's APAL cohort underscored the importance of nurturing the next generation of young professionals on Hawai'i. Ours was a group of budding professionals with a passion for learning and promoting Hawaiian perspectives on regional issues. They are quick to seize opportunities and eager to engage. They learned a lot from the opportunities afforded to them in the APAL program – as did all the people with which they interacted. We look forward to working with them and with future APAL cohorts, preparing them and Hawai'i for a future in which they play increasingly vital roles.

A special thanks goes to Amelia Hegstrom, a 2026 summer intern at the Pacific Forum, for her outstanding work for putting this publication together.

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Strengthening Indo-Pacific Relations Through Hawai'i Pacific Sister-City Partnerships

By
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Introduction

Sister city relationships, official partnerships between two communities in different countries, support economic development, foster citizen diplomacy, and promote international cooperation, thus making them important in foreign policy. Hawai'i has strong economic and educational ties with its sister cities in Asian countries. However, effective initiatives between Hawai'i and its sister cities in Pacific Island countries have yet to be established to ensure long-term governmental and people-to-people relationships. This research explores sister-city relationships with a focus on Hawai'i and its sister cities, and shares recommendations to strengthen sister-city relations by raising public awareness of sister cities in the Pacific Islands and expanding existing initiatives and programs to sister cities.

Significance of Sister-City Relationships

The concept of cities from different countries engaging in one-on-one partnerships emerged as a reconciliation effort between European countries after World War II. The concept of forming direct relationships with foreign cities resulted in "twin towns" that helped Europe reopen diplomatic relations, create new educational and cultural exchange opportunities, and fund rebuilding infrastructure efforts.

The success of "twin towns" in Europe prompted then President Dwight Eisenhower to form "sister cities" in 1956 as a nationwide initiative to promote citizen diplomacy in the US. Eisenhower founded Sister Cities International, now a nonprofit organization, to implement a People-to-People Program that would help cities in the US and around the world build cultural and economic partnerships.¹ Sister Cities International defines sister cities as "a broad-based, long term partnership between cities in the U.S. and cities in other countries" that are officially recognized when an agreement to establish sister city ties is signed by the highest elected or appointed officials from both communities.² Sister Cities International helped find potential partnerships, offered technical advice, created publications and reports, and organized or participated in conferences.³ Today, the organization continues to "create

global relationships based on cultural, educational, informational and trade exchanges" as the national membership organization for sister city programs with over 1,800 partnerships in over 140 countries. Currently, 46 of 50 states are members of Sister Cities International and partake in sister-city partnerships. The only nonparticipating states are Wyoming, North Dakota, Vermont, and Maine.⁴

Sister cities contribute to US soft power by fostering cultural exchanges, establishing economic corporations, and localizing bilateral sister-city relations. The STS Foundation defines cultural exchange as "the exchange of cultural knowledge and experiences between people from different backgrounds, heritage, ethnicities, and religions."⁵ Types of cultural exchanges include educational programs, work and professional exchanges, homestays, and arts and festivals. The Department of State sponsors multiple educational, cultural, and professional programs for US and non-US citizens including high school, undergraduate, and graduate students as well as working professionals. The sister-city framework facilitates a deeper understanding of people and culture through sustained exchanges, ultimately normalizing ideas of cross-cultural engagement over time and strengthening cultural diplomacy between nations.⁶ Furthermore, sister-city relations help establish trade delegations and connections between international municipal officials, institutions, and businesses.

According to Sister Cities International, business connections established through sister cities can "build trust, access, and expertise that help local businesses find new opportunities and resources. Access to new markets, assistance navigating import and export regulations, or introductions to new partners, sister city programs expand the resources available to local businesses."⁷ This in turn provides economic benefits to both communities since their partnerships offer a low-risk opportunity to gain insight on different business cultures. Business partnerships and projects have originated from sister-cities in some cases.⁸ Specific goals and outcomes of sister-city relationships vary on the political and economic interests of participating countries. Programs implemented by sister-city partnerships localize bilateral relations by allowing cities to

¹ Michael Ruth, "Twin towns and sister cities". <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/twin-towns-and-sister-cities>.

² Sister Cities International, "About Us". <https://sistercities.org/about-us/>.

³ Zilinsky, "The Twinning of the World: Sister Cities in Geographic and Historical Perspective," 11. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8306.1991.tb01676.x>.

⁴ Sister Cities International, "Where We Are: U.S. Partners Worldwide". <https://sistercities.org/about-us/>.

⁵ Katie Homer, "What is Cultural Exchange? Enrich Your Life Through Global Connections". June 4, 2025. [https://www.interexchange.org/blog/international-](https://www.interexchange.org/blog/international-participants/what-is-cultural-exchange-enrich-your-life-through-global-connections/)

[participants/what-is-cultural-exchange-enrich-your-life-through-global-connections/](https://www.interexchange.org/blog/international-participants/what-is-cultural-exchange-enrich-your-life-through-global-connections/).

⁶ Grace Ruch Clegg, "Sister Cities: Seedbed for Grassroots of U.S.-Japan Relations". May 23, 2018. <https://spfusa.org/publications/sister-cities-seedbed-for-the-grassroots-of-u-s-japan-relations/>.

⁷ Sister Cities International, "Exchanges". n.d. <https://sistercities.org/what-we-do/exchange/>.

⁸ Grace Ruch Clegg, "Sister Cities: Seedbed for the Grassroots of U.S.-Japan Relations". May 23, 2018. <https://spfusa.org/publications/sister-cities-seedbed-for-the-grassroots-of-u-s-japan-relations/>

address local needs while also contributing to broader international objectives. Sister-city initiatives provide cities a platform to engage in relevant, impactful diplomatic efforts in their communities, which makes the concept of international relations more tangible and accessible to everyday citizens. In a way, sister cities create a symbiotic relationship and balanced approach that respects the autonomy of local entities and ensures that their international participation aligns with national interests and follows international norms and laws.⁹

Hawai'i and its Sister Cities

As of 2025, Honolulu has 37 sister cities in 12 countries. Within the Asia-Pacific region, Honolulu has sister-city agreements in China, Cook Islands, Japan, Marshall Islands, Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam.¹⁰ Honolulu Sister Cities explains that sister-city relationships "play vital roles in amplifying Honolulu's unique and rich cultural, social, and economic fabric."

According to the 2025 Hawai'i's Sister States Report, successful sister relationships occur when the following conditions are met:

- a. There is geographical, historical, cultural, or economic commonality between Hawai'i and the sister city;
- b. There are active and interested support groups;
- c. There are economic benefits for both sister cities;
- d. There are established close ties between educational institutions of two potential sisters;
- e. There are clear, strong governmental interest in forming and maintaining sister-city relationship

Honolulu maintains strong sister-city relationships with China, Japan, Philippines, South Korea, and Taiwan. Recent sister-city initiatives from the 2025 Hawai'i Sister States Report include the inaugural Reverse Coffee Mission, Hawai'i-Japan Sister Summit, Culinary and Food Exchange Program, Maritime and Fisheries Exchange, and Philippines-Hawai'i Sister Province Symposium. These initiatives focused on strengthening diplomatic, economic, and cultural relations with Hawai'i and its sister cities. Pacific Forum's 2026 Hawai'i Asia-Pacific Affairs Leadership (APAL) Program Study Tour took place in Shibuya, one of Hawai'i's sister cities established in 2024; participants had the opportunity to meet experts, academics, and other young leaders involved in US-Japan

relations, foreign diplomacy, and national security and defense.

Though Honolulu has strong economic and educational ties with its sister cities in Asian countries, effective initiatives between Hawai'i and sister cities in Pacific Island countries have yet to be established to ensure long-term governmental and people-to-people relationships. Hawai'i's sister-city relationships with Pacific Islands are important for geopolitical strategy, maritime security, trade and supply resilience, and environmental protection. Hawai'i, Cook Islands, and Marshall Islands face similar environmental issues such as rising sea levels, warmer temperatures and extreme precipitation, risk of extreme natural disasters, and spread of invasive species. Hawai'i currently has two sister cities in the Pacific Islands. In 2009, Honolulu established a sister-city relationship with Majuro in the Marshall Islands. Most recently as a result of the decades long relationship between Cook Islands and Hawai'i, the two signed a sister-city agreement with Honolulu and Avarua as the first sister city under the 7 for 70 Program in 2024 with the main goals of supporting sustainable and regenerative tourism, preserving natural resources, and addressing climate change issues.¹¹ More information about Honolulu's sister-city relationship and initiatives with Majuro and Avarua is not available. Sister cities in Marshall Islands and Cook Islands were not included in the 2025 Hawai'i's Sister States Report. Majuro in the Marshall Islands has not been mentioned in reports from the last five years.

Case Studies: Australia and Papua New Guinea Sister-City Relations

The sister-city relationships between Australia and Papua New Guinea have effective initiatives and programs that Hawai'i can implement with its sister cities in Marshall Islands and Cook Islands. These two case studies include sister-city relationships between Cairns, Australia and Lae, Papua New Guinea as well as Orange City, Australia and Mount Hagen, Papua New Guinea.

Cairns and Lae became sister cities in 1984 to strengthen diplomatic and economic relations and they maintain well-documented initiatives and programs to this day. Cairns Mayor Amy Eden describes the sister-city relationship between Cairns and Lae as "built on people, shared culture, and mutual respect, and the belief that through bond, both communities can prosper together."¹² In 2025, a delegation from Cairns led by Mayor Eden, Sister Cities Ambassador

⁹ Mahendra, Nadya, Yahya, "Strategizing Sister City Partnerships: Paradiplomacy, Bilateral Relations, and Sustainable Cooperation in Indonesia," *Journal of Paradiplomacy and City Networks* 1(2), p.49. April 2023. <https://doi.org/10.18196/jpcn.v2i1.35>.

¹⁰ State of Hawai'i (December 2025). Report of Hawai'i's Sister State Committee on the State of Hawai'i's Sister States. <https://files.hawaii.gov/dbedt/annuals/2025/2025-bdsd-sister-states.pdf>.

¹¹ Marissa Harrold (December 9, 2024). "7 for 70: The Future of US-Pacific Islands Sister Cities". <https://asiamattersforamerica.org/articles/7-for-70-the-future-of-us-pacific-islands-sister-cities>.

¹² Amy Eden, "Cairns and Lae: Celebrating 41 Years of Sister Cities and 50 Years of PNG Independence". <https://amyeden.com.au/cairns-and-lae-celebrating-41-years-of-sister-cities-and-50-years-of-png-independence/>.

Sim Hayward and Dr. Charles Clarke of Cairns Botanical Gardens visited Lae to promote Cairns and Sister Cities during Papua New Guinea's 50th Anniversary of Independence. Other sister-city initiatives recorded from 2008 to 2025 include art exhibitions from local artists, cultural and educational exchanges, anniversary celebrations, and Morning Tea and Gift Exchanges.¹³ In addition, a plaque of Lae is displayed as part of Cairns Family of Sister Cities plaques in the Cairns Esplanade for the general public to learn about the history and significance of their sister-city relationship.¹⁴

Orange City and Mount Hagen have been sister cities since 1985 and with over 50 years of cooperation; the sister-cities have collaborated on urban planning projects, educational exchanges, and women's empowerment initiatives. The Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government states that the City of Mount Hagen has the strongest international and most documented partnership with the Orange City Council. Key features of Orange City's partnership with Mount Hagen include community development, capacity building, and economic development in contrast to their other sister cities in the U.S., New Zealand, and Japan that focus primarily on cultural exchanges.¹⁵ Orange City has provided assistance with waste management, support for \$4 million rural market and traffic facilities, and hosted engineering training to develop workforce skills.¹⁶ Notable economic cooperation includes the Economic Development Agreement between Orange Council and the Western Highlands Provincial Government to facilitate business opportunities in mineral resource development, environment protection, governance support industries, and the local farming industry. The sister cities have also worked together to facilitate a women's capacity-building project that helped empower women in the agriculture sector. This project consisted of sessions where women learned how to source produce to create jams and preservers, allowing them to generate income to support their families, and especially their children's education.¹⁷ Much of the success of the sister-city relationship can be credited to strong leadership by elected officials and senior officials from both cities.

Sister City Policy Recommendations

In order to implement effective initiatives between Hawai'i and its sister cities in Majuro, Marshall Islands and Avarau, Cook Islands and ensure long-term governmental and people-to-people relationships, greater public awareness of sister cities in the Pacific Islands should be promoted, and existing initiatives and programs should be expanded to incorporate Honolulu's sister-city relationships with Majuro and Avarau.

Greater public awareness of sister city partnerships in Majuro, Marshall Islands and Avarau, Cook Islands can be promoted by increasing visibility of sister-city partnerships through public art installations, signs, or plaques. Media coverage through social media, local news, and feature stories and interviews can address the lack of news reports and research sources, and help people learn more about the history and significance of Hawai'i maintaining strong sister-city relations with Pacific Island countries. Promotional campaigns through social media such as Instagram and educational institutions such as K-12 schools and universities can help reach younger generations and motivate them to partake in sister-city programs and events in their communities. Furthermore, existing cultural and sister-city initiatives and programs such as study abroad programs, local cultural festivals, and cross-cultural business collaborations should be expanded to incorporate Honolulu's sister cities of Majuro and Avarau

Study abroad programs include but are not limited to the Pacific and Asian Affairs Council Sister-State Study Tours, Environmental Summit in Japan, and the Moananuiākea Hawai'i Cultural and Conservation Youth Exchange Program. The Pacific and Asian Affairs Council describes Hawai'i as sitting at a crossroads of culture, diplomacy, climate, and economic exchange in a rapidly shifting Indo-Pacific region, making it important to invest in student ambassadors who are also future policymakers, educators, and business leaders.¹⁸ Their recent Sister-State Study Tours in Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur, Jeju Island, and Okinawa allowed high school students to be part of a statewide delegation and contribute to strengthening sister-city relationships through cultural diplomacy. The Environmental Summit in Sapporo also helped local Hawai'i students learn about shared environmental challenges between the sister cities and create proposals to

¹³ Cairns Regional Council, "Lae, Papua New Guinea". 26 November 2025. <https://www.cairns.qld.gov.au/experience-cairns/sister-cities/lae-papua-new-guinea>.

¹⁴ Monument Australia, "Cairns Family of Sister Cities". n.d. <https://www.monumentaustalia.org/themes/government/local/display/114025-cairns-family-of-sister-cities>.

¹⁵ Melissa Gibbs et al, (December 2015). "Sister Cities and International Alliances: Can and should Australian local governments play an expanded role?", Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government.

<https://www.uts.edu.au/globalassets/sites/default/files/ACELG-2015-Sister-cities-and-international-alliances.pdf>.

¹⁶ Orange City Council, "Sister Cities". n.d. <https://www.orange.nsw.gov.au/sister-cities/>.

¹⁷ Stephen Sykes, (2010). "Mutual capacity building: Mt Hagen local government and Orange City". <https://doi.org/10.5130/cjlg.v0i7.1915>.

¹⁸ Pacific and Asian Affairs Council, "42 Public High Schools. One Statewide Student Delegation." n.d. <https://www.paachawaii.org/news/sister-state-study-tours-2026>.

address them.¹⁹ The Moananuiākea Hawai'i Cultural and Conservation Youth Exchange Program allowed students from the Cook Islands to visit the Island of Hawai'i and strengthen cultural connections between indigenous communities. Incorporating study abroad programs in Majuro and Avarau and collaborating with sister city communities can raise awareness of shared economic, social and environmental issues, and build cross-cultural relationships among sister city communities. Unfortunately, this proposal faces challenges such as budget cuts to Department of State exchange programs. According to the Alliance for International Exchange, the White House's FY27 Presidential Budget Request proposes a 68% decrease in exchange programs, which makes study abroad programs and funding at risk of being eliminated.²⁰

While there are local festivals in Hawai'i such as the Celebrate Micronesia Festival that incorporate aspects of Marshallese culture, it is not common for displays of sister-city relationships to be present. Information booths, either run by staff or volunteers, at local cultural events can help people learn more about sister city relations in the Marshall Islands and Cook Islands. This can also encourage them to partake in more cultural events in their communities. Other than exchanges and cultural events, existing cross-cultural business cooperation can be implemented to cater to economic opportunities with Majuro and Avarau. For instance, the Inaugural Reverse Coffee Mission allows international buyers to Hawai'i to learn about the coffee production processes, sustainable practices, and the certificate procedures required to export coffee from Hawai'i to China.²¹ Implementing a similar program with local businesses in Majuro and Avarau allows Hawai'i to expand business connections within the Pacific Islands.

Conclusion

Sister cities contribute to America's soft power by fostering cultural exchanges, establishing economic corporations, and localizing bilateral sister-city relations. Hawai'i currently maintains strong diplomatic, economic, and cultural relations with its sister cities in Asia. However, effective initiatives and programs between Honolulu and its sister cities in Majuro, Marshall Islands and Avarau, Cook Islands have yet to be established to ensure long-term governmental and people-to-people relationships. To strengthen Hawai'i-Pacific sister-city relations, the following proposals have been introduced: 1) Raise public awareness of sister cities in the Pacific Islands 2) Expand existing initiatives and programs to incorporate Honolulu's sister-city relationships with Majuro and Avarau.

Strengthening Hawai'i's sister-city relationships in the Marshall Islands and the Cook Islands can greatly contribute to improving geopolitical strategy, maritime security, trade and supply resilience, and environmental protection.

¹⁹ State of Hawai'i (December 2025). Report of Hawai'i's Sister State Committee on the State of Hawai'i's Sister-States. <https://files.hawaii.gov/dbedt/annuals/2025/2025-bdsd-sister-states.pdf>.

²⁰ Mark Overmann, (7 April, 2026). "President's FY27 budget proposes 68% cut to Department of State exchange programs". [https://www.alliance-exchange.org/alliance-](https://www.alliance-exchange.org/alliance-commentary/presidents-fy27-budget-proposes-68-cut-to-department-of-state-exchange-programs)

[commentary/presidents-fy27-budget-proposes-68-cut-to-department-of-state-exchange-programs](https://www.alliance-exchange.org/alliance-commentary/presidents-fy27-budget-proposes-68-cut-to-department-of-state-exchange-programs).

²¹ State of Hawai'i (December 2025). Report of Hawai'i's Sister State Committee on the State of Hawai'i's Sister-States. <https://files.hawaii.gov/dbedt/annuals/2025/2025-bdsd-sister-states.pdf>.



Indo-Pacific Information Competition and Hawai'i's Strategic Role

By
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Abstract

Gray-zone competition, an increasingly defining feature of Indo-Pacific regional strategy, is often framed with a focus on highly contested areas. Within this gray-zone, malign actors compete in information and narrative spaces, deepening divisions while crippling trust and confidence. Pacific island communities, confronting local realities and constraints, face immense pressure from great powers. Comparing instances of information coercion in other Pacific communities reveal how powers like China and Russia aim to exert political pressure in Hawai'i, exploiting vulnerabilities rooted genuine issues. Comparing challenges and analyzing susceptibilities to narrative competition informs how aggressive governments may seek leverage and how Hawai'i, the U.S., and other partners, can defend against coercion through resilience. Preparing a robust defensive framework will require proactive approaches to tackling vulnerable points of leverage, including issues within indigenous communities and repairing trust.

Introduction

As geopolitical tensions rise in the Indo-Pacific, strategic competition in the region is increasingly characterized not by open conflict, but persistent and coercive activities below the threshold of armed confrontation. Highly contested areas, such as Taiwan, the South China Sea, where heightened tensions have catastrophic global consequences, receive the most attention.¹ This focus, however, risks obscuring how gray-zone pressures extend into the broader Pacific.

Scattered and isolated Pacific islands present strategic value but remain exposed to coercion as larger powers seek to gain access or footholds. Smaller island communities possess few means to defend against such pressures on information ecosystems, with attacks and manipulation by foreign powers going largely uncontested. Hawai'i represents an intersection of strategic importance, playing a central role as a forward presence in the Pacific for the U.S.

in regional strategy, confronted by local vulnerabilities. However, Hawai'i remains susceptible to influence campaigns due to a variety of factors: geographic isolation, economic dependence on external supply chains, and a unique history shaped by ongoing debates on political autonomy.

While understanding gray-zone vulnerabilities in disputed areas or potential flashpoints are critical to craft resilience measures and defend against coercion, less attention centers on domestic, presumed safe environments, strategically valuable lands where fraught histories and grievances due to colonialism and imperialism create unique vulnerabilities.

Information and Narrative Competition Literature Review

Gray-zone competition, coercive activity deliberately utilized to remain below conventional armed conflict, aims to maintain ambiguity, deniability, incrementalism, and blurring civilian and military domains. These strategies pursue gradual shifts in political and strategic conditions.² Exploiting this space between peace and war, gray-zone activity and competition complicate attribution and a proportional response.

Within this competition, narrative emerges as a consequential domain. Actors, state and non-state, utilize misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation, to exploit political, historical, and social dynamics. Emerging technologies and propagation of global social media platforms further complicates historical understandings of defense. Foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) allows messaging to quickly and instantaneously reach a wide audience.³ Narrative manipulation and influence operations seek to shape political environments, drive wedges in existing social divisions and tensions, and erode public confidence in institutions.⁴ Modern coercion campaigns rely on immense scale, speed, and digital pervasiveness, shifting between misinformation, disinformation, and mal-information, referring to varying degrees of factuality and intent.⁵ These

¹ "China-Taiwan Weekly Update, September 22, 2025." *Institute for the Study of War*. September 22, 2025. <https://understandingwar.org/research/china-taiwan/china-taiwan-weekly-update-september-22-2025/>

² "USA AI Disinformation & Security Report 2025 | AI Disinformation Threats Soar: 500-800% Increase by 2026 Projected in US." *Yahoo Finance: Research and Markets Report*. October 10, 2025. <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/usa-ai-disinformation-security-report-144200533.html>

Sean Lyngaas. "China Linked to AI Information Operations Targeting U.S. Politics." *CNN*. February 25, 2026. <https://edition.cnn.com/2026/02/25/politics/chatgpt-china-intimidation-operation>

³ Tamás Matura. "Sino-Russian Convergence in Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference: A Global

Threat to the US and Its Allies." *Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA)*. June 30, 2025. <https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/sino-russian-convergence-in-foreign-information-manipulation-and-interference/>

⁴ Dana Nickel. "Russia is quietly churning out fake content posing as US news." *Politico*. August 17, 2025. <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/08/17/russia-us-news-media-disinformation-campaign-00512173>

⁵ Dov Bachmann, Sascha-Dominik Dries Putter, and Guy Duczynski. "Hybrid Warfare and Disinformation: A Ukraine War Perspective." *Global Policy* (London) 14, no. 5 (November 2023): 858–69. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.13257>

instruments of subversion prove exceedingly useful to spur distrust and disorder.

In these communities, external or malign actors need not fabricate tensions and, instead, focus on debates grounded in historical events and socioeconomic realities. Erosion of public trust poses a clear threat to democratic governance, which draws authority from an informed public.⁶ Rather than territorial expansion, narrative competition may target social cohesion and trust, altering cost-benefit calculations and limiting the will to adopt necessary policies to defend against potential escalation.⁷

Misinformation Campaigns in the Pacific, Island Nation Vulnerabilities

The strategic and physical realities leave Pacific island nations uniquely vulnerable to coercion. Strategies to influence information, especially between formidable geopolitical powers, allow little room for these smaller, isolated populations to avoid manipulation.⁸ Information campaigns transcend geographic boundaries, blurring the frontlines of a conflict. Recent reporting and policy analysis point to growing convergence between Russian and Chinese information operations. A 2025 report by the Center for European Policy Analysis documents escalating coordination in FIMI, particularly the smaller, more media vulnerable Pacific island states.⁹ This analysis examines qualitative aspects of influence campaigns targeting different Pacific island communities to discern patterns and evaluate vulnerabilities of these operations.

Case Study: Solomon Islands

⁶ Asia-Pacific Regional Security Assessment 2024, Chapter 5: Driving Wedges: China's Disinformation Campaigns in the Asia-Pacific. *International Institute for Strategic Studies*. May 2024. <https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-dossiers/asia-pacific-regional-security-assessment-2024/chapter-5/>

⁷ Ashwani Malhotra, Nina Evans, Jing Gao, Jia Tina Du, and Connie Zheng. "The Issues Caused by Misinformation—How Workers and Organizations Deal with It: A Systematic Literature Review. An Annual Review of Information Science and Technology (ARIST) Paper." *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* (Hoboken, USA) 77, no. 1 (January 2026): 133–62. <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.25016>

⁸ Lisa Singh & Tushar Joshi. "Deadly Consequences: Disinformation in the Pacific." *Lowy Institute: The Interpreter*. February 3, 2025. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/deadly-consequences-disinformation-pacific>

⁹ Matura. "Sino-Russian Convergence in Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference: A Global Threat to the US and Its Allies." 2025.

¹⁰ Albert Zhang and Adam Ziogas. "Russia and China Coordinate on Disinformation in Solomon Islands Elections." *Australian Strategic Policy Institute: The Strategist*.

Electoral anxieties have proven susceptible to information operations. During elections in the Solomon Islands, disinformation activity by Russian and Chinese state-media accused the United States of weaponizing foreign aid and plotting regime change.¹⁰ While attention and coverage to these theories remain limited, the acute coordination between Russia and China should cause concern. As the article notes, both governments utilized numerous levers and modes to multiply messaging and interactions to reach the widest audience possible.¹¹ Evidence suggests China attempted to influence public discourse through operations that spread false narratives and suppressed others.¹² Reports also note pressure on news organizations by Chinese diplomats to adopt friendlier images, often leveraging this with much-needed financial support.¹³

Case Study: The Republic of Palau

Similarly, the Republic of Palau (hereafter referred to as Palau) faced a significant surge in gray-zone coercion. In 2024, Palau suffered a major cyberattack, resulting in the theft of more than 20,000 government documents containing detailed diplomatic communications and records with the U.S., Japan, and Taiwan, which were subsequently published on the dark web.¹⁴ Although China denies involvement, Palauan officials publicly attributed the actors to China, citing Palau's diplomatic recognition of Taiwan's sovereignty, an increasing rarity among Pacific nations, as the root of China's ire. Part of the "Second Island Chain," Palau sits upon a strategic route into the Western Pacific. In 2017, China abruptly targeted and ordered tour operators to cancel and halt travel packages to Palau, slashing tourism to the islands.¹⁵ In 2018, Palau authorities

May 2, 2024. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/russia-and-china-co-ordinate-on-disinformation-in-solomon-islands-elections/>

¹¹ Zhang and Ziogas. "Russia and China Coordinate on Disinformation in Solomon Islands Elections."

¹² Blake Johnson, Miah Hammond-Errey, Daria Impiombato, Albert Zhang, and Joshua Dunne. "Suppressing the Truth and Spreading Lies: How the CCP is Influencing Solomon Islands' Information Environment." *Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI)*. October 5, 2022. <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/suppressing-truth-and-spreading-lies/>

¹³ "China's Growing Grip on the Solomon Islands' Fragile Media Sector." *Reporters Without Borders (RSF)*. March 16, 2026. <https://rsf.org/en/china-s-growing-grip-solomon-islands-fragile-media-sector>

¹⁴ Jacob Judah. "A Pacific Island With Ties to Taiwan Was Hacked. Was It Political?" *New York Times*. June 2, 2024. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/02/world/asia/palau-taiwan-china-hack.html>

¹⁵ Charlotte Graham-McLay. "Palau's president says China is weaponizing lucrative tourism over his refusal to break Taiwan ties." *Associated Press*. August 15, 2024.

noted an uptick in Chinese-linked illegal activities and criminal organizations in Palau.¹⁶ FIMI in Palau reveals information coercion aiming to erode trust and influence foreign policy alignment, specifically those maintaining diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

Case Study: Guam

Guam possesses strategic value and has also faced information coercion. An island territory in the Western Pacific, Guam is the United States' westernmost point, closest to potential flashpoints with China. Positioned in the second island chain, the territory has faced significant hacking challenges from China targeting U.S. bases.¹⁷ Although centered on U.S. bases, the breach targeted, "communications, manufacturing, utility and transportation sectors...to maintain access to critical systems for as long as possible," calling into question Guam's ports and airports.¹⁸ Similar to Hawaii, the people and government of Guam confront challenges with sharing close proximity to U.S. military presence. Environmental and living costs to economic dependence on the industry, with one in five jobs related to the military.¹⁹

Case Study: Philippines

In the Philippines, while most attention on gray-zone tactics have focused on the tense episodes of maritime

harassment and conflict, China also deployed and engaged in false narratives and disinformation. The series of coercive messaging focuses on casting doubt on and seeking to damage the U.S. partnership while embellishing China's role as a regional power.²⁰ Information competition also seeks to raise questions about the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) in the contested waters, claiming China's EEZ overlaps other nations' territories in the region, including the Philippines.²¹

Case Study: Okinawa

Okinawa, specifically the Ryukyu Islands, possesses a complex history over sovereignty. Although local polls reveal weak support for full independence, China utilizes propaganda tools to cast doubt on Japan's sovereignty over the islands and stoke fears and concerns over U.S. military bases.²² Observers noticed when Japan and China face periods of diplomatic tensions, these narratives begin to increase across social media and online spaces.²³ In this case, China appears willing to complicate an adversary's domestic historical narratives to sow discontent. As Okinawa remains firmly within Japanese sovereignty, these historical grievances become instrumentalized as levers rather than confronted honestly.²⁴

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/palaus-president-says-china-weaponizing-044636355.html>

Caterson, Jessica. "From Tourism to Propaganda Tactics: Unveiling the PRC's Influence on Palau's Electoral Landscape." *Expeditions with MCUP: Marine Corp University Press*. October 28, 2024.

<https://www.usmcu.edu/Outreach/Marine-Corps-University-Press/Expeditions-with-MCUP-digital-journal/From-Tourism-to-Propaganda-Tactics/>

¹⁶ Judah. "A Pacific Island With Ties to Taiwan Was Hacked. Was It Political?"

¹⁷ Hannah Ritchie. "Microsoft: Chinese hackers hit key US bases on Guam." *BBC*. May 25, 2023. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-65705198>

¹⁸ Ritchie. "Microsoft: Chinese hackers hit key US bases on Guam." 2023.

¹⁹ Sean Mantesso. "Strategically critical Guam divided over growing US military presence." *Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) News*. April 3, 2026. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-04-04/us-military-expansion-threat-or-saviour-in-guam/106516124>

²⁰ Marites Dañguilan Vitug. "China's Disinformation Narratives in the Philippines." *Perry World House*. April 25, 2025. <https://perryworldhouse.upenn.edu/news-and-insight/chinas-disinformation-narratives-in-the-philippines/>

²¹ Asia-Pacific Regional Security Assessment 2024, Chapter 5: Driving Wedges: China's Disinformation Campaigns in the Asia-Pacific. *International Institute for Strategic Studies*.

May 2024. <https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-dossiers/asia-pacific-regional-security-assessment-2024/chapter-5/>

Poppy McPherson and Karen Lema. "How China waged an infowar against U.S. interests in the Philippines." *Reuters*. October 5, 2025. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/how-china-waged-an-infowar-against-us-interests-philippines-2025-10-06/>

²² Yuichiro Kanematsu. "Social media fuel pro-Okinawa independence disinformation blitz." *Nikkei Asia*. October 3, 2024.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/spotlight/cybersecurity/social-media-fuel-pro-okinawa-independence-disinformation-blitz>

Maria Siow. "Beijing stokes opposition to US bases in Japan's Okinawa as it seeks to 'win hearts and minds' amid Taiwan tensions." *South China Morning Post*. July 2, 2023. <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3226123/china-stokes-opposition-us-bases-japans-okinawa-it-seeks-win-hearts-and-minds-amid-taiwan-tensions>

²³ Hsi-Ting Pai. "When China-Japan disputes arise, Beijing plays the Ryukyus card." *Australian Strategic Policy Institute: The Strategist*. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/when-china-japan-disputes-arise-beijing-plays-the-ryukyus-card/>

²⁴ Pai. "When China-Japan disputes arise, Beijing plays the Ryukyus card."

	US Military Presence	Evidence of Coercion	Examples
Solomon Islands		False Narratives during elections	False Narratives about US Pressure news organizations
Palau		Cyberattacks Economic Pressure - Tourism	Leverage economic dependence on tourism; Foreign policy alignment (with Taiwan)
Guam	x	Cyberattacks	Economic dependence on military; Hacking targeting access to critical infrastructure
Philippines	x	False Narratives during maritime tensions	False Narratives about US / EEZ
Okinawa	x	False Narratives during diplomatic tensions	False Narratives about US / Historical Tensions

Summary of Pacific Cases

The island nations in the Pacific face unique vulnerabilities to misinformation and disinformation. Many of these island nations are adjusting to rapid advances in communication technology and methods, leaving them exposed to higher connectivity and vast amounts of unverified information and sources.²⁵ The deception and speed of dissemination are particularly problematic, utilizing these close-knit, largely isolated island communities' interpersonal connections, sometimes referred to as "coconut wireless," potentially aiding the spread of inaccurate online accounts to offline communications.²⁶ Coercion relies on authentic anxieties, not solely fabricated narratives. For cases where the U.S. maintains military presence, adversaries will seek to exploit this node. Increased militarization and toll on the environment offer sensitive narratives for amplification in a location where geography sharply constrains the flow of resources and communication.

Hawai'i's Vulnerabilities through a Gray-Zone Lens

Firmly embedded in the United States political system and considered a geopolitical extension of the United States, Hawai'i occupies a distinct sociopolitical and historical space. While understanding past information campaigns in

the Pacific does not imply that Hawai'i mirrors the same fragilities, certain elements and points of leverage highlight why and where actors may seek to add pressure in Hawaii. Policymakers should consider strategic value, physical isolation, and historical tensions as points where adversaries may seek to find and exploit leverage.

Strategic Value

Hawai'i occupies a distinct position in U.S. strategy and history. Uniquely isolated and strategically located, the Hawaiian archipelago hosts the headquarters of the United States Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM), which oversees military operations across the vast Pacific region, and numerous naval and air installations, central to force projection and deterrence.²⁷ In an open conflict, Hawai'i will play a critical role. This strategic value also presents a paradoxical conundrum, similar to other Pacific island communities, geographic and infrastructural constraints often catalyze the large military bases and public into conflict. Issues and tensions continually emerge, often weighing economic benefits from defense spending with costs of land occupation by armed forces. Discourse and opposition often highlight environmental degradation and dispossession of Indigenous and local populations and land.²⁸ These sensitive issues complicate balancing regional security needs with local socioeconomic and

²⁵ Lisa Singh & Tushar Joshi. "Deadly Consequences: Disinformation in the Pacific." *Lowy Institute: The Interpreter*. February 3, 2025. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/deadly-consequences-disinformation-pacific>

²⁶ Anouk Ride. "Fake kidnaps and real dangers of disinformation in Pacific Islands." *The Lowy Institute: The Interpreter*. November 7, 2024. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/fake-kidnaps-real-dangers-disinformation-pacific-islands>
Meg Tapia. "Pacific Disinformation Playbook." *Lowy Institute: The Interpreter*. November 27, 2024.

<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/pacific-disinformation-playbook>

²⁷ "The Strategic Importance of Hawai'i's Military Presence." *Military and Community Relations Office (MACRO)*. May 9, 2025. <https://www.macro.hawaii.gov/the-strategic-importance-of-hawai-is-military-presence/>

²⁸ Audrey McAvoy. "U.S. Military's Attempt to Retain Strategic Land for Training Runs into Native Hawaiian Opposition." *NBC News*. July 4, 2025. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/us-militarys->

environmental concerns. Despite its status as a U.S. state, Hawai'i's isolation and historic tensions may play more pivotal roles in determining vulnerability to foreign attempts to inject harmful or divisive narratives.

Physical Isolation

In addition to federal tensions, Hawai'i's level of geographic isolation, while strategically valuable, presents narrative and information vulnerabilities. Such isolation forces Hawai'i to depend on many external industries, maritime supply chains or air transport. Hawai'i's economy relies heavily on tourism, federal spending, and imported goods.²⁹ Disruptions, physical or narrative, can present and exaggerate economic and psychological effects. As detailed in other Pacific island community examples above, this isolation encourages a distinctly close-knit, interpersonal communication and connectivity as a vehicle for offline spread of potentially dangerous misinformation or disinformation.

Historical Tensions: Identity and Political Autonomy

Hawai'i's strategic centrality cannot be separated from its tumultuous history. Political upheaval, erasure of Native Hawaiians and indigenous practices, and racist plantation hierarchies, all weave a deeply and historically conflicted community, many consequences which remain unresolved.³⁰ The overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom and subsequent annexation by Congress through joint resolution, rather than a bilateral treaty remains a deep wound and fundamental issue for many Native Hawaiians.³¹ With the islands annexed, Hawai'i marked a

decisive moment in American imperial expansion, transforming Hawai'i into the strategic outpost which experienced accelerated militarization after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Debates over sovereignty and self-determination persisted.³² These tensions persist and, in many ways, grow with social media connectivity and persistent issues surrounding military and external interests, such as contamination and unwanted development, trumping the needs and claims of the local and indigenous populations.³³ Debates over crown lands, sovereignty claims, and institutional obligations continue to shape Hawai'i's contemporary political discourse.³⁴

Lahaina Wildfire 2023, An Information Battleground

The 2023 Maui wildfires provide a poignant example of how narrative spaces, especially in a crisis and information vacuum, can be exploited by FIMI. As recovery efforts unfolded, conspiracy theories proliferated. Across social media, narratives alleged land seizures, energy weapons, and potential shadowy government plots, diverted attention from the emergency response and complicated recovery efforts. Narratives surrounding land seizure and displacement proved critically sensitive due to the history of Native Hawaiian communities.³⁵ However, speculators and realtors eagerly swooped into the disaster zones to buy destroyed homes, which induced genuine fear and concern among members of the community.³⁶ The absence of rapid responses left a void quickly filled by an overwhelming amount of online paranoia and ideation, leaving local authorities, federal agencies, and the affected community reeling from a swirling information space.

[attempt-retain-strategic-land-training-runs-native-Hawai'i-rcna216928](https://www.hawaiibusiness.com/hawaiiis-economic-outlook-2026/)

²⁹ Cynthia Wessendorf, Jennifer Ablan and Ken Wills, "Hawai'i's Economic Outlook 2026." *Hawaii Business Magazine*. January 19, 2026. <https://www.hawaiibusiness.com/hawaiiis-economic-outlook-2026/>

³⁰ Barbara Sprunt. "Simmering Disputes Over Statehood Are About Politics and Race — They Always Have Been." *National Public Radio (NPR)*. August 21, 2020. <https://www.npr.org/2020/08/21/902334807/simmering-disputes-over-statehood-are-about-politics-and-race-they-always-have-b>

³¹ "Petition Against the Annexation of Hawai'i; 1897." Petitions and Memorials, Resolutions of State Legislatures, and Related Documents, which were referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations from the 55th Congress; Petitions and Memorials, 1817 – 2000; Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46; National Archives Building, Washington, DC. <https://docsteach.org/document/petition-against-annexation-Hawai'i/>

³² Adrienne LaFrance. "The Hawaiians Who Want Their Nation Back." *The Atlantic*. December 11, 2024. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2025/01/Hawai'i-monarchy-overthrow-independence/680759/>

³³ Jennifer Sinco Kelleher. "Fuel in water deepens Native Hawaiians' distrust of military." *Associated Press (AP)*. March 3, 2022. <https://apnews.com/article/health-environment-and-nature-environment-navy-Hawai'i-afc7c9ba612ac94f4a69259fba69b101>

Gary Kubota. "Controversial Telescope Project on Haleakalā Up for Public Hearings." *The Maui News*. February 17, 2026. <https://www.mauinews.com/news/local-news/2026/02/controversial-telescope-project-on-haleakala-up-for-public-hearings/>

³⁴ LaFrance. "The Hawaiians Who Want Their Nation Back." 2024.

³⁵ Russell Subiono, Savannah Harriman-Pote, Sophia McCullough, Krista Rados, Maddie Bender. "Lahaina land grab rumors reveal an erosion of trust." *Hawai'i Public Radio*. Nov 17, 2023. <https://www.Hawai'ipublicradio.org/local-news/2023-11-17/lahaina-land-grab-rumors-reveal-an-erosion-of-trust>

³⁶ Nina Lakhani. "First came the Maui wildfires. Now come the land grabs: 'Who owns the land is key to Lahaina's future'." *The Guardian*. Mar 15, 2024. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/mar/15/maui-wildfires-community-land-trust>

Although the spread of incendiary narratives by Russia seeking to exacerbate domestic distrust in the U.S. was nothing new, the crisis provided fertile ground for China to test new coercion techniques.³⁷ Russian propaganda and domestic influencers seeded and boosted “home-grown criticisms,” often exploiting support for wartime Ukraine with the government response to the Maui tragedy, as well as evidence that the Chinese government amplified fictional narratives through AI bots that the source of the wildfires began from “meteorological weapon.”³⁸ Even after the foreign campaigns ceased, social media influencers, conspiracy theorists, and even some government officials continued to fuel the domestic spread of false information.³⁹ The use of AI bots became a more prominent technique of influence later during political campaigns in Taiwan and the U.S. in 2024.⁴⁰

Foreign Amplification of Sovereignty Narratives

Especially in Pacific communities affected by imperialism and colonialism: foreign actors wishing to engage in narrative competition need only to magnify this fraught history. Hawai‘i’s sovereignty movement, rooted in the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom and ongoing debates over self-determination, represents a legitimate issue area vulnerable to opportunistic amplification.

Native Hawaiian activism illustrates the overlap between global information ecosystems bringing attention to local issues and injustices while also revealing where competitors to the U.S. may seek to heighten and highlight governance failures. Although little evidence suggests

coordinated foreign government manipulation, online forum discussions point out sovereignty activists and international advocacy networks appear to converge with malign actors.⁴¹ Activists have participated in transnational political forums where messaging aligns with broader anti-U.S. narratives and even sponsored individuals with aims of spreading pro-China propaganda.⁴²

Caution remains necessary when assessing potential foreign influence on these sensitive issues. Overstating or implying involvement of external actors risks diminishing a historically grounded movement, further cementing distrust and the conditions for FIMI to take root. Cross-border connections and shared narratives are legitimate features of transnational advocacy networks, crucial to address systemic issues and express shared values. This situation reinforces the need for resilience strategies to consider the relationship between institutions and the public, especially marginalized or disenfranchised communities who will be targeted and exploited.

Continued Erosion

Persistent campaigns of “smaller” actions continue to affect Hawai‘i communities. Steady accumulation of doubt continues to target institutional functions and erodes social cohesion, causing deeper divisions. Vital institutions continue to face pressures and sustained barrages of misinformation and disinformation. Attacks on Hawai‘i health organizations disrupt infrastructure and harm patient care while degrading confidence, heightening feelings of defenselessness.⁴³ The *Washington Post* detailed

³⁷ David E. Sanger, and Steven Lee Myers. “China Sows Disinformation About Hawai‘i Fires Using New Techniques.” *The New York Times*. September 11, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/11/us/politics/china-disinformation-ai.html>

³⁸ Pien Huang and Huo Jingnan. “How Rumors and Conspiracy Theories Got in the Way of Maui’s Fire Recovery.” National Public Radio (NPR). September 28, 2023. <https://www.npr.org/2023/09/28/1202110410/how-rumors-and-conspiracy-theories-got-in-the-way-of-mauis-fire-recovery>

Caroline Orr Bueno. “Russia amplifies right-wing influence campaign to undermine support for Ukraine by exploiting Hawai‘i’s tragedy.” *Weaponized Spaces Substack*. August 18, 2023. <https://weaponizedspaces.substack.com/p/russia-amplifies-right-wing-influence>

“Chinese operatives use AI to spread conspiratorial narratives about Hawai‘i wildfires.” *German Marshall Fund of the United States: The Alliance for Securing Democracy* (ASD). August 2023. <https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/incident/chinese-operatives-use-ai-to-spread-conspiratorial-narratives-about-Hawai-i-wildfires/>

³⁹ Huang and Jingnan. “How Rumors and Conspiracy Theories Got in the Way of Maui’s Fire Recovery.”

⁴⁰ Koh Ewe. “China Is Using AI to Sow Disinformation and Stoke Discord Across Asia and the U.S., Microsoft Reports.” *Time*. April 5, 2024. <https://time.com/6963787/china-influence-operations-artificial-intelligence-cyber-threats-microsoft/>

⁴¹ Jennifer Baker. “CCP Influence in U.S. Pro-Palestinian Activism.” *The George Washington University: Program on Extremism*. July 2025. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/ccp-influence-us-pro-palestinian-activism>

“Sovereignty Activists team up with Chinese Communist Front Group.” *Hawai‘i Free Press* (forum). July 21, 2025. <https://www.hawaiiifreepress.com/Articles-Main/ID/45879/Sovereignty-Activists-team-up-with-Chinese-Communist-Front-Group>

“China threatening to arm Hawaiian independence movement?” *Hawaiian Kingdom Independence Blog* (forum). February 10, 2015. <https://www.hawaiiankingdom.info/china-threatening-to-arm-hawaiian-independence-movement/>

⁴² Hvistendahl, et al. “A Global Web of Chinese Propaganda Leads to a U.S. Tech Mogul.” *The New York Times*. 2023.

⁴³ Mahealani Richardson. “Maui Health Center Allegedly Attacked by Russian Hackers.” *Hawai‘i News Now*. June 20, 2024.

efforts from the Chinese military to disrupt key American infrastructure, including water utilities, transportation, and communication systems, noting that a cyber campaign, called Volt Typhoon, targeted a water utility in Hawai'i.⁴⁴ Other cyberattacks without discernable links to specific countries or groups, such as ransomware attacks on Honolulu public transportation, may still cause physical damage to key societal functions and continue to erode trust in those systems.⁴⁵ These attacks avoid outright conflict but continually test tactics to, "sow panic and chaos or snarl logistics in the event of a U.S.-China conflict in the Pacific."⁴⁶

Leaks and damage to infrastructure, health, and other social systems, create feelings of vulnerability and drive communities away from participation. This cycle relies heavily on a constantly connected social media ecosystem. Local influencers and localized bots from foreign actors play the same role in the information environment, inserting themselves into vacuums to sway the public, especially those increasingly connected to social media sources.⁴⁷

Implications

Pacific island peoples face distinct vulnerabilities and challenges when confronting gray-zone and narrative competition. Like other Pacific communities, Hawai'i's information environment remains exposed to information manipulation, especially as resources and attention strains. Despite strategic value and importance, historical grievances and lingering distrust within the local community creates fertile conditions for misinformation and external coercion. Understanding this evolving geopolitical and information environment in the Pacific reveals key factors to combat coercion.

<https://www.Hawai'iNewsNow.com/2024/06/20/maui-health-center-allegedly-attacked-by-russian-hackers/>

⁴⁴ Ellen Nakashima and Joseph Menn. "China's Cyber Army Is Invading Critical U.S. Services Including Hawai'i." *Washington Post*. December 11, 2023.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/12/11/china-hacking-Hawai'i-pacific-taiwan-conflict/>

⁴⁵ Mahealani Richardson. "OTS Cyber Breach Allegedly Includes 800,000 Pieces of Data." *Hawai'i News Now*. June 19, 2024.

<https://www.Hawai'iNewsNow.com/2024/06/19/ots-cyber-breach-allegedly-includes-800000-pieces-data/>

⁴⁶ "China's Cyber Army Is Invading Critical U.S. Services Including Hawai'i." 2023.

⁴⁷ Shannon Bond. "China Uses TikTok and X with Fake Voters to Influence Campaigns." *NPR*. September 3, 2024. <https://www.npr.org/2024/09/03/nx-s1-5096151/china-tiktok-x-fake-voters-influence-campaign>
"Speakers." People's Summit for Korea. <https://peoplesummitforkorea.org/speakers>

Proliferation of Gray-Zone and Information Coercion in the Pacific

Gray-zone strategies, particularly those targeting narrative spaces, continue to rapidly proliferate presenting a dynamic challenge for Pacific island communities and governments. Low risk, inexpensive means to create and spread messaging, along with rocketing technological improvements fuels these influence campaigns. Even if outright conflict can be avoided, the U.S. and China will continue to compete in all available spaces. In the absence of robust deterrence frameworks, difficulties to detect and attribute coercive tactics will leave many layers of these Pacific societies vulnerable against immense pressure and manipulation.

Confronting gray-zone competition requires proactive strategies to outcompete and deter leverage in the narrative ecosystems by fostering goodwill and preventing the amplification of untruthful or harmful narratives to take hold.⁴⁸ On a federal level, governments wishing to prevent China's expansionism must tie resolute plans to counter violations while also proving benefits for partners and strategic local communities in the Pacific.⁴⁹ Although military and security investments remain vital, increased assistance in infrastructure, developmental, and technical support, while also underlining China's shortcomings, provide robust avenues to shore up support and goodwill.⁵⁰

Need for Policy Focus on Resiliency and Total Defense

Instead of crafting individual responses to each new gray-zone tactic or pressure, states and societies with hardened coercive defenses have adopted strategies of deterrence and denial of leverage. States like Finland and Singapore, stress networks of resilience within the society, developing

Mara Hvistendahl, David A. Fahrenthold, Lynsey Chutel and Ishaan Jhaveri. "A Global Web of Chinese Propaganda Leads to a U.S. Tech Mogul." *The New York Times*. August 5, 2023.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/05/world/europe/nevill-e-roy-singham-china-propaganda.html>

⁴⁸ Dan Minnoci. "The US and China are in 'gray zone' competition. A counterinsurgency model can help explain what that means." *Atlantic Council*. March 6, 2026.

<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/dispatches/the-us-and-china-are-in-gray-zone-competition-a-counterinsurgency-model-can-help-explain-what-that-means/>

⁴⁹ Kitsch Liao, Nik Foster, and Santiago Villa. "Beijing pressures Taiwan's remaining diplomatic partners. Here's what the US should do in response." *Atlantic Council*. December 15, 2025. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/maintaining-taiwans-international-space-to-enhance-deterrence-against-china/>

⁵⁰ Liao. "Beijing pressures Taiwan's remaining diplomatic partners. Here's what the US should do in response." 2025.

a “comprehensive security.”⁵¹ In practice, this draws upon, “whole-of-government and whole-of-society preparedness: regular interagency cooperation, public-private partnerships, and nationwide education on resilience.”⁵² For small island communities, lacking sufficient resources to mount or develop countermeasures, focusing on cohesion, these societal approaches deny an actor leverage from influencing or harnessing discontent. Different communities or societal domains, such as industry, business, government and citizenry, possess different strengths and vulnerabilities. When confronting information manipulation, denying leverage requires engaging all facets of society.⁵³

Building Trust and Legitimacy

Building trust in institutions represents a key mechanism for denying leverage in Hawai‘i’s information environment. Narrative competition may seek to coerce or confuse, which, ultimately, deepens unease. The resulting confusion and anger present real societal problems. Information vacuums allow malign actors to exploit crises, filling the space with their narratives. In Hawai‘i, breakdowns in communication amplified existing skepticisms, especially toward federal stewardship of land and resources. Native Hawaiian communities are sensitive to such transgressions, especially when considering the history of institutional neglect or deception. With repetition and a primed population, followers of false content soon develop into producers.

Roundtable discussions with experts through the Hawai‘i Asia Pacific Affairs Leadership (APAL) program, offered insights into how these Pacific communities seek agency, regional cooperation and inclusion, rather than outside power interventions like militarization. States can foster this resilience by strengthening communication networks and tapping into a variety of avenues and engagements, incorporating nongovernmental actors, community leaders, and trusted local networks. Investing in public affairs capacity and rapid fact-clarification mechanisms would prevent misinformation and disinformation from flooding in communication gaps or vacuums. By reducing uncertainty and improving credibility, government officials and institutions can limit the ability of malign actors to weaponize harmful and false narratives.

While the military’s posture in Hawaii can adopt a cooperative approach to tackling tensions, addressing

issues in other strategic Pacific islands with growing Chinese influence may also benefit from a security posture which aims to work with and address the needs of the local populations. If genuine grievances remain unaddressed or are dismissed, trust in institutions and officials deteriorate and, simultaneously, offer an exploitable opening.

Inclusion of Indigenous Communities

Like other Pacific island communities, Hawai‘i’s indigenous Native Hawaiian population remains an overlooked and susceptible node, vulnerable to information coercion and manipulation. Any strategy aimed at strengthening societal resilience must pay heightened attention and repair connections with indigenous communities, which have faced unique neglect and remain vulnerable to leverage.⁵⁴ Whole-of-society strategies must prioritize indigenous communities to attain success. Historical grievances and systemic mistreatment remain deeply ingrained and provide fertile ground for others to exploit mistrust and weaken confidence in institutions.

Countering these potential threats to indigenous and local communities requires building legitimacy and trust between indigenous people and other domains in society. By reinforcing or developing lines of communication and coordination capacity. Strengthening these relations involves approaches that move beyond gestures and allows for meaningful inclusion.

Conclusion

While the Indo-Pacific continues to evolve, Hawai‘i represents a key location for national defense. As gray-zone tactics become increasingly common in the geopolitical landscape, influence operations and information coercion remain an integral component of great power competition in the region. Military power and presence does little to affect the information and narrative spaces in the Pacific and may even be counterproductive. Due to its diverse population, fraught history, and unparalleled remoteness, Hawai‘i remains on the frontlines of this narrative competition and coercion. Hawai‘i’s vulnerabilities present a unique opportunity and example which can inform national security strategies and posturing when information coercion blurs the distinctions between the core and periphery. Defending against and deterring information coercion requires a view of resiliency as a

⁵¹ Alexander Noyes and Jesse R. Humpal. “Why the US needs a total defense strategy based on resilience.” *The Brookings Institution*. October 21, 2025. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/why-the-us-needs-a-total-defense-strategy-based-on-resilience/>

⁵² Noyes and Humpal. “Why the US needs a total defense strategy based on resilience.” 2025.

⁵³ Kristian Alexander. “Total Defence in Comparative Perspective: Lessons from Finland, Sweden, Switzerland,

and Singapore.” *Institute for Security & Development Policy: ISDP Voices*. December 15, 2025. <https://www.isdp.eu/total-defence-in-comparative-perspective-lessons-from-finland-sweden-switzerland-and-singapore>.

⁵⁴ Nick Grube. “Tokuda: Military Stationed In Hawaii Should Learn Native Culture.” *Civil Beat*. June 22, 2023. <https://www.civilbeat.org/2023/06/tokuda-military-stationed-in-hawaii-should-learn-native-culture/>.

network of defense, not isolation. Gray-zone and influence operation resiliencies, especially in Pacific island communities, demand inclusion of indigenous communities. Confronting genuine grievances deny leverage that external actors will utilize to amplify harmful or divisive narratives. The U.S. and partners must continue to outcompete in the narrative space and utilize proactive deterrence by delivering security and prosperity without always relying on a military hand.

Toward Island-Informed GIScience in Indo-Pacific Security Operations

By
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1. Introduction: GIS, Security and the Indo-Pacific

Geographic Information Science (GIScience) and geospatial technologies have become increasingly prevalent in national security and military operations.^{1, 2} GIScience, or Geographic Information Science, is the study of geographic and geospatial information.³ GIScience can offer a holistic approach to understanding spatial relationships. GIS, or Geographic Information Systems, are the technologies and software tools that store, manage, analyze, and visualize spatial data for GIScience.⁴ Within military operations, GIScience offers pathways for spatial pattern analyses that support security infrastructure.⁵ However, with the implementation of these rather new technologies in the security and military spheres, it is critical to consider the analytical and sociopolitical power of GIScience.

Over the past decade, the Indo-Pacific region has become a critical component of geopolitical discourse. The Indo-Pacific refers to a vast region stretching across the Indian and Pacific Oceans, encompassing dozens of island nations, major shipping routes, and some of the world's most contested waters.⁶ It makes up nearly 60% of global economic output and is home to the majority of maritime trade routes, making it a central focus of military strategy.⁷ The Indo-Pacific is often described in strategic terms as a theater of deterrence, a zone of competition, or a space to be managed. But this framing tends to treat the ocean and

its islands as empty or passive, as a backdrop to great-power competition rather than a living world full of communities with their own histories and rights. The Pacific scholar Epeli Hau'ofa offered a powerful counter-image. Instead of seeing Pacific islands as tiny, isolated dots in a vast sea, he proposed thinking of them as a "sea of islands," defined not by separation but by connection, movement, and exchange. The ocean, in this view, is not empty space. The Indo-Pacific region comprises a "sea of islands" whose histories are deeply embedded in the realities of security operations and militarization.^{8, 9}

The spatial imaginaries of the Indo-Pacific are further influenced by GIScience in contemporary security infrastructures. GIScience can structure space in legible ways for strategic planning. However, GIScience is not an objective lens for observing the world. Rather, GIScience reflects assumptions within data and how the user understands the world.¹⁰ Mapping decisions regarding scale, extent, and geospatial analysis methods made by the user inherently carry bias, influencing how geospatial data is interpreted and presented.¹¹

Recent work in GIScience calls for centering the "3E's": ethics, empathy, and equity.¹² This attempts to acknowledge how geospatial research and applications are not objective.¹³ Meanwhile, security applications of GIScience remain largely insulated from these ethical conversations. Hau'ofa's "sea of islands" challenges the

¹ Chipatiso, Ezra. "Application of GIS and Artificial Intelligence in Military Operations: Prospects and Challenges." *Southern African Journal of Security* 3 (December 2025): 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.25159/3005-4222/15984>.

² ESRI. "GIS for Defense and Intelligence." Accessed, February 20, 2026.

³ Nelson, T. A., M. F. Goodchild, and D. J. Wright. "Accelerating Ethics, Empathy, and Equity in Geographic Information Science." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 119, no. 19 (2022): e2119967119. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2119967119>.

⁴ Chipatiso, Ezra. "Application of GIS and Artificial Intelligence in Military Operations: Prospects and Challenges." *Southern African Journal of Security* 3 (December 2025): 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.25159/3005-4222/15984>.

⁵ Kostev, Radoslav, and Kiril Anguelov. "Modern Methods of Training in National Security through Geographic Information Systems." *2022 10th International Scientific Conference on Computer Science (COMSCI)*, May 2022, 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.1109/COMSCI55378.2022.9912592>.

⁶ Aryal, Saroj Kumar, and Adithyan Nair. "Division in Indo-Pacific Strategy: An Assessment of the Indo-Pacific Strategies of India, Japan, the USA, and Australia." *East Asia* 42, no. 2 (2025): 157-78. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12140-024-09440-0>.

⁷ Aryal, Saroj Kumar, and Adithyan Nair. "Division in Indo-Pacific Strategy: An Assessment of the Indo-Pacific

Strategies of India, Japan, the USA, and Australia." *East Asia* 42, no. 2 (2025): 157-78. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12140-024-09440-0>.

⁸ Hau'ofa, Epeli. "Our Sea of Islands." *The Contemporary Pacific* 6, no. 1 (1994): 148-61.

⁹ Jackson, Van. "Geopolitical Sacrifice Zones in US Strategic Thought: Erasure, the Frontier and the Blue Pacific." *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 38, no. 4 (2025): 440-59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2025.2501595>.

¹⁰ Nelson, Trisalyn, Amy E. Frazier, Peter Kedron, et al. "A Research Agenda for GIScience in a Time of Disruptions." *International Journal of Geographical Information Science* 39, no. 1 (2025): 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13658816.2024.2405191>.

¹¹ Burg, Marieka Brouwer. "It must be right, GIS told me so! Questioning the infallibility of GIS as a methodological tool." *Journal of Archaeological Science* 84 (2017): 115-120.

¹² Nelson, T. A., M. F. Goodchild, and D. J. Wright. "Accelerating Ethics, Empathy, and Equity in Geographic Information Science." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 119, no. 19 (2022): e2119967119. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2119967119>.

¹³ Nelson, Trisalyn, Amy E. Frazier, Peter Kedron, et al. "A Research Agenda for GIScience in a Time of Disruptions." *International Journal of Geographical Information Science* 39, no. 1 (2025): 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13658816.2024.2405191>.

continental logic of most military and geopolitical thinking, which tends to divide the world into fixed territories, borders, and strategic assets. It is precisely this difference in worldview that demonstrates a need for an island-informed ethics protocol in Indo-Pacific GIScience security operations.

2. GIScience in Security Infrastructure

With the increasingly significant role of GIScience in national security operations, it is essential to examine how military and national security institutions understand the function, benefits, and limitations of GIScience technologies.

Author (Year)	Shared Themes	Importance of GIS	Identified Benefits	Identified Challenges
Chipatiso (2025)	Monitoring, Command, Control, Communication, Decision-making, Threat Detection	Incident response, threat detection, monitoring	Information access and dissemination, data management, terrain analysis, pattern recognition	Cost, training, cybersecurity, situation misinterpretation
Obundike et al. (2023)	Monitoring, Command, Control, Communication, Decision-making, Threat Detection	Monitoring, threat detection	Counter terrorism, simulation, monitoring, profiling	Data protection (cybersecurity)
ESRI (2026)	Monitoring, Command, Control, Communication, Decision-making, Threat Detection	Monitoring, decision-making, mobility	Data management, analysis, interpretation, visualization	Training, Interoperability
Kostevand Anguelov (2022)	Monitoring, Command, Control, Communication, Decision-making, Threat Detection	Informed decision-making, monitoring, threat detection	Communication, visualization, pattern recognition	N/A
Dimanova and Kuzmanov (2024)	Monitoring, Command, Control, Communication, Decision-making, Threat Detection	Monitoring, informed decision-making	Rapid response emergency	Data management, cybersecurity, personal information, training
Andimuharrom (2025)	Monitoring, Command, Control, Communication, Decision-making, Threat Detection	Strategic decision-making, monitoring	Early detection	N/A

Table 1: Thematic Synthesis of GIS Applications in National Security Literature

Across six publications about GIScience in national security and defense, a consistent set of keywords and conceptual framings were used (Table 1). The most common terms included monitoring, command, control, communication, decision-making, and threat detection. Monitoring appeared more than 25 times collectively, averaging four to five mentions per article. Command and control were mentioned in four of the six texts.

The articles shared similar sentiments regarding the importance of GIScience to national security infrastructures. Chipatiso emphasized that GIS and AI adoption improves information dissemination, terrain analysis, pattern

recognition, and predictive analysis.¹⁴ Obunadike et al. similarly argued that GIS provides security agencies an “advantage in strategizing how to combat terrorism.”¹⁵ Ultimately, GIScience is positioned as the backbone of network-centric operations, enabling improved command, control, communication, and coordination.

The articles discussed core benefits of GIScience in military and security operations, including improved threat detection and profiling, modeling, communication and coordination, and decision-making. GIScience enables visualization of terrain, infrastructure, troop movements, and emerging threats, supporting the identification of risk zones and adversarial activity.^{16, 17, 18, 19} Additionally, real-time GIScience and analytical tools improve response in crisis management.²⁰ GIScience is consistently discussed as an objective tool that increases precision, coordination, and operational efficiency.

The articles also identify several challenges. Chipatiso notes financial constraints, training requirements, cybersecurity threats, and software issues as potential obstacles to effective GIS and AI deployment.²¹ Dimanova and Kuzmanov reference concerns regarding protecting personal information and data security in real-time systems.²² Obunadike et al. emphasize the need for protecting GIS-generated data related to suspected terrorist profiles and hot zones.²³

However, these challenges are largely framed as technical or managerial problems. The articles do not discuss challenges with the ethics of using GIScience. Ethics

regards asking who benefits and who is harmed by a given decision, and whether those decisions are being made fairly and responsibly. The ethics of using GIScience is an important conversation in broader literature and work. For example, people using GIScience may ask about the ethics of data use and privacy. An ethics protocol provides a set of guiding principles that helps decision-makers ask these questions. In the context of military GIS, an ethics protocol might ask: Whose knowledge is represented, are communities being consulted or simply surveilled, and is this technology making decisions more accurate?

The brief reference to “misinterpretation of situations” in Chipatiso²⁴ is particularly revealing. While presented as an operational risk, the article does not elaborate on how misinterpretation may stem from assumptions in spatial models, classification schemas, or algorithmic bias. Nor does it consider how contextual misunderstandings in culturally and politically complex regions, such as the Indo-Pacific, may lead to flawed threat assessments. Similarly, Dimanova and Kuzmanov’s concern for protecting personal information focuses primarily on cybersecurity compliance rather than broader human security or rights-based frameworks.²⁵ If GIScience is foundational to threat detection, command coordination, and operational planning, then the assumptions embedded within geospatial data structures, models, and visualizations materially shape security outcomes. The identified importance of GIScience for informed decision-making inherently requires expanding ethical considerations and formalizing a protocol for its use.

¹⁴ Chipatiso, Ezra. “Application of GIS and Artificial Intelligence in Military Operations: Prospects and Challenges.” *Southern African Journal of Security* 3 (December 2025): 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.25159/3005-4222/15984>.

¹⁵ Obunadike, S., C. Obunadike, K. Oloyede, et al. “Geographic Information Systems as a Tool for Effective Counter Terrorism across the United States.” *International Journal of Information Technology*, 2023.

¹⁶ Obunadike, S., C. Obunadike, K. Oloyede, et al. “Geographic Information Systems as a Tool for Effective Counter Terrorism across the United States.” *International Journal of Information Technology*, 2023.

¹⁷ Andimuharrom, Dipo. “Utilization of Remote Sensing in Monitoring Terrorism Threats in the Border Areas of Indonesia: In the Context of Relocating the Capital City.” *Remote Sensing Technology in Defense and Environment* 2, no. 1 (2025): 32-45. <https://doi.org/10.61511/rstde.v2i1.2025.1777>.

¹⁸ Chipatiso, Ezra. “Application of GIS and Artificial Intelligence in Military Operations: Prospects and Challenges.” *Southern African Journal of Security* 3 (December 2025): 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.25159/3005-4222/15984>.

¹⁹ ESRI. “GIS for Defense and Intelligence.” Accessed, February 20, 2026.

²⁰ Dimanova, Donika, and Zdravko Y. Kuzmanov. “Real-Time GIS for Monitoring and Security” *Journal of Scientific and Applied Research* 27, no. 1 (2024): 83-89. <https://doi.org/10.46687/jsar.v27i1.408>.

²¹ Chipatiso, Ezra. “Application of GIS and Artificial Intelligence in Military Operations: Prospects and Challenges.” *Southern African Journal of Security* 3 (December 2025): 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.25159/3005-4222/15984>.

²² Dimanova, Donika, and Zdravko Y. Kuzmanov. “Real-Time GIS for Monitoring and Security” *Journal of Scientific and Applied Research* 27, no. 1 (2024): 83-89. <https://doi.org/10.46687/jsar.v27i1.408>.

²³ Obunadike, S., C. Obunadike, K. Oloyede, et al. “Geographic Information Systems as a Tool for Effective Counter Terrorism across the United States.” *International Journal of Information Technology*, 2023.

²⁴ Chipatiso, Ezra. “Application of GIS and Artificial Intelligence in Military Operations: Prospects and Challenges.” *Southern African Journal of Security* 3 (December 2025): 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.25159/3005-4222/15984>.

²⁵ Dimanova, Donika, and Zdravko Y. Kuzmanov. “Real-Time GIS for Monitoring and Security” *Journal of Scientific and Applied Research* 27, no. 1 (2024): 83-89. <https://doi.org/10.46687/jsar.v27i1.408>.

3. Island Feminisms and Militarized Islands in the Indo-Pacific

Reconceptualizing the Indo-Pacific not as “islands in a far sea” but as a “sea of islands” reframes the region as an interconnected world bound by exchange and oceanic pathways.²⁶ This is a part of an island worldview that reflects the lived experiences of island nations. It also challenges continental assumptions that treat islands as isolated or peripheral.

Island feminism²⁷ is a framework that examines how these unique qualities of island life shape and intersect with the everyday experiences of people who live on islands.²⁸ It contextualizes island worldviews, reframing security through a human-centered lens to lived experiences of island communities within militarized and colonial contexts.²⁹ In the case of the Indo-Pacific, island feminism offers a lens for considering how sovereignty and militarization are experienced within islands where land, sea, and community are interconnected.³⁰

Defense infrastructures are embedded within everyday geographies, creating militarized islands. When a military sets up bases, weapons testing sites, and restricted zones on an island, it fundamentally changes life there. For example, land that communities once farmed, fished, or called home can be restricted, fenced off, and handed over to military control for other uses. Or, weapons testing and heavy equipment that come with military use often pollute the soil and water, leaving environmental damage that can last for generations.

Therefore, island feminism questions how security infrastructures disproportionately affect island communities. It also offers a different way of thinking about whether technologies like satellite tracking, drone surveillance, and digital mapping are being used fairly and justly in places across the Pacific. Rather than just asking whether these technologies work efficiently, island feminism asks about who benefits, who gets harmed, and

whose voices are left out of those decisions?³¹ To understand what is at stake, three case studies in Hawai‘i, Guåhan (Guam), and Okinawa illuminate how military GIS infrastructure and island communities intersect, calling for an implementation of island-informed ethics protocols.

3.1 Hawai‘i

Hawai‘i sits at the center of U.S. Indo-Pacific military strategy. It is home to naval bases, missile defense facilities, and training ranges that the military describes as indispensable to forward operations in the Pacific. In strategic documents, Hawai‘i is often portrayed primarily as a platform for deterrence, a location valued for what it enables in the military.

However, such framings of a security landscape often obscure the lived consequences of militarization for island communities. Kānaka ‘Ōiwi, or Native Hawaiians, hold a deep cultural connection to ‘āina, the land. For Kānaka ‘Ōiwi, the land is not a resource to be managed but an ancestor to be cared for. Military land use has disrupted these relationships, contaminating water sources, making sacred sites inaccessible, and pushing endangered species toward extinction by training activities.³²

Island feminisms illuminate these tensions between islands and the military by foregrounding care for land and relational belonging. From this perspective, security infrastructures prioritize strategic positioning over ecology and culture.³³ The militarized landscape of Hawai‘i exemplifies how security infrastructures may undermine the very conditions of human flourishing they claim to protect.³⁴

Further, when GIS systems map Hawai‘i for military purposes, they render it as terrain, coverage zones, and logistical nodes. The result is a representation of the islands that is useful for command decisions, yet almost entirely blind to the living world it overlays. Cultural knowledge, geographies, and the ongoing political claims of Kānaka

²⁶ Hau‘ofa, Epeli. “Our Sea of Islands.” *The Contemporary Pacific* 6, no. 1 (1994): 148–61.

²⁷ Karides, Marina. “An Island Feminism Perspective: Convivial Economics and the Women’s Cooperatives of Lesvos.” In Stratford, E (ed) *Island Geographies: Essays and Conversations*, New York: Routledge (2016): 78–96.

²⁸ Karides, Marina. “Why Island Feminism.”

²⁹ Esu, Aide, and Simone Maddanu. “Island Militarization: Beyond Colonialism.” In *Occupying Island: Resisting Militarization in a No-War Zone*, edited by Aide Esu and Simone Maddanu. Springer Nature Switzerland, 2025. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-00419-2_3.

³⁰ Chirico, Jennifer, and Gregory S. Farley, eds. *Thinking like an island: navigating a sustainable future in Hawai‘i*. University of Hawaii Press, 2017.

³¹ Burgos Martinez, Elena. “Containing the Intertidal Island: Negotiating Island onto-Epistemological Visibility and Plurality.” *Political Geography* 113 (August 2024): 103145. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2024.103145>.

³² Tsuchibuchi, Yuichi. “Prioritizing National Security over Care for Land? A Qualitative Study on the Social, Ecological and Cultural Impacts of the U.S. Military in Hawaii.” *Master’s Thesis Series in Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science*, 2023. <http://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/record/9116811>.

³³ Chirico, Jennifer, and Gregory S. Farley, eds. *Thinking like an island: navigating a sustainable future in Hawai‘i*. University of Hawaii Press, 2017.

³⁴ Cristobal, Nik, Sam Ikehara, ‘Ihilani Lasconia, and Hina Ka‘ōpua-Canonigo. “Genuine Security for Whom?.” *Journal Committed to Social Change on Race and Ethnicity (JCSORE)* 10, no. 1 (2024): 35–57.

‘Ōiwi are not present in military datasets. This oversight means that decisions about where to expand training ranges, where to route military infrastructure, and how to assess risk are being made with incomplete information. It fails to recognize and include the perspectives of Kānaka ‘Ōiwi who know the land best.

3.2 Guåhan

Guåhan (Guam) is an unincorporated U.S. territory in the Mariana Islands. The people of Guåhan are U.S. nationals but have no voting power in presidential elections or Congress. It is a heavily militarized place, hosting air force and naval installations that the U.S. military considers critical to its Indo-Pacific strategy.

Similar to Hawai‘i, the strategic security framing of Guåhan renders existing cultural and sociopolitical structures secondary to strategic necessity.³⁵ Participatory mapping research conducted in Guåhan reveals how Traditional Cultural Places (TCPs) were absent from federal heritage inventories. The absence of these culturally significant places reflect a privileging of infrastructural and military datasets over cultural landscapes. When geospatial systems omit TCPs, they contribute to the erasure of those sites and the cultural knowledge that contributes to island identity in Guåhan.³⁶

Guåhan’s political status as a subject to U.S. sovereignty without full political representation exemplifies asymmetrical power relations.³⁷ It becomes an extension of colonial territoriality, as people who bear the greatest burden of military activity are also those with the least ability to influence the decisions that create such burdens.³⁸ Militarization intersects with limited self-determination, intensifying the vulnerability of local communities to environmental and infrastructural decisions made elsewhere. When island landscapes are reduced to nodes

within deterrence networks, their cultural and political complexities are omitted. Therefore, ethical geospatial protocols must be designed to present these harms. Accounting for these asymmetries and community-defined spaces can prevent the reproduction of sacrifice zones, or places that face uneven burden produced by operations of economic development and national security.³⁹

3.3 Okinawa

Okinawa shares key characteristics of militarized islandscapes within the Indo-Pacific. Hosting a disproportionate share of U.S. military bases in Japan, Okinawa functions as a strategic platform for deterrence. Local opposition movements have long articulated opposition to the harms of militarization, including land appropriation, environmental degradation, and the social impacts of base presence.⁴⁰ The reframing of Okinawa as an indispensable frontier for security erases its cultural history. As with Guåhan, militarization intersects with asymmetrical political arrangements, wherein local residents bear more burdens of security and deterrence operations.⁴¹ Island feminist perspectives highlight the gendered dimensions of militarization in Okinawa. Base economies and troop presence reshape gender relations, contributing to instances of sexual violence and altering labor markets.⁴² Okinawa exemplifies how human security and state security diverge within militarized islandscapes. Security systems which ignore these realities are ethically and analytically incomplete, missing key dynamics that shape whether communities support or resist the presence of military infrastructure. Trust matters for long-term security cooperation. The absence of such considerations within conventional security GIS frameworks underscores the need for expanded ethical protocols.

³⁵ Jackson, Van. “Geopolitical Sacrifice Zones in US Strategic Thought: Erasure, the Frontier and the Blue Pacific.” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 38, no. 4 (2025): 440–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2025.2501595>.

³⁶ Roth, Madeline, Jennifer McKinnon, and Kristen Myers. “‘It’s Not Just One Place I’ve Fallen in Love With’: A Participatory Place-Based Approach to Mapping Heritage.” *Journal of Maritime Archaeology* 20, no. 4 (2025): 4. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11457-025-09484-0>.

³⁷ Na’puti, Tiara R., and Sylvia C. Frain. “Indigenous Environmental Perspectives: Challenging the Oceanic Security State.” *Security Dialogue* 54, no. 2 (2023): 115–36. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09670106221139765>.

³⁸ Esu, Aide, and Simone Maddanu. “Island Militarization: Beyond Colonialism.” In *Occupying Island: Resisting Militarization in a No-War Zone*, edited by Aide Esu and Simone Maddanu. Springer Nature Switzerland, 2025. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-00419-2_3.

³⁹ Jackson, Van. “Geopolitical Sacrifice Zones in US Strategic Thought: Erasure, the Frontier and the Blue Pacific.” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 38, no. 4 (2025): 440–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2025.2501595>.

⁴⁰ Kohatsu, Tatsuki. “A Militarized Island: Everyday (In)Securities in Okinawa.” M.A., *University of Hawai‘i at Manoa*, 2021. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2570331073/abstract/58BD4A18173E4AFDPQ/1>.

⁴¹ Hein, Laura, and Mark Selden. *Islands of Discontent: Okinawan Responses to Japanese and American Power*. Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2003.

⁴² Oshiro, Akino. “From ‘Footprint’ to Relationships: Impacts of US Military Base on Okinawa.” *Sociology Compass* 18, no. 1 (2024): e13099. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.13099>.

⁴³ Untalan, Carmina Yu. *Beyond Empire: Okinawa and the Politics of American Military Bases in Japan*. July 30, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1163/25903276-bja10056>.

Across Hawai‘i, Guåhan, and Okinawa, militarization is felt unevenly, as burdens disproportionately affect island communities. While military installations are justified through national defense logics, their material footprint redistributes harm. Contemporary strategy frameworks in the Indo-Pacific may reproduce spatial imaginaries of frontier spaces. Spatial imaginaries are the ways we think about and understand a place. Framing the Indo-Pacific as merely an arena for strategic security operations risks producing an “oceanic security state” and notions of *terra nullius*, where the vast network of island nations are reduced to empty space.^{44, 45, 46, 47}

Geospatial abstraction through the misinterpretation or omission of places can render cultural landscapes invisible. So, security strategies in the Indo-Pacific must avoid further creating sacrifice zones. These imaginaries of the Indo-Pacific maintain core-periphery dynamics that produce uneven burdens.⁴⁸ Island feminism thus provides a framework for understanding these dynamics. By centering relational oceanic epistemologies and lived experiences of militarization, island feminism challenges continental and state-centric logics embedded within military operations. In the context of Indo-Pacific, this framework compels a designation of GIScience ethical protocols in security and military infrastructures.

4. Toward an Island-Informed GIScience Ethical Protocol for Indo-Pacific Security Operations

An expanded ethical protocol for GIScience in Indo-Pacific security operations would strengthen both operational effectiveness and political legitimacy. Rather than constraining security capacity, a protocol would enhance analytical precision, reduce misinterpretation, and strengthen long-term regional partnerships. An island-informed ethical framework requires integrating societal and cultural context into geospatial analysis. This context would acknowledge island worldviews, institutionalize participatory and consent-based geospatial governance where feasible, and prevent the reproduction of sacrifice zones.

The shift toward ethical expansion in geospatial security operations in the Indo-Pacific offers two key advances for strengthening GIScience insights and security infrastructure. First, it improves analytical effectiveness. Contemporary security GIScience modeling operates through abstraction that treats spaces, such as Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), maritime corridors, and island territories, as strategic buffers or logistical nodes. However, misrepresenting relational island spatialities produces flawed security assessments. For example, the U.S. military treats the stretch of the Pacific around Guåhan as a strategic buffer zone and training ground for naval maneuvers, missile defense testing, and rapid deployment. From a military planning perspective, it is an empty ocean. But, for Guåhan communities, those same waters are deeply inhabited in a cultural and ecological sense, with defined fishing areas and navigation routes that have important generational knowledge tied to them. When EEZs are conceptualized as empty spaces of maneuver rather than as lived ecological and cultural worlds, threat assessments risk becoming detached from political and social realities. Such abstraction of place erases culture that shapes local legitimacy, environmental vulnerability, and resilience. Incorporating this contextual human security data produces more accurate and comprehensive risk assessments. An island-informed protocol thus recalibrates geospatial modeling to reflect the full complexity of the environments in which security infrastructures operate.

Second, ethical expansion strengthens strategic durability. Security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific consists of bilateral, minilateral, and multilateral arrangements that depend on sustained political trust.⁴⁹ Macro-strategic framings of the Indo-Pacific as a security infrastructure marginalize island worldviews and understate the diversity of political arrangements that structure regional governance. Indo-Pacific security cooperation is better understood as a network of evolving relationships rather than a centralized system. An “expanded concept of security” would prioritize environmental resilience, human security, and climate change alongside traditional defense concerns.⁵⁰ This broader understanding diverges sharply from state-centric deterrence logics that dominate major-power

⁴⁴ Jackson, Van. “Geopolitical Sacrifice Zones in US Strategic Thought: Erasure, the Frontier and the Blue Pacific.” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 38, no. 4 (2025): 440–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2025.2501595>.

⁴⁵ Hau’ofa, Epeli. “Our Sea of Islands.” *The Contemporary Pacific* 6, no. 1 (1994): 148–61.

⁴⁶ Watson, Irene. “Re-Centring First Nations Knowledge and Places in a Terra Nullius Space.” *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 10, no. 5 (2014): 508–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/117718011401000506>.

⁴⁷ Na’puti, Tiara R., and Sylvia C. Frain. “Indigenous Environmental Perspectives: Challenging the Oceanic Security State.” *Security Dialogue* 54, no. 2 (2023): 115–36. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09670106221139765>.

⁴⁸ Jackson, Van. “Geopolitical Sacrifice Zones in US Strategic Thought: Erasure, the Frontier and the Blue Pacific.” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 38, no. 4 (2025): 440–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2025.2501595>.

⁴⁹ Wallis, Joanne, Henrietta McNeill, James Batley, and Anna Powles. “Security Cooperation in the Pacific Islands: Architecture, Complex, Community, or Something Else?” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 23, no. 2 (2023): 263–96. <https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcac005>.

⁵⁰ Wallis, Joanne, Henrietta McNeill, James Batley, and Anna Powles. “Security Cooperation in the Pacific Islands: Architecture, Complex, Community, or Something Else?” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 23, no. 2 (2023): 263–96. <https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcac005>.

discourse and would strengthen strategic durability in the region.

When geospatial planning processes disregard other perspectives by omitting community-defined spaces, minimizing environmental impacts, or framing inhabited seascapes as operational grids, they risk undermining the trust upon which security cooperation depends. Ethical missteps in GIScience can generate political backlash, intensify perceptions of marginalization, and weaken long-term partnerships. Conversely, ethical and participatory geospatial governance signals recognition of island worldviews and experiences, strengthening the legitimacy of security initiatives. Thus, an island-informed GIScience ethical protocol advances both analytical rigor and political sustainability. Security institutions can avoid the errors that arise from treating the Indo-Pacific as abstract and align more closely with the region's priorities to foster durable cooperation. In the context of intensifying geopolitical tensions, such cooperation and alignment with the region is strategically important.

Actionable items for developing ethical protocols for GIScience in Indo-Pacific security operations may include:

- Enhancing analytical accuracy by incorporating contextual human security layers, such as a Social Vulnerability Index;
- Reducing misinterpretation by considering lived experience and context-specific cultural, ecological, and political dynamics; and
- Strengthening trust through participatory GIScience, such as community mapping projects.

Contemporary applications of GIScience in security and military operations require an ethical expansion. As GIScience becomes increasingly embedded within Indo-Pacific security infrastructures, the assumptions that are built into GIScience and geospatial analyses carry profound geopolitical consequences. Through island feminism, an island-informed GIScience ethical protocol strengthens both analytical effectiveness and long-term legitimacy in militarized islandscapes, including in Hawai'i, Guåhan, and Okinawa. Expanding ethics in military mapping and surveillance technology means going beyond just protecting data from hackers. It takes understanding how these tools affect real communities, respecting lived experiences and worldviews, and putting the safety and wellbeing of people at the center of security decisions. Moving forward, security institutions, geospatial practitioners, and policymakers must treat ethical protocol development as integral to operational design. Security infrastructures that fail to recognize island ways of knowing and understanding risk undermining the very partnerships upon which Indo-Pacific stability depends. Incorporating contextual human security layers, acknowledging oceanic worldviews, and institutionalizing participatory geospatial governance are practical measures

for strengthening security infrastructures in the Indo-Pacific.

Hawai'i Where Big Problems Collide

By
Kyla Lee

Introduction

Hawaii sits in the middle of the Indo-Pacific like a promise and a responsibility. Separately, the challenges we face here enormous. Strategy in the Indo-Pacific is enormous, an oceanic theater where deterrence, alliances, and great-power competition are measured in time, distance, and credibility. Supply chain resilience is enormous, an invisible architecture that decides whether ships sail, aircraft launch, networks stay secure, and forces remain ready when the moment arrives. The talent pipeline is enormous, because no posture, no platform, and no plan works without trained people who can build, maintain, protect, and improve it. And the question of whether people stay in Hawaii is enormous too, because retention is not a slogan; it is a lived decision made by families and communities in a place where the beauty is unmatched and the costs can be unforgiving. Each of these issues is big enough to dominate a policy agenda. But Hawaii is where they overlap. Hawaii is where the Indo-Pacific meets logistics. Hawaii is where logistics meets people. And Hawaii is where people decide whether national strategy will have local hands to carry it forward.

To support the military in the Indo-Pacific is to take seriously the reality that distance is not merely a map problem, it is an operational constraint that becomes a human constraint. The tyranny of distance is the Pacific's constant reminder that power projection is only as real as the sustainment behind it, and sustainment is only as strong as the workforce that makes it tangible. Hawaii's strategic importance is often described in the language of bases, ranges, and headquarters, and those are essential, but they are not the whole story. The deeper truth is that Hawaii can be a strategic hinge that connects operational readiness to resilient supply chains and to a homegrown talent ecosystem that turns national priorities into durable local capability. When those connections are made intentionally, Hawaii becomes more than a waypoint; it becomes an engine of readiness and a stabilizing anchor in a contested region. When those connections are ignored, Hawaii becomes a place where strategic rhetoric outpaces sustainable capacity, and the tyranny of distance wins by default.

Hawaii's role in the Indo-Pacific should be understood as a single integrated system rather than a set of separate policy lanes. Geography drives the mission, the mission drives logistics, logistics demands talent, and talent becomes enduring only when people can build real lives in the place they serve. The overlap is not accidental. It is where the future of Indo-Pacific readiness will be decided. And that overlap, Hawaii, can be an example of what it looks like

when a community and a military posture strengthen one another instead of draining one another.

I. Hawaii in the Indo-Pacific: The Hinge Between Homeland and Forward Presence

The Indo-Pacific is not a normal theater. It is a region defined by ocean, by dispersed archipelagos, by long transit times, and by the complexity of operating across many sovereign partners. The sheer scale alone changes what "power" means. U.S. Indo-Pacific Command describes its area of responsibility as encompassing "about half the earth's surface," stretching "from the waters off the west coast of the U.S. to the western border of India."¹ That is more than trivia; it is the operating condition that turns every plan into a sustainment problem and every sustainment problem into a readiness problem. In such a theater, the difference between influence and irrelevance is measured not by what you can do in theory, but by what you can sustain in practice.

Hawaii is one of the few places that is both deeply American in sovereignty and strategically positioned in proximity, a rare combination that matters when access elsewhere can be uncertain, politically constrained, or operationally vulnerable. It is not simply that Hawaii is "in the Pacific." It is that Hawaii is a stable node in the Pacific, a place where the United States can plan, train, stage, and regenerate capability with the confidence of home territory while remaining meaningfully connected to the operational tempo of the Western Pacific. This is why Hawaii's military value is not only about basing; it is about what basing enables in a maritime-dominant, distance-punishing theater: continuity of command, repeatable joint integration, and a reliable backbone for reception, staging, onward movement, and sustainment.

From a military-supporting perspective, Hawaii's value is inseparable from credibility. Deterrence is not only the existence of capability; it is the belief that capability can arrive, endure, and operate effectively under pressure. USINDOPACOM frames its approach as "partnership, presence, and military readiness," explicitly tying daily posture to the ability to deter aggression and respond when necessary.² Hawaii contributes to that posture by reducing uncertainty in the chain between the continental United States and the forward edge. It can be the point where forces converge and synchronize, where readiness is validated, and where joint integration becomes routine rather than a one-time feat of coordination. In practical terms, this means Hawaii helps convert national capacity into theater-relevant capability by shortening decision-to-action timelines, increasing the reliability of communications and coordination, and supporting the

¹ "About United States Indo-Pacific Command," *U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM)*, accessed February 8, 2026.

² "About United States Indo-Pacific Command," USINDOPACOM, accessed February 8, 2026 (USINDOPACOM approach "partnership, presence, and military readiness").

cycles of training and certification that keep forces ready for real contingencies.

This hinge function has become even more important as the Indo-Pacific shifts toward distributed operations and multi-domain demands. The center of gravity is no longer where forces are stationed, but whether they can train together across distances, share operational pictures, and rehearse complex integration before crisis compresses time. USINDOPACOM's Pacific Multi-Domain Training and Experimentation Capability (PMTEC) captures the logic directly: it was created "to enhance joint, combined, and coalition warfighting readiness" and has built "the largest coalition range system in the world," linking "geographically distributed ranges and training areas across the Indo-Pacific."³ Hawaii matters here not only as geography, but as the institutional and technical hub that makes that linking possible, where command relationships, planning culture, and infrastructure converge to turn scattered training locations into a single learning and readiness ecosystem. In other words, Hawaii is where the theater learns at scale, and in modern competition, the side that learns faster and more collectively gains an advantage that cannot be faked by messaging alone.

The deeper military insight is that Hawaii's strategic advantage is not fully expressed until it is treated as a readiness generator rather than merely a readiness host. Hosting implies that readiness arrives from somewhere else and passes through. Generating implies that Hawaii itself produces repeatable combat credibility through integrated planning, training, sustainment coordination, and regeneration capacity. That distinction matters because the Indo-Pacific's defining risk is not a lack of platforms on paper; it is the possibility that distance, dispersion, and disruption slow the joint force enough that opportunities close before forces can concentrate effects. Hawaii's geography gives the United States a head start against that risk, but geography alone does not yield power. The advantage becomes real only when the systems that support operations (training integration, command-and-control continuity, and the sustainment architecture that keeps forces ready) are strong enough to exploit it.

II. The Tyranny of Distance: The Indo-Pacific's Quiet, Relentless Pressure

In Pacific defense, the tyranny of distance refers to the immense geographic separation between islands, bases, allies, and supply lines. That distance makes it harder to move forces, sustain operations, and respond quickly.

Every additional mile increases fuel consumption, maintenance demands, crew fatigue, and the time required to move people and equipment. Every additional day in transit stretches inventories thinner and increases the chance that a part, system, or plan will fail at the wrong moment. Michael Lostumbo captures the operational reality by calling the tyranny of distance the "most essential challenge" for sustainment in the Indo-Pacific, emphasizing that the theater's scale is fundamentally unlike Europe and noting that a Taiwan contingency would be "roughly 7,000 miles from San Diego," with sailing times from the US West Coast to Indo-Pacific destinations often "15 to 21 days."⁴ Those numbers are not just daunting; they define the time-and-space conditions under which deterrence must be made believable. Distance turns readiness into a race against time, and time into a vulnerability an adversary can exploit.

The problem is not only the length of the supply line, but also the *shape* of the theater itself. The Indo-Pacific is defined by "water," "scale," and "topography," which means sustainment functions differently than in land-contiguous regions. The Association of the US Army emphasizes this structural challenge by noting that major US power projection hubs are still "hundreds or thousands of miles" from potential conflict zones, while "Hawaii is over 5,000 miles away" from Taiwan and China is "only 90 miles" away.⁵ That asymmetry is the strategic heart of distance: in a crisis, the side closer to the fight can concentrate support faster, recover faster, and replace losses with less friction. Even if US forces are qualitatively superior, distance forces the United States to spend more ships, fuel, spare parts, sealift, airlift, time, and administrative effort simply to reach the same starting line.

The tyranny of distance becomes truly dangerous when it collides with modern contestation. Long supply lines are easier to observe, easier to disrupt, and more vulnerable to cascading failure when cyber, space, maritime, and information threats are layered on top. This is why the Indo-Pacific sustainment problem is no longer simply about logistics efficiency; it is about logistics survivability. The AUSA analysis makes the escalation explicit: the People's Liberation Army has developed capabilities "to target US supply lines, sustainment nodes and regional depots," and it warns of "contestation from 'factory to fort to port to foxhole' across all domains, including space, cyber and information warfare."⁶ The phrase "factory to fort to port to foxhole" is more than vivid language; it is a strategic diagnosis. It implies that the decisive attacks may not begin at the frontline. They may begin in production

³ "PMTEC," *USINDOPACOM*, accessed February 8, 2026 (PMTEC established to enhance "joint, combined, and coalition warfighting readiness" and linking "geographically distributed ranges").

⁴ Michael J. Lostumbo et al., *U.S. Major Combat Operations in the Indo-Pacific: Partners and Ally View* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2024), 13.

⁵ Association of the U.S. Army, "Contested Logistics in the Indo-Pacific: Joint Sustainment Through Positional Advantage," accessed February 9, 2026.

⁶ Association of the U.S. Army, "Contested Logistics in the Indo-Pacific: Joint Sustainment Through Positional Advantage," accessed February 9, 2026.

schedules, in port operations, in shipping coordination systems, in cyber disruptions against sub-tier suppliers, or in the narrative layer that pressures access and basing. The modern tyranny of distance is therefore not only a matter of miles; it is a matter of how many points along the chain can be stressed simultaneously.

This exposes an uncomfortable truth: peacetime efficiency can become a wartime liability. The Department of Defense has increasingly warned that just-in-time practices do not translate well into high-end competition. In a 2023 Defense Department report, Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment William LaPlante argued that meeting the pacing challenge requires “a shift away from the just-in-time mindset,” warning that “over time, the industrial base has prioritized efficiency over resiliency.” He pointed to cold production lines, obsolete parts, and fragile sub-tier suppliers as weaknesses that become dangerous in a contested theater.⁷ Distance does not merely punish slow ships and long flights; it punishes brittle systems that depend on perfect timing and uninterrupted flow. In the Indo-Pacific, small disruptions are not small for long. They propagate across the chain.

This is why senior leaders frame logistics not as a supporting concern but as the core of credible deterrence. A recent Stimson Center analysis quotes Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr. stating that “Credible military logistics capability is the key element of integrated deterrence,” and then reinforces the strategic lineage of the argument by recalling Gen. Douglas MacArthur’s hard-edged judgment that “Victory is dependent upon the solution of the logistics problem.”⁸ These statements reveal the inner logic of Indo-Pacific deterrence: deterrence is not only the promise of strike, but the promise of sustainment. It is not only the ability to appear, but the ability to remain. Distance erodes credibility when it suggests delay, exhaustion, or hollow presence. Logistics restores credibility when it makes response time believable and endurance undeniable.

Because the threat is enterprise-wide, the solution cannot be incremental or limited to one service. An USINDOPACOM article on the Indo-Pacific “tyranny of distance” quotes Brig. Gen. James Wellons arguing that the challenge requires an “innovative, whole-of-government approach to logistics.”⁹ That framing recognizes the real scope of the problem. The United States does not move material across the Pacific with military assets alone. It depends on ports, commercial shipping, industrial capacity, energy infrastructure, information systems, allies, and the political and regulatory conditions that govern access.

Distance therefore forces integration *before the crisis*, because the time to build resilience is not after the first convoy is targeted, the first cyberattack disrupts a supplier, or the first port becomes unavailable.

This is where the tyranny of distance becomes a demand for strategic design. The Indo-Pacific does not forgive a sustainment system built for convenience. It rewards redundancy, dispersion, prepositioning, repair capacity, resilient networks, and the ability to regenerate under pressure. The United States does not need to lose a battle to lose tempo; it can lose tempo through long repair cycles, fragile resupply loops, or single points of failure. This is why Hawaii matters so much. Hawaii is one of the most practical answers the United States has to the tyranny of distance because it can shorten the operational loop and serve as a resilient node for sustainment, repair, and joint coordination in US sovereign territory. But that advantage is not automatic. It requires treating supply chains and sustainment not as background support that follows strategy, but as the operational foundation that makes forward presence credible and crisis response possible.

III. Supply Chain as Operational Power: Sustainment Is Deterrence

A supply chain is often invisible until it breaks, and that invisibility can tempt leaders to treat sustainment as a problem to solve after strategy is set. In the Indo-Pacific, that approach is backward. Sustainment is strategy. What the joint force can *promise* politically is constrained by what it can *sustain* physically, and what it can sustain is constrained by whether logistics can function under contest. The ability to keep ships supplied, aircraft maintained, networks secured, and units equipped is not merely a support function; it is a form of power that determines whether the force can persist. That is why deterrence is increasingly evaluated not only by forward platforms, but by the adversary’s judgment of whether the United States can keep those platforms armed, fueled, repaired, and connected once the environment becomes hostile. A force that cannot sustain itself is a force that can be waited out. A force that can regenerate, rapidly and repeatedly, is a force that compels respect because it signals that time pressure will not break the campaign.

This is also why the Indo-Pacific is forcing a conceptual shift from efficiency to effectiveness. In April 2025, Navy Vice Adm. Jeff Jablon described the core problem in stark terms: “We are operating on a just-in-time, pull-supply system that is efficient. Instead, we need a just-in-case, push-supply system that is effective.”¹⁰ That sentence has a

⁷ David Vergun, “Official Says Just-In-Time Deliveries Fail in High-End Competition,” *DOD News*, March 16, 2023.

⁸ Maximillian K. Bremer and Kelly A. Grieco, “The Four Tyrannies of Logistical Deterrence,” *Stimson Center*, November 8, 2023.

⁹ “Logistics in Peacetime is Hard Enough; Now Add Water, Distance, and Being Shot At,” *U.S. Indo-Pacific Command*, March 2023.

¹⁰ Alexandria Brimage-Gray, “Senior military leaders discuss challenges, future sustainment in INDO-PACOM,” *Defense Logistics Agency*, April 11, 2025,

couple layers of meaning. On the surface, it is about inventory posture and distribution. At a deeper level, it is about the kind of war the Indo-Pacific implies: a war where predictability collapses, where demand spikes violently, where access windows open and close, and where being “lean” can become late. In that environment, the supply chain stops being a background business function and becomes an operational weapon system, something that must be designed to survive disruption, to absorb shocks, and to keep combat power flowing even when the enemy’s strategy is to make flow impossible.

Hawaii’s role in the supply chain system can be understood as a point where the United States can concentrate and then distribute capability across the theater while maintaining operational reliability. It can serve as a staging base where units synchronize and prepare for onward movement, but it can also serve as a sustainment node where critical supplies and parts are closer to the operating environment than the continental United States, reducing the time between need and fulfillment. That reduction matters. In a theater where every additional day can shape outcomes, shaving time from resupply loops is not an efficiency; it is an operational advantage.

Even more significant is the potential for Hawaii to function as a regeneration and repair ecosystem. In a long-distance theater, replacement is slow and expensive, and in a contested environment it can be uncertain. Repair is speed. Repair is resilience. Repair is the practical ability to take damage, wear, or failure and return capability to the fight. A robust repair ecosystem in Hawaii, supported by infrastructure, parts, and skilled labor, reduces dependence on distant facilities, increases operational tempo, and strengthens deterrence by signaling that the force can absorb disruption without collapsing. In that sense, Hawaii can become an answer to the tyranny of distance not by denying distance, but by building enough local capability to prevent distance from dictating outcomes.

Repair, sustainment, and resilience do not exist in concrete and steel alone. They exist in people. And this is where the supply chain story becomes inseparable from the talent pipeline story.

IV. The Human Reality Behind Readiness: Logistics Runs on Skill

If supply chains are operational power, talent is the engine that turns them. Inventory in a warehouse does not generate readiness by itself. Fuel in a tank does not move by itself. A replacement part does not install itself. A secure network does not defend itself. A maintenance plan does not execute itself. The Indo-Pacific’s distance magnifies the importance of human skill because every gap in expertise

is harder to fill quickly, and every shortage of qualified labor translates into delays that reverberate across the theater.

Hawaii’s defense posture creates constant demand for highly skilled work across technical trades and advanced disciplines. Aircraft and maritime systems require technicians who can diagnose and repair under pressure. Facilities and power systems require electricians, engineers, and maintainers who can keep critical infrastructure reliable. Communications and cyber systems require professionals who can protect networks and ensure continuity even when adversaries seek to disrupt them. Logistics requires planners and managers who can anticipate needs, coordinate movement, and maintain resilience under uncertainty. These are readiness jobs. They are the difference between a force that can respond and a force that must wait.

The easiest way to fill these roles is often to import talent, rotate people in, offer temporary incentives, and accept turnover as the cost of doing business. But in a theater shaped by distance, turnover is not just expensive; it is strategically corrosive. Frequent churn disrupts continuity, lengthens learning curves, weakens institutional memory, and strains the trust that high-performing teams require. It also makes the system fragile when crisis comes, because the people who know the systems best may have just rotated out. A stable talent base is therefore not a social goal adjacent to readiness. It is a readiness requirement.

This is why the talent pipeline matters so much in Hawaii. If Hawaii is a strategic hinge in the Indo-Pacific, then Hawaii must also be a place that produces and retains the people who keep that hinge moving.

V. The Talent Pipeline as Strategic Infrastructure: Building Capability That Endures

A talent pipeline is often described as education, but in practice it is a chain of identity, opportunity, training, employment, and advancement. It begins with whether young people can imagine themselves in roles that matter, whether they see pathways that are realistic, and whether the community and its institutions reinforce the idea that high-skill careers can be built at home. In Hawaii, this question is especially powerful because the islands carry a familiar narrative: you can love this place and still feel you must leave it to succeed. That narrative, repeated across generations, becomes a quiet drain on local capability. It does not only export ambition; it exports future readiness. To support the military in the Indo-Pacific is to recognize that the most reliable workforce is the one that is grown where it is needed, trained with local context, and connected early to meaningful work. This does not require

militarizing education or turning every student into a defense employee. It requires building respected pathways into the technical and professional roles that sustain defense posture and community resilience at the same time. When students see that engineering, cyber, logistics, skilled trades, and emergency management are not only good jobs but mission-relevant service, the pipeline gains purpose. Purpose matters because it gives people a reason to invest their effort locally rather than searching for meaning elsewhere.

The pipeline becomes real when it is anchored in paid experience and clear transitions from training to stable employment. In many places, the leak occurs precisely at that threshold: students graduate, look for real work, and discover the best offers are somewhere else. Hawaii cannot afford that pattern if it intends to remain a durable Indo-Pacific hub. Paid internships, apprenticeships, co-ops, and entry-level roles that lead to advancement are not simply workforce programs. They are a strategic design choice, a way to convert local potential into local capability. When defense organizations and contractors treat early career pathways as readiness investments, they begin to create a stable base of expertise that strengthens operations for decades.

What makes this approach especially powerful in Hawaii is that defense-related skills are often dual-use in the best sense. A cybersecurity professional who protects military networks also strengthens the broader resilience of critical infrastructure. A logistics specialist who plans sustainment also improves disaster response capability. An electrician maintaining mission facilities also contributes to community capacity. This creates a virtuous overlap: the more Hawaii builds mission-relevant talent, the more Hawaii becomes resilient not only for the military but for itself. That resilience, in turn, reinforces the legitimacy and sustainability of defense presence, because the community experiences the benefits of capability-building as part of local strength rather than external extraction.

VI. Integration: How Hawaii Can Beat Distance by Connecting Mission, Supply Chains, and People

The most important insight is that Hawaii's strategic value emerges when these elements are intentionally fused into a single system. Hawaii's geography provides advantage, but the tyranny of distance threatens to erode that advantage unless sustainment is robust. Sustainment can be robust only when there is repair capacity, inventory resilience, and secure distribution. Those capabilities depend on a skilled workforce. A skilled workforce depends on a pipeline that begins early, bridges education and employment, and offers meaningful progression. When these pieces reinforce one another, Hawaii becomes

more than an operational location; it becomes a strategic engine.

This integrated vision changes how we interpret readiness. Readiness is not merely the status of units on a given day. Readiness is the long-term capacity to generate, sustain, and regenerate forces in a contested theater. In the Indo-Pacific, that capacity is shaped by distance and by the fragility of long logistics lines. Hawaii can reduce that fragility by functioning as a place where sustainment is concentrated, where repairs are executed quickly, where supply chain disruptions are absorbed, and where the workforce is deep enough to maintain continuity through time. When Hawaii develops durable human capital and repair-forward capability, it signals something powerful to allies and adversaries alike: the United States is not merely present; it is prepared to endure.

There is also an inspiring civic dimension to this integration. The Indo-Pacific mission can feel distant and abstract to people whose daily life is shaped by local concerns. But when the work of readiness is tied to local careers, local education, and local resilience, the mission becomes tangible. It becomes something that can be owned, not just hosted. It becomes a form of modern service that includes uniformed personnel, civilian workers, students building skills, and communities strengthening infrastructure. In that sense, Hawaii becomes a place where national defense is not only stationed but rooted. Rooted defense is stronger than rotational defense, because it is supported by relationships, continuity, and a shared sense of purpose.

VII. Hawaii as the Pacific's Model for Resilience, Security, and Local Capacity

Hawaii paves the way for the Pacific because it shows how an island community can turn distance, isolation, and vulnerability into a strategy for resilience. Many Pacific nations face the same structural pressures that Hawaii faces, but often with fewer resources: they are surrounded by vast ocean spaces, dependent on maritime shipping, vulnerable to climate disasters, and exposed to disruptions in fuel, food, communications, and skilled labor. This is why Hawaii's role matters beyond the United States. If Hawaii strengthens its ports, repair capacity, supply stockpiles, cyber systems, energy resilience, and emergency-response networks, it becomes a model for how other Pacific islands can prepare before a crisis arrives. Tonga is a clear example. When the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai eruption and tsunami damaged Tonga's undersea cable in 2022, the country was largely cut off from global communications, showing how one point of failure can isolate an entire island nation.¹¹ Hawaii can help lead the region by demonstrating that resilience must include backup communications, trained technicians, repair-forward infrastructure, and partnerships that can restore

¹¹ Submarine Networks, "Tonga Cables Cut after Volcano Eruption, at Least Four Weeks to Restore," January 2022.

connectivity quickly. The Marshall Islands, Palau, and the Federated States of Micronesia also show why Hawaii's example matters. Their renewed Compacts of Free Association with the United States reflect how strategically important Pacific islands have become, but these relationships should not be understood only through military access.¹² They also reveal a deeper need for local capacity: islands must be able to support infrastructure, maintain ports and airfields, protect networks, and train their own people so they are not completely dependent on outside help. Hawaii can inspire these nations by proving that Pacific security is strongest when geography is supported by durable systems and skilled local workers.

Hawaii also inspires other Pacific countries because it broadens the meaning of security from military presence to community survival. In the Pacific, security includes whether a country can keep its people connected after a disaster, move supplies across oceans, protect coastal communities, and give young people a reason to stay. Kiribati, Tuvalu, and the Marshall Islands face some of the most urgent climate pressures in the world; the World Bank has warned that climate change is endangering their ecosystems, economies, and livelihoods, with the highest points in these countries only about three meters above sea level.¹³

Fiji offers another example: several Fijian communities have had to confront planned relocation because rising seas, erosion, and extreme weather are making some coastal villages unsafe.¹⁴ These cases show that Pacific resilience is not abstract. It is about land, homes, culture, jobs, and whether communities can remain rooted while adapting to danger. This connects directly to Hawaii's talent-pipeline challenge. Across the Pacific, labor mobility programs can bring benefits, but they can also raise concern about the loss of skilled workers from small island economies.¹⁵ Hawaii can lead by showing that the answer is not simply to import expertise or allow local talent to leave, but to build pathways that connect education to meaningful work at home. Apprenticeships in maritime maintenance, cyber defense, logistics, engineering, construction, emergency management, and renewable energy would not only support Hawaii's role in the Indo-Pacific; they would also offer a model for Samoa, Fiji, Palau, Tonga, Kiribati, and the Marshall Islands. In that sense, Hawaii's leadership is both strategic and civic. It can show the Pacific that true readiness is not only measured by ships, aircraft, or bases, but by whether island communities have the people, systems, and confidence to sustain themselves under pressure.

Conclusion: The Place Where the Threads Become One

Indo-Pacific strategy is enormous, because it is about preserving stability across a region that will define the century. Supply chain resilience is enormous, because it determines whether plans survive contact with reality. The talent pipeline is enormous, because technology and readiness both depend on skilled people more than ever. Each of these issues can feel too big, too complex, too sprawling. Yet Hawaii is where they converge in a way that can be understood and acted upon. Hawaii is where strategy becomes sustainment, sustainment becomes work, and work becomes a reason for people to build futures in the place that matters.

This is why Hawaii's role is not simply to be a location on the map. Hawaii can be the answer to the Indo-Pacific's defining constraint, not by pretending distance is smaller, but by building the kind of local capability that makes distance less decisive. When Hawaii strengthens its supply chain role through repair and resilience, it strengthens deterrence. When it builds a talent pipeline that connects education to mission-relevant work, it turns readiness into a local engine. When it integrates these efforts, it creates a durable posture that can outlast crises, outlast headlines, and outlast the temptation to treat defense presence as temporary.

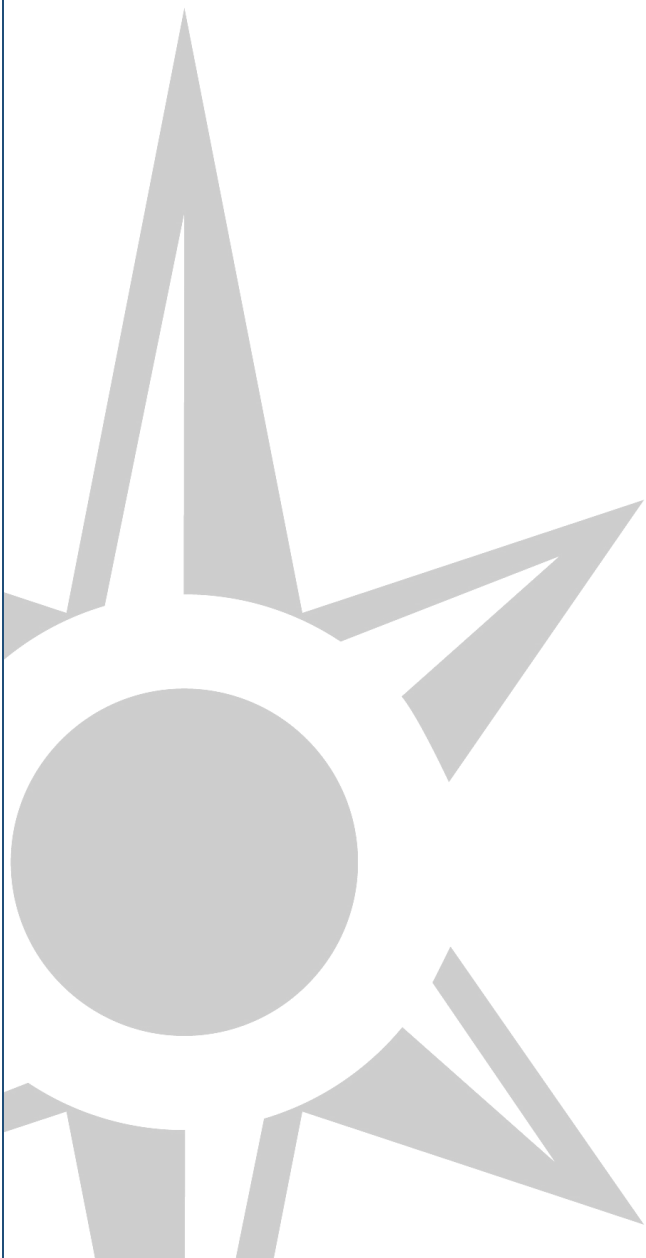
There is something deeply inspiring in that possibility. It is the idea that a place can be both home and hinge, both community and cornerstone. It is the idea that the Indo-Pacific is not only an arena of competition but also an opportunity to invest in people and capability in a way that strengthens everyone. And it is the idea that Hawaii can lead by example: showing what it looks like when the tyranny of distance is met not only with ships and aircraft, but with resilient systems, skilled hands, and a shared determination to make readiness sustainable where it is needed most.

¹² U.S. Embassy in the Republic of the Marshall Islands, "U.S. and Pacific Islands Forge Stronger Bonds with COFA Renewal," November 13, 2024.

¹³ World Bank, "Protect, Accommodate, or Retreat? New World Bank Research Outlines Adaptation Pathways for Pacific Atoll Countries," November 14, 2024.

¹⁴ Toda Peace Institute, "Climate Change-Induced Community Relocation in Fiji: Challenges and Opportunities," 2024.

¹⁵ World Bank, "Pacific Labor Mobility: The Benefits, Concerns, and Opportunities".



PICL Mediating Economic Security through the Ocean of Peace Declaration between Pacific Island Countries and External Powers

By
Kylar Cade

Introduction

The Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders (PICL) is a unique platform to mediate economic security, through the Pacific Island Countries' declaration of an Ocean of Peace (OoP), with the United States and potentially other external powers. Clear, consistent, informal communication between the parties is essential if the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) are to maintain their sovereignty and agency in the face of geopolitical competition between the United States and China. Such communication is also vital if the US seeks to be a partner of choice for PICs. With a secretariat in Honolulu in the state of Hawai'i, PICL could play a decisive role in constraining the worst and bringing out the best of extra-regional focus on Oceania. The US should support the conference and its secretariat without pressuring them to align with it.

This paper provides a brief overview of the political and security situation in Oceania, with particular attention placed on the 2025 Ocean of Peace Declaration (OoPD). Relatedly, it points out PIC interests and then observes non-PIC interests in the region, in particular those of the US and China. The paper shows that there are PIC and non-PIC interests that do not align. The paper notes one regional institution (the Pacific Islands Forum, or PIF) but dives deeper into another regional institution, the Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders (PICL). Finally, it provides thoughts on PICL playing a mediating role for the OoP declaration between PICs and external powers, regarding their strategic endeavors in Oceania.

The State of Oceania and PIC Interests

Over the past two decades, Oceania has steadily gained the interest of the international community and external partners -- for better and worse. In the past five years, France, India, Japan, South Korea, and the US have held one or more summit-level gatherings with most or all PICs. The summits organized by South Korea and the US were the first of their kind for those partners. China has also engaged in high-level gatherings, although the two times it has done so in the past five years have been at the ministerial level. (Previously, President Xi Jinping had attended two gatherings with PIC leaders.) Ministers from member states of the League of Arab States also met with their PIC counterparts a few years ago. The region has also received development and investment support. For example, in May 2026, the Quad group (comprising

Australia, India, Japan, and the US) announced a joint port project in Fiji, a PIC.

Oceania spans a significant portion of the Pacific Ocean and includes Australia, New Zealand, and thousands of islands in the Pacific Ocean that constitute 14 PICs (Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu). Together, they with the islands that constitute territories of other countries, including the US, can be said to constitute the Pacific Islands Region (PIR).

Oceania is a gateway to and cultural guardian of a significant part of the Pacific Ocean, which harbors significant stocks of natural resources, including fish and critical minerals. PICs have political and strategic value to non-PIC and non-Oceania countries as most of them have a vote at the United Nations and all of them could or do host military outposts. PICs have grown in their international stature given their push for climate-related action. Oceania has been identified as a Sea of Islands¹ and the Blue Pacific Continent.² These terms reflect an effort to create unity among countries in the region, an effort that includes issues such as regional security. Additionally, the terms have been reinforced by the "New Pacific Diplomacy", which manifests in the PICs collectively working together.³ The Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), the most authoritative intergovernmental political body in Oceania, comprising Australia, New Zealand, the 14 PICs, and two French territories (New Caledonia and French Polynesia), is the institutional basis for the effort at unity. The effort has rapidly accelerated since 2017, when the leaders of the PIF Member States "endorsed The Blue Pacific narrative as a call for Forum Members to work together as one Blue Continent recognising it as a catalyst for stronger and deeper Pacific regionalism."⁴

Pacific unity and regionalism became more concrete at the 2022 annual Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting (PIFLM). There, leaders agreed to the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. The strategy comprises seven pillars and five cross-cutting themes to foster collective action and identity in Oceania. One of the pillars is "peace and security." Additionally, a key aspect in the implementation of the strategy is to conduct a Review of the Regional Architecture (RRA), a process that began in 2019 that assesses the political setting of the region, its institutions and governance mechanisms. The Review also examines engagement with international partners.⁵

¹ Epeli Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands," *The Contemporary Pacific*, Volume 6, Number 1 (Spring 1994): 147–161, <https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/77265cd6-ddfd-469d-a96b-04ace31ea67c/content>.

² Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent* (Suva, Fiji, 2022). Accessed at <https://forumsec.org/2050>.

³ Greg Fry and Sandra Tarte, "New Pacific Diplomacy' Ten Years On," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Volume 79, Issue 1(2025): 55–63. doi:10.1080/10357718.2024.2415123.

⁴ PIFS, *Boe Declaration Action Plan* (Suva, Fiji, 2019), 8.

⁵ PIFS, *Political Leadership and Regionalism*, forumsec.org, accessed May 2026: <https://forumsec.org/political-leadership-and-regionalism>.

The RRA continues in as PICs find it increasingly challenging to address matters of security and to engage with international partners. There are various reasons for the challenges, most prominent among them being the Forum Leaders' recognition of an expansive understanding of "security" and the geopolitical tensions between the US and China. As for the former, PICs identify climate-related impacts as the most threatening source of insecurity; they are also interested in securing human and economic security, both of which are being stressed. As for the latter, PIF members Australia and New Zealand have security interests in Oceania as well as military ties with PIF partners such as the US, which operates decades-old military bases in the northern stretch of PICs and conducts exercises and patrols in Oceania. Within the past few years, China also has undertaken security and military activities in the region, including the testing of a ballistic missile and the deployment of naval vessels.

As early as 2018, Forum Leaders recognized "[...] an increasingly complex regional security environment driven by multifaceted security challenges, and a dynamic geopolitical environment leading to an increasingly crowded and complex region."⁶ The most recent convening of the Pacific Dialogue, "the only Track Two mechanism in the Pacific Islands region focused on fostering and supporting dialogue on critical geopolitical and security issues in the Pacific," recognizes accelerating militarization and competing defense strategies as putting great pressure on PICs.⁷ There has been an increase in defense/security-related arrangements that have come into effect between and with PICs within the past few years. In fact, security agreements have been said to be "creating a strategic alignment dilemma for Pacific Island states, reshaping regional order from one based on collective neutrality to one of differentiated alignment."⁸

Following the consolidation of a regional identity (2017) and framework for regional action (2022), the most recent PIFLM in 2025 saw the Forum Leaders endorse the Blue Pacific Ocean of Peace Declaration (OoPD).⁹ The declaration "recogni[zes] Pacific peoples as custodians of the Blue Pacific Continent."¹⁰ It commits the PIF Member States to 12 ideal actions and "call[s] upon all states and non-state actors to [...] support the integration and advancement of the Blue Pacific Ocean of Peace, by respecting its principles and aligning all engagement with the Pacific's vision for peace," among five other stipulations.¹¹

The OoPD (Annex 3 of 4 in the 2025 PIF Leaders Communiqué) follows a historical chain of regional security-related pronouncements.¹² One of them is the subject of Annex 1, which commemorates the 40th anniversary of the adoption of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (Treaty of Rarotonga). The Treaty seeks to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the region and prevent nuclear testing and nuclear waste dumping.

Annexes 1 and 3 can be seen as a signal to international partners and actors that PICs have agency and intend to use it to ensure comprehensive peace in the Pacific Ocean. At the same time, the Treaty of Rarotonga lacks enforcement, and the OoPD needs to be operationalized. It is these areas where the varying interests of PICs, Australia and New Zealand, and external partners (especially the US, China, and Taiwan) could collide. Here, PICL could serve as a crucial platform for dialogue among Pacific Island leaders with relatively easy access to US officials. PICL might even be a vehicle through which to mediate dialogues separately with the US, China, and other external partners regarding their strategic (economic) endeavors in Oceania.

Two Key External Partners: U.S.-PICs Relations and Chinese Engagements with PICs

The next PIFLM will take place in 2026 in Belau/Palau. The PIC will also host PICL at or around the same time. Palau is very aligned with the US, both by choice of the current president of the PIC and due to a legally binding agreement between them: the Covenant of Free Association (COFA). The US maintains similar covenants with the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and the Marshall Islands (RMI). All three covenants were renegotiated with massive increases in US funding and, in 2023, signed for another 20 years. These three PICs, together with the US territories of Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), are in the northern swathe of PICs and are geographically proximate to China and Taiwan. US activity in the PIR portion of Oceania largely has been centered on these particular islands.

The fact that Palau will host the PIFLM this year is uncomfortable for China, because the PIC maintains diplomatic ties with Taiwan. Additionally, the current president, Surangel Whipps Jr., has argued China is weaponizing tourism to influence Palau in its favor.

⁶ PIFS, *Boe Declaration Action Plan* (Suva, Fiji, 2019), 6.

⁷ The Pacific Dialogue, *Outcomes Document* (Suva, Fiji, 2026), 1, previously found at <http://usp.ac.fj/pacificdialogue/>.

⁸ Anna Powles, "Friends to all, bound to some: Pacific Island states, security agreements, and the regional order", *Pacific Dynamics*, Volume 9, Issue 3 (September 2025), 1413.

⁹ Ben Burdon, "Shaping the second wave of Pacific diplomacy", pacificsecurity.net, January 20, 2026,

<https://pacificsecurity.net/blog/shaping-the-second-wave-of-pacific-diplomacy/>.

¹⁰ Fifty-Fourth Pacific Islands Forum, Solomon Islands, *Forum Communiqué* (Solomon Islands, 2025), 18.

¹¹ Fifty-Fourth Pacific Islands Forum, Solomon Islands, *Forum Communiqué*, 19-21.

¹² PIFS, *Boe Declaration Action Plan* (Suva, Fiji, 2019), 28.

Official US and PRC deep engagement in the PIR goes back to World War II and the latter 2000s, respectively.¹³ Competition with the Soviet Union spurred US interest in the PICs in the 1980s but its attention waned for around three decades.¹⁴ The first Trump administration directed attention to the PIR, particularly with an eye on China. The first-ever gathering of the leaders of the three COFA states with a US president took place in 2019. In 2020, the Trump administration announced funding for the PIR. The Biden administration continued US geostrategic posturing but went further: It established the “Partners in the Blue Pacific” with allied partners, hosted two summits with Pacific Island leaders, reopened embassies, and pledged hundreds of millions of dollars to/for the PICs.¹⁵

Under the second Trump administration, the US presents itself as reprioritizing the PIR in US foreign policy.¹⁶ This would not seem to be the case given the 2025 National Security Strategy, which mentions “Pacific” nine times, all but one of which is in the term “Indo-Pacific”. (The one exception is, “We will also harden and strengthen our military presence in the Western Pacific, [...]”¹⁷) However, Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau has been busy at work with the PIR, including speaking at three separate gatherings, two of which were heavily oriented towards investment/trade/business: the *U.S.-Pacific Islands Business Forum* on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2025 and at *The Pacific Agenda: Investment, Security, and Shared Prosperity Summit* in Honolulu, in February 2026. The latter event saw the attendance of heads of Pacific Island governments and senior officials.

For decades, the US exclusively has been the (military) security provider to the COFA states. Moreover, the US military has maintained important bases in the northern PIR, namely Andersen Air Force Base and Naval Base Guam on Guam and US Army Garrison Kwajalein Atoll in

the RMI. In 2020, Marine Corps Base Camp Blaz was activated on Guam. The US Department of Defence/War is also in the process of constructing a radar facility in Palau and upgrading facilities on Tinian in CNMI. Additionally, the department is involved with projects in Yap, FSM, and Manus Island, PNG.¹⁸

Between 2008 and 2025, the US established shiprider agreements with 12 PICs, as a result of which US Navy and Coastguard vessels aid the PICs in mitigating illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. As of 2025, the US National Guard had partnerships with 4 PICs, including the only PICs with militaries (Fiji, PNG, and Tonga) (Power and Influence). As of 2026, the US has a defense cooperation agreement with PNG and Fiji. The most controversial development in US security activities in Oceania began in 2021 with the signing of AUKUS, a pact between the US, UK, and Australia that provides for the delivery of nuclear-powered submarines to Australia by 2040.¹⁹

As for China, 2006 was a pivotal year with establishment of the China-Pacific Island Countries Economic Development and Cooperation Forum. The forum has since met two more times, the last occasion being in 2019. A foreign ministers’ meeting and political leadership dialogue started this decade, the latter already having had five iterations. These events have taken place while “China [relatively consistently] has built on its narrative of shared historical and colonial experience to support its narrative of the value of South–South cooperation, which it has used, in turn, to justify its narrative of the opportunities offered under its BRI [Belt and Road Initiative].”²⁰ (As President Xi stated at the 3rd Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in 2023, the founding mission of BRI includes enhancing connectivity, for example through infrastructure development.²¹ As of June 2026, 10 or 11 out of 14 PICs have signed an MOU to participate in the initiative.²²) Perhaps because of Chinese investment in commercial/trade

¹³ Jian Zhang, “China’s Role in the Pacific Islands Region,” in *Regionalism, Security & Cooperation in Oceania*, ed. Rouben Azizian and Carleton Cramer (Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2015), 45–48.

¹⁴ Alan Tidwell and Joanne Wallis, “The United States’ statecraft in the Pacific Islands,” in *Power and Influence in the Pacific Islands: Understanding Statecraftiness*, ed. Joanne Wallis, Henrietta McNeill, Michael Rose, and Alan Tidwell (Routledge, Oxon and New York, 2025), 107.

¹⁵ Alan Tidwell and Joanne Wallis, “The United States’ statecraft in the Pacific Islands,” 107–117. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003496441>.

¹⁶ Office of the Spokesperson, “Reinvigorating the U.S.-Pacific Islands Partnership: U.S.-Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Roundtable in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea,” state.gov, September 16, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/09/reinvigorating-the-u-s-pacific-islands-partnership-u-s-pacific-islands-forum-pif-roundtable-in-port-moresby-papua-new-guinea>.

¹⁷ The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington D.C., November 2025), 24.

¹⁸ Alan Tidwell and Joanne Wallis, “The United States’ statecraft in the Pacific Islands,” 106–117. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003496441>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Geyi Xie, “China’s strategic narratives in the Pacific,” in *Power and Influence in the Pacific Islands: Understanding Statecraftiness*, ed. Joanne Wallis, Henrietta McNeill, Michael Rose, and Alan Tidwell (Routledge, Oxon and New York, 2025), 191.

²¹ Xinhua, “Full text of Xi Jinping’s keynote speech at 3rd Belt and Road Forum for Int’l Cooperation,” english.www.gov.cn, October 18, 2023, https://english.www.gov.cn/news/202310/18/content_WS652fc328c6d0868f4e8e064e.html.

²² Christoph Nedopil, “Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative” (Shanghai, 2025), Green Finance & Development Center, FISF Fudan University, accessed June 2026,

projects, China has extended security cooperation with the militaries of PNG, Fiji, and Tonga. Additionally, it maintains police cooperation in five PICs.²³

The Trump administration is working to advance PIR prosperity with economic growth, with US military involvement, and with allies. It is also seeking partnership and mutual benefit with PICs, a clear emphasis being on benefits to the US. The Pacific Agenda Summit in Honolulu could not make these two statements more clear, as the event was co-hosted by the State Department and USINDOPACOM, the largest combatant command of the United States that is based less than 11 miles from the East-West Center, the site of the event. Moreover, representatives from allied countries were also present at the event “to coordinate investment efforts.”²⁴

In the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, Pacific leaders envision “a resilient Pacific Region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion and prosperity, that ensures all Pacific peoples can lead free, healthy and productive lives.”²⁵ PICs are intent on shaping their future and the future of the Pacific Ocean. The US must clearly understand this as it pursues its own interests in Oceania. To ensure its legitimacy as a reputable partner to the PIR, the US will need to explicitly take into account the interplay of its interests and those of PICs in relation to the OoPD.

Given US strategic interest in private-sector led development as a foundation of regional prosperity (per The Pacific Agenda Summit), as well as its practice of investing in projects related to its security and military agenda, where better to engage in the interplay of interests than through the Pacific Islands Development Program (PIDP) and by communicating with the Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders (PICL)?

PICL: Past, Present, and Future

<https://greenfdc.org/countries-of-the-belt-and-road-initiative-bri/>.

²³ Joanne Wallis, Anna Naupa, Henrietta McNeill-Stowers, James Batley and Anna Powles, *Mapping Security Cooperation in the Pacific Islands (2026 edition)* (Australian National University, 2026), 7-8.

²⁴ Office of the President & Communications & External Relations, East-West Center, “US–Indo-Pacific Diplomatic, Business Leaders Advance Economic Initiatives in Inaugural Pacific Investment Summit at East-West Center,” eastwestcenter.org, February 27, 2026, <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/news/news-release/us-indo-pacific-diplomatic-business-leaders-advance-economic-initiatives>.

²⁵ Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent* (Suva, Fiji, 2022), 6.

²⁶ PIDP, “Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders (PICL),” eastwestcenter.org, n.d., <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/pidp/our-place-region/pacific-islands-conference-leaders-picl>.

PIDP came together in 1980 because of Pacific Island leaders, especially Fiji Prime Minister Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara and Hawai’i Gov. George Ariyoshi. Twenty Pacific Island governments, including French and US territories, are members of the program. Additionally, it is the secretariat of the PICL, a forum that “is intended to provide a unique opportunity for island leaders from the North and South Pacific, regardless of political status, to meet as equals in an informal setting to discuss development goals and problems and to exchange ideas and experience.”²⁶ The conference has met 12 times since its inception, and, as mentioned before, will be held this year in Palau.

The program and its conference should not be underestimated. PIDP is a founding member of the Council of Regional Organizations (CROP), a grouping that PIF Leaders created “to improve cooperation, coordination, and collaboration among Pacific inter-governmental organizations.”²⁷ Also, PIDP has directed its support toward advancing Pacific regionalism. As for PICL, perhaps its greatest strength is the opportunity it provides for Pacific leaders, regardless of the political status of their jurisdiction, to meet and talk in an informal setting.

Furthermore, PIDP is housed in the East-West Center, which means it is based in Hawai’i. As a result, PIDP members have, at least in theory, direct access to the US. (In fact, PICL has enabled Pacific heads of government to meet US presidents four times.²⁸) This is crucial because both PICs and the US understand development and security to go hand-in-hand. This was made evident at The Pacific Agenda Summit. Then-PIF Chair Jeremiah Manele said: “Investment and security are inseparable and critical for prosperity.”²⁹ Adm. Samuel Paparo, commander of USINDOPACOM, also proclaimed at the summit that peace in the Pacific involves protected fishing, free sea- and airways, and secure digital connections.³⁰

²⁷ PIDP, “Our Place in the Region,” eastwestcenter.org, n.d., <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/pidp/our-place-region>.

²⁸ PIDP, “About PIDP,” eastwestcenter.org, n.d., <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/pidp/about-us>.

²⁹ Annalisa Burgos, “Honolulu conference aimed to boost private U.S. investment in Pacific Island nations”, hawaiinewsnow.com, February 28, 2026, <https://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/2026/03/01/honolulu-conference-aimed-boost-private-us-investment-pacific-island-nations/>.

³⁰ Office of the President & Communications & External Relations, East-West Center, “US–Indo-Pacific Diplomatic, Business Leaders Advance Economic Initiatives in Inaugural Pacific Investment Summit at East-West Center,” eastwestcenter.org, February 27, 2026, <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/news/news-release/us-indo-pacific-diplomatic-business-leaders-advance-economic-initiatives>.

There are points of tension between the positions of PICs and of the US. PICs consider security in an expansive fashion, identifying their greatest threat as climate change. At the Summit, Manele also stated, "Economic development is security," pointing out another dimension of security.³¹ He also mentioned that "[s]ecurity cooperation [...] should support disaster preparedness and climate resilience, strengthen maritime domain awareness, combat transnational crime, and respect national sovereignty and regional stability, consistent with the Ocean of Peace Declaration."³² On the other hand, the US is predominantly concerned with hard military and economic security: deterring China; denying the Asian superpower a military foothold in the PIR; competing for influence with China; and securing resources, especially critical minerals, supply chains, and use of US technology and goods. China has (at the least) framed its engagements with PICs in a way that aligns with their interests.

The 2025 convening of the Pacific Dialogue noted "growing concern that human security and development priorities are being co-opted to advance external militarization agendas."³³ Communication between the PICs and external partners is essential for economic security and prosperity to take place in a way that mutually benefits Pacific Islanders and, for example, Americans.

Economic security can be defined in two ways, which one could say are microeconomic and macroeconomic/geopolitical in nature. The microeconomic definition is "the ability of individuals, households and communities to meet their basic and essential needs sustainably; including food, shelter, clothing, health care, education information, livelihoods, and social protection."³⁴ A macroeconomic/geopolitical conception was released by the G7 in 2023 and consists of (a) building resilient supply chains, (b) building resilient critical infrastructure, (c) responding to nonmarket policies and practices, (d) addressing economic coercion, (e) countering harmful practices in the digital sphere, (f) cooperating on international standard-setting, and (g) preventing leakage of critical and emerging technologies.³⁵ PICs are interested in securing both conceptions of economic security in the

PIR while cooperating with external powers to enhance the best and constrain the worst of non-PIC economic security agendas.

Channeling economic security and prosperity communication through PICL is feasible because PICL has facilitated dialogue between PICs and external partners. The 12th PICL "created space for Pacific leaders to dialogue with non-PICL member countries including Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, and the United States. Non-member countries were given the opportunity to comment on the current state of their respective country's engagements in the region, followed by frank and open questions and comments from island leaders."³⁶

PICL could be used as a vehicle to mediate PIC and external partner engagement in line with the OoPD. PICL could be a platform for dialogue with each external partner, as appropriate and if called for, regarding their economic development and security efforts in the PIR. Matters of discussion could cover dual-use infrastructure, deep-sea mining, supply chains, and the incorporation of nuclear energy (and weapons) in PIR. Economic security and prosperity-related interchange would advance Paragraphs 16.4 and 17.3 in the OoPD.

PICs could "contribute towards strengthened international peace and security," as envisioned in and aligned with the OoPD, by directing economics and development conversations to PICL.³⁷ Such conversations would cover geopolitical ground, which the PIF could build on or reorient as it is the highest regional political body. These dialogues could also support PIF facilitation of communication between the US and China should they continue advancing their strategic reach into the PIR and assuming PIF takes on such a role. In this scenario, although PICL would have a mediating role between China and the US, the dialogue hosted by PIF would be at the highest levels and would be considered the foremost Pacific/Oceania-led US-China dialogue.

Therefore, the US should not use the advantage of hosting a CROP agency (PIDP) to influence the entity in its favor.

³¹ Timoci Vula, "Manele: Investment in Pacific must be people-centred," *fijitimes.com*, before the update on May 28, 2026, <https://www.fijitimes.com.fj/manele-investment-in-pacific-must-be-people-centred/>.

³² Solomon Islands Government, "PM Manele Calls for Purposeful Investment and Comprehensive Security at Pacific Summit," *solomons.gov.sb*, February 24, 2026, <https://solomons.gov.sb/pm-manele-calls-for-purposeful-investment-and-comprehensive-security-at-pacific-summit/>.

³³ The Pacific Dialogue, *Outcomes Document* (Suva, Fiji, 2026), 2, previously found at <http://usp.ac.fj/pacificdialogue/>.

³⁴ GSIDI at UNC, "Economic Security," *gsdi.unc.edu*, n.d., <https://gsdi.unc.edu/our-work/economic-security/>.

³⁵ Matthew P. Goodman, "G7 Gives First Definition to 'Economic Security'," *csis.org*, May 31, 2023, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/g7-gives-first-definition-economic-security>.

³⁶ PIDP, "Pacific Leaders Address Key Regional Issues at the 12th Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders," *eastwestcenter.org*, September 16, 2022, <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/news/news-release/pacific-leaders-address-key-regional-issues-12th-pacific-islands-conference>.

³⁷ Fifty-Fourth Pacific Islands Forum, Solomon Islands, *Forum Communiqué*, 13 September, 2025. Accessed from <https://forumsec.org/publications/leaders-communique-54th-pacific-islands-forum-leaders-communique>.

The neutrality of PIDP and PICL should be enhanced so that it can be a true mediator for PICs in relation to each external partner (and potentially between China and the US). The fact that Forum Leaders decided at the 2025 PIFLM to continue to recognize Taiwan at such meetings indicates Pacific leaders' balancing act to maintain a stance of friend to all (although it may just be the result of a minority of PICs continuing to maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan).

Given that PIDP is working toward putting in place a governance structure to increase its institutional effectiveness, the US, its allies, and even China and other external partners should approach the body and suggest making its governance compatible with hosting dialogues between PICs and external powers and between US and Chinese counterparts.³⁸ The US should provide funding to the body through the East-West Center. This undertaking would align with "Deputy Secretary Landau [having highlighted] the critical role the East-West Center could play in the US-Pacific relationship, as its location in Hawai'i makes it a 'natural choice' for US-Pacific dialogue."³⁹

Another location-advantage to PICL's potential new role as a mediator of economic security and prosperity in line with the OoPD is its proximity to Pacific Forum International. Given Pacific Forum's extensive work in dialogue between China and the US, it could support PICL's facilitating and mediating communication between PICs and China and between the two superpowers.

Now is the time to lay the groundwork for sustained dialogue between PICs and external partners as the latter increase their strategic activities in the PIR, Oceania, and the Pacific Ocean. Increased international focus on economic security enables PICL to be a key site for dialogue between PICs and external partners, as well as potentially between the US and China. PICL facilitated US-China dialogue would fulfill, at least in part, what Secretary of State Marco Rubio noted at his Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on June 2, 2026: "The Chinese government and the US have to speak. There's really not a choice here."⁴⁰ PICL could prove decisive in mediating the execution of the Ocean of Peace for the betterment of PICs, international peace, and US security and prosperity.

³⁸ Marly Fredrick, "As PICL Chair President Simina Prioritizes Development of Governance and Arrangements Manual in PIDP Strategic Planning Meeting," gov.fm, March 1, 2026, <https://gov.fm/as-picl-chair-president-simina-prioritizes-development-of-governance-and-arrangements-manual-in-pidp-strategic-planning-meeting/>.

³⁹ Office of the President & Communications & External Relations, East-West Center, "US-Indo-Pacific Diplomatic, Business Leaders Advance Economic Initiatives in Inaugural Pacific Investment Summit at East-West Center,"

eastwestcenter.org, February 27, 2026, <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/news/news-release/us-indo-pacific-diplomatic-business-leaders-advance-economic-initiatives>.

⁴⁰ Dewey Sim & Mark Magnier, "Rubio says US and China must keep talking despite deep differences," scmp.com, June 3, 2026, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/3355750/rubio-says-us-and-china-must-keep-talking-despite-deep-differences>.



Empowering the Indo-Pacific: Addressing Gender-Based Violence through Comprehensive Sex Education in Hawai'i, Fiji and the Philippines

By
Dipshay Krishnan Reddy

Abstract

Gender-based violence has occurred for centuries and continues to be a global issue generally characterized by the use of power relations that create violence and prevent peace or human security. The United States state of Hawai'i, the Republic of Fiji and the Philippines, gender-based violence is prevalent and disproportionately affects women, girls and the indigenous peoples. There are higher rates of sexual violence against Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander adolescents in Hawai'i, which mirrors larger regional patterns based on patriarchy, social norms, and institutional deficits. Sexual violence, one category of gender-based violence, exists within cultural, religious, and political institutions that deny individuals autonomy over their bodies and promote unequal power relationships. Through examining power relations, this paper explores how they maintain gender-based violence in Hawai'i, Fiji, and the Philippines, situating Hawai'i as a diasporic and regional hub of the Asia-Pacific region. This qualitative research utilized a comparative methodology, secondary literature, and interviews of experts in women, gender, and sexuality studies to analyze the implementation of limited comprehensive sex education. This paper contends that comprehensive, age-appropriate sex education within educational systems, along with community-based support services, will effectively reduce gender-based violence in the Indo-Pacific region.

Introduction

Power relations often mediate global changes, be they on peace or security. The concept of power holds immense potential for change; however these changes can be contradictory depending on the context in which power is exercised. Relating this to gender-based violence, power takes a toll for the worse when it is exercised in manners that perpetuate harm, resulting in continued victimization of persons affected by such offenses. Gender-based violence in a broad term that covers emotional, sexual, psychological, and physical forms of harm based on gendered power inequities. Throughout the Asia Pacific, and specifically in Fiji and the Philippines, gender-based violence remains prevalent on account of multiple cultural, political, and socio-economic factors that impact the broader development of societies. Placing Hawai'i at the center, given its diversity, it provides an important lens through which, considering how these issues are manifesting within diasporic Asian and Pacific Islander communities, enabling connections to be made between experiences in the region and those within migrant contexts.

Sex education is often a broad and hotly contested concept; however, incorporating comprehensive sex education into formal systems of education, coupled with community outreach initiatives, has the potential to shift existing power dynamics and address gender-based violence. This project aims to analyze how power relations perpetuate gender-based violence in Fiji, the Philippines, and Hawai'i, and how sex education and community-based approaches will function as policy tools to mitigate these intersecting challenges.

Review of literature

Gender-Based Violence

The reasons behind these violent incidents are still numerous and intricate, despite their substantial number. The most recent NCVAW report claims that discriminatory and subservient patriarchal society, women's vulnerability, and unequal power relations between men and women, husbands and wives, children and parents, employees and employers, people, teachers, students, and the state are the main causes of GBV. According to the findings, which is the subject of this article, "patriarchy" impact and the existence of unequal status and power relations between men and women are probably the most common causes of GBV in this nation.¹ According to the UN Secretary-General's 2015 report on sexual violence states, "a common point across the varied contexts examined is that waves of conflict-related sexual violence take place against a backdrop of structural gender-based discrimination".²

Case Studies: Hawai'i, Fiji and the Philippines

Hawaii's diversity is evident in the way it brings people from Asia and the Pacific together, particularly with the presence of the Filipino diaspora and Pacific Islanders, including those from Micronesia and Samoa. The cases of gender-based violence are high among Philippines, Fiji, and Hawai'i being placed at the center as a melting pot has these diaspora connections to Asia and the Pacific due to its geographic location and the history. It is interesting to note that, despite considerable efforts to customize the intervention for young people of Asian, mixed Asian, and Pacific Islander origin, the intervention's impact did not differ between Asian Pacific Islander and Non-Asian Pacific Islanders adolescents. The results showed that, whereas non-API kids had higher sexual violence knowledge scores at pre, this pattern flipped at follow-up, with API youth now scoring higher than non-API youth.

¹ Muhammad Kholis Hamdy, "Gender Based Violence", Dec 2, 2022, p. 74. Accessed at <https://doi.org/10.15408/empati.v11i2.29751>.

² Jacqui True, "Women, Peace and Security in Asia Pacific" *UN Women*, 2016, p.13. Accessed at

<https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2016/12/emerging-issues-in-naps-on-wps>.

Only sexual violence knowledge was shown to differ between the two groups from pre to follow-up.³

In contrast to the article in 2014, a recent news article published by UH News in collaboration with the School of Social work stated that, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander adolescents are reported to have faced or be at risk of sexual violence with alarming statistics considering the population representation.⁴ In Fiji, "a variety of social, political, economic, and cultural factors combine to create an environment where women are particularly vulnerable to abuse." Fiji has one of the worst rates of domestic violence in the world. According to the most recent data from the Fiji Women's Crisis Center, 64% of Fijian women have experienced physical or sexual abuse at some point in their lives at the hands of an intimate partner. This comprises 34% of victims of sexual abuse and 61% of victims of physical assault.⁵ While in the Philippines, official data on gender-based violence (GBV) in the Philippines is too inconsistent to draw firm conclusions, critics imply that Duterte's sexist remarks contributed to an increase in GBV.⁶

Absence of Sexual Education and Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence is a complex problem, everyone is more vulnerable to violence if comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is not implemented globally. CSE contains information on a variety of subjects, such as human development, gender identity, sexual behaviors, communication skills, empathy, and mutual respect, that is scientifically supported, developmentally and culturally appropriate, and medically correct.⁷ The lack of sexual education often stems from stigma, carried by cultural and religious beliefs that deem these topics immoral for young people. Naz, in her article on religious and cultural barriers to sex education in Fiji, argues that religious beliefs significantly influence how sex and sexuality education are interpreted, as evidenced by numerous workshops held over the years.⁸ A recent study conducted by a group of researchers in Hawai'i states that findings show that sex education is still narrowly oriented, centered on abstinence, restricted to heterosexual relationships, and of little utility

to students at the time of delivery and in the future.⁹ In the Philippines, ever-increasing religious culture over the past few decades has made sex education a controversial subject there. The Philippines continues to see a rise in adolescent pregnancies despite the importance of pro-abstinence sentiments in the nation given its religious base.¹⁰

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to examine how power relations contribute to the perpetuation of gender-based violence (GBV) and how the absence of comprehensive sex education reinforces these dynamics across Hawai'i, Fiji and the Philippines. A comparative case study approach is utilized to analyze similarities and differences across these three contexts, with Hawai'i positioned as a regional and diasporic hub within the Indo-Pacific.

The research draws on both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data consists of semi-structured interviews conducted with key informants, including a faculty member from the Department of Women, Gender & Sexuality Studies at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, an executive director of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement, and a student from the Philippine education system. These perspectives provide insight into institutional, community, and lived experiences related to sex education and GBV. Secondary data includes academic journal articles, policy reports, and existing literature on gender-based violence, power relations, and sexuality education.

The study is guided by a transnational and interdisciplinary framework, integrating perspectives from gender studies, sociology, and development studies to analyze how cultural, religious, and political structures shape both GBV and access to sex education. By situating Hawai'i in relation to Fiji and the Philippines, the research highlights the interconnected nature of these issues across the Indo-Pacific region.

Ethical considerations are central to this study. No direct engagement with survivors of gender-based violence was

³ Charlene Baker et al., "Utilizing a Train-the-Trainer Model for Sexual Violence Prevention" *Asian American Journal of Psychology*, 2014, p. 112. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0034670>.

⁴ UH News, "Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander adolescents face highest sexual violence risk in Hawai'i", 2025. <https://www.hawaii.edu/news/2025/09/15/nhpi-adolescents-sv-risk-study/>.

⁵ Mumtaz Alam, "Domestic violence (DV) and intimate partner violence (IPV)," *World Development Perspectives*, 2025, p.6. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wdp.2024.100649>.

⁶ Rob Jenkins, "Has the Philippines Reversed its Democratic Decline?", *IDS Bulletin*, 20, Aug, 2025, p.57. <https://doi.org/10.19088/1968-2025.123>.

⁷ Rebekah Rollston et al., "Comprehensive Sexuality Education to Address Gender-Based Violence," *The Lancet*,

June 2020, p.149. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)31477-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)31477-X/fulltext).

⁸ Rafia Naz, "Sex Education in Fiji", *Sexuality and Culture*, 20, Nov, 2013, p.666. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-013-9204-3>.

⁹ Chevelle Davis et al., "76. Let's Talk about Sex: College Students' *Journal of Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology*, April 2, 2024 p.274. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpag.2024.01.083>.

¹⁰ Kristel Yamat et al., "Should Sex Education in the Philippines Remain Taboo?," *Journal of Social Health* 5, Aug. 15, 2023, p.45. <https://doi.org/10.61072/j.osh.2023.524>.

conducted in order to minimize potential harm. All interview participants were informed of the purpose of the research, and their identities have been kept anonymous to ensure confidentiality. This approach allows for critical engagement with sensitive topics while maintaining ethical research standards.

Gender-Based Violence and Sex Education in Hawai'i

Gender-based violence and sexual education are two interrelated domains that intersect and influence one another. Hawai'i is a melting pot with different ethnicities; with that comes a lot of social issues like gender-based violence, under the umbrella of sexual violence being highly prevalent across Hawai'i. According to a community-based study conducted in Hawaii, indigenous Hawaiian women had a greater lifetime prevalence rate of sexual assault (19.0 per 100 women) than Japanese and Filipino women (7.5 and 7.9 per 100 women, respectively).¹¹ On the other hand, a study that used a school-based sample found that more Japanese college women than Native Hawaiian and other AA (Chinese, Filipino, Mixed Asian) women had experienced sexual assault, rape, and being touched or coerced into touching their attacker at some point in their lives.¹² While they all face sexual violence in different forms, often times, as history suggests, indigenous women and women of color are often at the forefront.

Foucault analyzes a recurring element in studies on sexual assault, particularly in feminist analysis, is power.¹³ These power relations come in various different forms ranging from micro to macro-level, which is again intertwined with women's sexuality and bodies. Male sexuality continuously sexualizes and threatens women's bodies, disciplining them and establishing the socially constructed feminine body as the body of the guilty pre-victim.¹⁴ Sex education becomes mandatory in combatting issues with patriarchal power relations intertwined in this. Dr. Lisa Vallin, in her interview stated that statistics from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey have indicated that kids in Hawai'i report experiencing sexual and romantic violence at alarmingly high rates.¹⁵ This suggests that GBV is prevalent in juvenile relationships throughout the state and is a concerning issue to the adolescents. The Board of Education policy, sexual health education in Hawai'i public schools must be age-appropriate, medically

accurate, and cover topics like violence prevention and healthy relationships.¹⁶ Schools are required to give it, but not all pupils participate since families may choose not to. How regularly students are taught the fundamentals of consent and safety can be impacted by variations in implementation and involvement. Consequently, the absence of sex education directly impacts population dynamics, which extend beyond adults and include children as well.

Gender-Based Violence and Sex Education in Fiji

The topic of sex and sexual education is of paramount importance for Fiji, as a central hub in the South Pacific Island nations. It plays a crucial role in improving the well-being of its people and promotes continued education and empowerment, contributing to the overall development of the country. At the same time, many individuals policies are in place that hinders the development of sex education and perpetuates GBV in the region. Addressing issues such as education, including sexual health awareness, is therefore essential in creating more stable, informed, and empowered societies. This is often attributed to their involvement in gender-based violence (GBV) or their inability to freely express their sexual freedom and autonomy. Gender-based violence is highly prevalent in these nations, primarily due to the absence of effective policy reforms. A 2024 report from the Fijian Government reveals that two out of every three women experience either sexual or physical violence throughout their lives.¹⁷ For a small nation like Fiji with a population of less than this figure is very high given that the nation has less than a million population.

Religion has a major impact on the Pacific societies in general, leading to a lot of people being misinformed or erroneous on the ethical and moral boundaries, but this shows the power religion has in these communities. A study compared religious views, focusing on Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam. Christianity, based on Deuteronomy 22:13–21, views premarital sex as evil and disgraceful; Hinduism considers sex a moral duty within marriage; and Islam teaches that sexual relations must occur within marriage, and any deviation is punishable and labeled as *zina*.¹⁸ While sex education is legal in Fiji's curriculum, the leading reason to which it is not considered mandatory in

¹¹ Sahnah Lim et al., "Non-Partner Sexual Violence among Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Adults", *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, April 21, 2022, p.1821. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380221082088>.

¹² *ibid*

¹³ Harriet Gordon, "A Foucauldian-Feminist Understanding of Patterns of Sexual Violence in Conflict," *The Philosophical Journal of Conflict and Violence*, January 2018 p.23. <https://doi.org/10.22618/TP.PJCV.20182.1.171002>.

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ Lisa Vallin, The Relationship between Absence of Sex Education and Gender-based Violence, interview by Dipshay Reddy, February 18, 2026.

¹⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷ "Fiji National Action Plan to Prevent Violence against All Women and Girls 2023-2028," UN Women – Asia-Pacific, 2023. <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/09/fiji-national-action-plan-to-prevent-violence-against-all-women-and-girls-2023-2028>.

¹⁸ Rafia Naz, "Sex Education in Fiji", *Sexuality and Culture*, 20, Nov, 2013, p.666. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-013-9204-3>.

schools is due to the religious factors that come with it. Family life education (FLE) is part of the curriculum in countries like Vanuatu, Samoa, Fiji, and Kiribati, major deficiencies persist including limited time allocated to FLE in Fiji, low teacher confidence, insufficient resources, and lack of support from religious schools.¹⁹

Religion plays a significant role in the Pacific region. However, it is essential to acknowledge that societal changes have led to the evolution of religion, where it can serve as a source of faith and belief. Nevertheless, when examining these complex issues, education remains the most effective means of progress and understanding. The Executive Director of Fiji Women's Rights Movement stated that when young people are not taught about consent, bodily autonomy, healthy relationships, and gender equality from an early age through age-appropriate learning methods, myths and unequal power relations often fill this gap. In Fiji, this dynamic is evident in several ways, as many adolescents grow up without clear, age-appropriate information about consent and respectful relationships. Cultural taboos surrounding discussions of sex and relationships frequently lead young people to rely on peers, pornography, or misinformation rather than evidence-based guidance.²⁰ The cultural factor is often intertwined with religious factors, leading to misinformation and often leading to the increment of GBV.

Gender-Based Violence and Sex Education in the Philippines

The Philippines, with its colonial history, is widely recognized as a predominantly Catholic nation. This religious influence often shapes discussions about sex, rendering it a taboo subject and discouraging open conversations about sexual health and consent. The Philippines is a crucial point to analyze, as Hawaii has a significant Filipino population, again with the political history of plantation and the issues are closely related to the Philippines. Gender based violence remains an issue today, with many people facing these issues around the country with alarming rates of violence. The Philippine Statistics Authority's 2022 National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) found that 17.5% of Filipino women between the ages of 15 and 49 have been the victims of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse at the hands of their romantic partners. As of 2021, 8,399 cases of physical violence, 1,791 cases of

rape, and 1,505 cases of lasciviousness were documented.²¹ These cases arise from an imbalance in power, which is often referred to as patriarchy while societal norms also play a significant role in these situations. The social environment clearly falls behind: 41% of victims do not seek assistance, and one in four Filipino women have been victims of gender-based violence.²² Quite often, people do not wish to seek help due to the fear of family separation which would affect them and their children.

Sex education is embedded in the curriculums. However, due to religion and faith, it is not publicly taught even though it has been mandatory. Religion once again wields its power, much like in Fiji, causing the perpetrators to perpetuate this violence in the name of their faith. A study documented that Filipino fathers or uncles, who are often in their 30s to 40s and do not have knowledge on sex education tend to sexually abuse their children.²³ It is devastating that in the wake of this sexual attack, people they trust and who are meant to protect them are abusing them. According to a student of University of Hawai'i at Manoa who migrated to Hawai'i for her tertiary education stated that "In the Philippines, sex education is not really taught in a comprehensive way. When I was in grade school, what we learned was limited to the biological aspects through science classes. We were taught basic anatomy, such as what a penis and a vagina are, but there was no detailed discussion about sex itself. Topics like safe sex, consent, contraceptives, or how to actually practice sexual health were never addressed. Sex remains a taboo subject, which is closely tied to the country's strong religious influence. As a result, sex education focuses on biology rather than real-life sexual health and decision-making".²⁴ This taboo is prevalent in various environments due to the intertwining nature of religion and power in influencing education; consequently, many individuals encounter violence. Hence, because of these related factors in each other leads to the perpetuation of GBV and the alarming cases as evidence.

Recommendations: Hawai'i, Fiji and the Philippines

In the context of gender-based violence, the power imbalance manifests in the abuse of religious and cultural authority, patriarchal norms, and inadequate comprehensive sex education. Since about 2007, the incidence of teenage pregnancies and abortions have

¹⁹ Karl Peltzer and Supa Pengpid, "Risk and Protective Factors Affecting Sexual Risk Behavior among School-Aged Adolescents in Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, and Vanuatu," *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Health*, May 30, 2016, p.413. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1010539516650725>.

²⁰ Nalini Singh, "Gender-based Violence and Comprehensive Sex Education in Fiji", interview by Dipshay Reddy, February 14, 2026.

²¹ Philippine Commission on Women, "Violence against Women," <https://pcw.gov.ph/violence-against-women/>.

²² Isabel Valdez et al., "Violence against Women in the Philippines: Barriers to Seeking Support," *The Lancet Regional Health - Western Pacific*, June 2023, p.1. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lanwpc.2022.100471>.

²³ Margarita Jaminal, "Sexual Abuses of Young Children at Home and School: A Systematic Review of Comprehensive Sexuality Education Implementation and Challenges in the Philippines" *International Social Science Review*, 2024, p.2. <https://ejournals.ph/article.php?id=25376>.

²⁴ Haaiah Canaba, Sex Education in the Philippines, interview by Dipshay Reddy, February 22, 2026.

drastically declined in several wealthy countries and one of the factors could be that public policy initiatives have significantly benefitted sex education and related sexual health care.²⁵ In an interview with Dr. Vallin, she stated that comprehensive sex education is important, there should be some sort of explicit instruction regarding consent and what constitutes ethical reasoning surrounding the use of power in a relationship as opposed to simply providing the information, and to additionally promote relational accountability and critical thinking regarding how gender roles and systems of inequity create vulnerability and build the connections between community members and those professionals who provide services related to sexual violence and/or abuse (such as therapy, legal assistance, and medical care).²⁶ Implementing sex education as a policy instrument in Hawai'i, Fiji, and the Philippines would enable these entrenched power relations rooted in gender-based violence to function as a mitigating factor.

The Hawai'i State Department of Education has recently expanded its work with the Sex Abuse Treatment Center (SATC) of Kapi'olani Medical Center for Women & Children to introduce and strengthen sexual violence and abuse education across K-12 schooling. Through this collaboration, schools will have access to SATC's locally created age-appropriate prevention curriculum and training materials, which will teach students how to identify dangerous situations, respect their bodies, set boundaries, and ask for help from responsible adults.²⁷ This collaboration with stakeholders could be used as a policy tool in Fiji as well. Ms. Singh stated that in Fiji's context, comprehensive, age-appropriate sex education is one of the most evidence-based primary prevention tools available, as it builds understanding of consent and respectful relationships, challenges harmful gender stereotypes early, reduces unintended teenage pregnancy that heightens vulnerability and early marriage, strengthens young people's communication and decision-making skills, supports boys and young men in developing positive, non-violent masculinities, and reduces stigma around reporting abuse and understanding sexual and reproductive health and rights.²⁸ While Fiji has sex education embedded in the curriculum, it has been brought to light by Jessica Work of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) Youth Network, sex education in Fiji's high schools fails to equip students with practical knowledge to navigate real-life sexual and reproductive health challenges.²⁹ Though sex education is embedded in the curriculum, many barriers prevent its full implementation, as reported by

students across the country. Hence, similar to Hawai'i, Fiji's Ministry of Education should involve stakeholders such as the Fiji Women's Rights Movement to promote comprehensive sex education for utmost outreach to the community.

In the Philippines, the issue remains enactable due to religious faith in the region, leading to a lot of misinterpretation of comprehensive sex education. Often times, sex education is regarded as biological science but comprehensive sex education involves factors of sex, safe sex, sexuality and issues surrounding all these which also includes gender-based violence too. In the Philippines, in the biology curriculum, they usually teach students about sex education as embedded in the curriculum is usually the reproductive organ and not diving into the use of contraceptives, which is important not just for safe sex but women's bodily autonomy as well.³⁰ Drawing connections to Hawai'i Department of Education's stance on sex education above from the involvement of stakeholders such as the Philippine Commission of Women and other relevant stakeholders for the purpose of addressing a lack of commitment towards sex education and combatting religious power that is present in this dynamic.

Furthermore, it can be stated that the bridge in comprehensive sex education can be filled through community cultural sex education, especially in rural communities. This is something that would be highly applicable in many Indo-Pacific countries, including Fiji, the Philippines, and Hawai'i, as a state, in order to bridge the gap between gender-based violence and lack of sex education, and this has proven to be effective in many places like indigenous communities as the solidarity piece is tied together within these spaces. A research carried out in New Zealand states that young people mentioned feeling uneasy or scared to seek help because of the unfavorable cultural perceptions about STIs. Across all study sites, young people's knowledge of STIs was very low among both Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents.³¹ To bridge this gap, it is important to work with stakeholders such as the Pacific Forum International, on initiatives like the Asia Pacific Affairs Leadership Program (APAL) to get young leaders out in the community to do work in areas that are underrepresented in the Indo-Pacific. Hence, involvement through community outreach would help bridge the gap as people will stay informed, which of course has a direct impact on the rates of GBV.

²⁵ David Paton et al., "The Impact of Sex Education Mandates on Teenage Pregnancy: International Evidence," *Health Economics*, April 24, 2020, p.790. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hec.4021>.

²⁶ Lisa Vallin, *The Relationship between Absence of Sex Education and Gender-based Violence*, interview by Dipshay Reddy, February 18, 2026.

²⁷ *ibid*

²⁸ Nalini Singh, Interview by Dipshay Reddy, Feb 14, 2026.

²⁹ Jake Wise, "Fiji's Sex Education," *The Fiji Times*, July 15, 2025. <https://www.fijitimes.com.fj/fijis-sex-education/>.

³⁰ Haaiah Canaba, Interviewed by Dipshay Reddy, Feb 22, 2026.

³¹ Janet Helmer et al., "Improving Sexual Health for Young People: Making Sexuality Education a Priority," *Sex Education*, January 26, 2015 p.165. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2014.989201>.

A strategic perspective proposed in this recommendation is for stakeholders to collaborate with institutions like the University of Hawai'i at Manoa, particularly its social science program, Advising, Civic and Community Engagement in the Social Science (ACCESS). Additionally, the Department of Women, Gender & Sexuality Studies should partner with East-West Center (EWC) initiatives and ACCESS, as EWC is highly involved in both Asia and the Pacific. The Pacific Forum, with its initiative in Asia Pacific Affairs Leadership program, could also collaborate with these institutions to promote and reach out to the community and state. For instance, the Pacific Islands Development Program, in partnership with EWC, has a fellowship called the Pacific Islands Leadership Program. This program brings young leaders from the Pacific to Hawai'i and Taiwan to explore issues related to the Pacific Islands. Similarly, the Pacific Forum, in collaboration with the mentioned stakeholders, could expand these programs, making them internationally feasible. This would allow young minds from the Indo-Pacific to visit Hawai'i and take their knowledge and initiatives back to their communities, policies, and various levels. These young leaders would then share their ideas with the community, effectively reaching out to people and exchanging knowledge not only in sex education but also on a wide range of other issues and solutions. This strategy would be highly effective in promoting sex education and implementing it in communities, policies, and various levels.

Limitations of the Study

The study has potential limitations that include reliance on secondary data to conduct the research given that most of the reports are academic journals, book chapters, and media reports. However, to bridge this, primary data was collected in the form of interviews which included people from all three case studies: a school student from the Philippines education system, a PhD instructor in the sex education field at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa, and the executive director of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement, who gave their knowledge on this topic. While these are experts in the topic, at the same time, it lacks community involvement. For ethical reasons, there was no involvement of the community, which is not just limited to the survivors of gender-based violence. The statistics included in my research are the actual reported cases; however, often times due to stigma, cultural norms, and fear of family separation, it is often underrepresented in statistics.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be stated that gender-based violence and the absence of sex education have a direct correlation. This strong correlation is rooted in the imbalance of power, which is often perpetuated through gender-based violence. Consequently, women and other gender who do not conform to societal binaries are frequently victims of this

violence. The power relations manifest in various forms, such as religion, patriarchy, race, and ethnicity, which influence the rates of gender-based violence. While sex education can serve as a mitigating factor for gender-based violence cases, the stigma associated with sex education often stems from societal perceptions that it is non-beneficial for individuals. These negative perceptions are often embedded in religious teachings, highlighting the strong link between power and sex education. Within this context, patriarchy emerges, which has a strong connection to colonial ideas, as evident in the case studies of Hawai'i, Fiji, and the Philippines. These case studies center Hawai'i as a focal point and explore how the Indo-Pacific region can draw measurable lessons from Hawai'i for Fiji and the Philippines. While sex education is embedded in the curriculum, it is often not taught properly in schools, leading to a gap in the education system that is not able to implement this idea of mitigation. Professionals have mentioned that there is a strong correlation between gender-based violence and the absence of sex education. Hawai'i has taken a stance on involving other stakeholders in order to bridge the gap, and a solution for Fiji and the Philippines would be to look at stakeholders such as the Fiji Women's Rights Movement in Fiji and the Philippine Commission of Women to work hand in hand with each other to positively incorporate sex education so that it is being conveyed to the generation. To positively approach this issue, educating the younger generation with age-appropriate content would allow for cases of GBV to allow room for decrement.

The education within schools is not enough; there needs to be community outreach, in educating the community, with the involvement of stakeholders such as the Pacific Forum inventing new outreach programs to have youth involvement in such initiatives. Hawai'i can serve as a regional hub in the Indo-Pacific by leveraging institutions like the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, the East-West Center, and the Pacific Forum to train and empower leaders who can implement comprehensive sex education and reduce gender-based violence in their home countries. Every research has potential limitations; this research has more use of secondary resources, but these were bridged using the experts' interview on the topic analyzed with people interviewed from each region. The statistical data used to support the argument may not be accurate, given the fact that often people do not report these cases due to the power present in the dynamics. Ultimately, educating people on comprehensive sex and sexuality education is a way to curb issues pertaining to gender-based violence.



Deep Sea-bed Mining, Hawai‘i’s Opposition and the Geopolitical Impacts of US DSM Efforts

By
Conrad Morgan

Introduction

By examining the pushback on and implications of the United States' Deep Sea-bed Mining (DSM) initiatives and highlighting the impacts of Hawai'i's multifaceted opposition efforts, this paper argues that it is in the best interest of US national security to stop the push for DSM and to pursue alternative avenues for mineral independence that strengthen relations between the US and its allies and partners.

Since the 1970s, it has been known that there are vast expanses of mineral deposits across the deep-sea floor. Today, as demand for critical minerals like manganese, nickel, cobalt, and copper continues to grow, these deep-sea mineral deposits have become the center of a geopolitically complex and controversial prospective industry. The collection of minerals from the seafloor, referred to as Deep Sea-bed Mining (DSM), is being pushed by governments and corporations seeking to utilize and profit from these mineral deposits. Scientists, indigenous communities, NGOs, environmental activists, and policymakers are pushing back against these efforts as the potential devastation to the seafloor and its marine ecosystems may be irreversible.

As the US advances policy and process in efforts to unilaterally pursue DSM, one of the 50 states has led an impactful multifaceted opposition to the industry; Hawaii. While the voices of Pacific communities have not been heeded by the US, Hawai'i state legislators, the people of Hawaii, and native Hawaiian leaders, continue to push back against the federal administration's relentless efforts to fast track DSM projects.

Both nationally and globally the US has received backlash as its pursuit of DSM in international waters circumvents the existing international regulatory framework. While reducing dependence on Chinese monopolized critical mineral supply chains is strategically important, the perusal of DSM threatens relationships with allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific and elsewhere that are essential to US security. This paper argues that continued pursuit of DSM is fundamentally misaligned with and counterproductive to security interests and recommends that the US invest in alternative avenues to achieve mineral security that align with and support national security interests.

What is Deep Sea-bed Mining

Deep sea-bed mining (DSM) is the process of extracting minerals from the seafloor at depths greater than 200 meters. While there are various methods of mineral extraction depending on the types of mineral deposits, the most common method is the collection of polymetallic nodules from the surface of the seafloor. These polymetallic nodules are small masses, averaging between 5 to 10 centimeters in diameter, that formed on the seafloor over millions of years.¹

The largest deposits of polymetallic nodules are found in an area known as the Clarion Clipperton Zone (CCZ), where the average sea-floor depth is between 4,000 to 5,000 meters. This 1.7 million square mile expanse between Mexico and the Hawaiian Islands is in the high seas, an Area Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ).²

Governance of DSM in ABNJ

While any DSM activity within a nation's own Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is regulated by that nation's domestic laws, the regulation and management of DSM in any ABNJ relies on international governance. The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)³ is the foundational treaty/agreement for the governance of international waters. There are 168 countries that have ratified UNCLOS; the US is one of the few countries that has not.

In 1996, under UNCLOS, the United Nations established the International Sea-bed Authority (ISA). The ISA's purpose is to regulate and govern mineral extraction in and benefit from the high seas.⁴ Only states that are parties to UNCLOS can be members of the ISA, allowing them to be part of the regulatory decision-making processes and future benefit sharing.

Concerns about DSM

According to scientists, DSM activities have the potential to cause irreversible harm to deep-sea environments and their marine biodiversity, areas that are biologically significant and have still barely been explored. Some of the main potential ecological impacts from DSM include sediment plume generation, habitat destruction, sound pollution, and subsequent biodiversity loss.

¹ Polymetallic nodules. Accessed April 2026. <https://www.isa.org/jm/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/eng7.pdf>.

² Gales, Phillip. "Clarion-Clipperton Zone." Deep Sea Mining, August 14, 2023. https://deepseamining.ac/clarion_clipperton_zone#gsc.tab=0.

³ United Nations. *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*, December 10, 1982, 1833 U.N.T.S. 397 (entered into force November 16, 1994). https://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/UNCLOS-TOC.htm.

⁴ "About ISA - International Seabed Authority." International Seabed Authority - International Seabed Authority, March 3, 2026. <https://isa.org/jm/about-isa/>.

The deep sea makes up roughly two thirds of the world's ocean.⁵ Close to 20% of the world's population depends on seafood.⁶ Deep sea marine organisms that are found nowhere else in the world are central in innovative pharmaceutical science, with the development of medications for cancer, infectious diseases, and more coming from the genetic information found in these organisms.⁷ The deep sea is also one of the largest carbon sinks on the planet and proposed DSM operations could inhibit its ability to sequester carbon from the atmosphere, which is vital to the planet and climate security.⁸

Protecting the health of the deep sea is not only important for marine biodiversity, human health, food security, and the planet's climate but it is also integral to the protection of people's cultural heritage and sovereignty. Many indigenous peoples across the Pacific and globe have deep intrinsic connections, genealogical ancestry, and spiritual connections to the deep sea.

Global Pushback on DSM

A growing number of nations are joining the stand against the prospective DSM industry. As of 2025, 40 countries have called for a moratorium on DSM, a precautionary pause to DSM, or an outright ban on DSM.⁹ Nine hundred and ninety-seven marine science and policy experts from over 70 countries "strongly recommend that the transition to the exploitation of mineral resources be paused until sufficient and robust scientific information has been obtained to make informed decisions as to whether deep-sea mining can be authorized without significant damage to the marine environment and, if so, under what conditions."¹⁰ Seventy-two companies, including Google and Apple, have signed a business statement calling for a moratorium on deep sea-bed mining activities.¹¹

US Efforts to Advance Deep Sea-bed Mining US Motivations for DSM

One of the ambitions of current federal administrations is a push to bolster the economy and shift manufacturing of goods and supply chains to US soil. Aside from strengthening the economy, one of the key motivations of U.S. efforts to strengthen domestic manufacturing and material sourcing is to lessen resource and supply dependence on adversarial nations, especially those needed for critical defense industry needs. China is now the provider of roughly 70% of global critical mineral supply and provides around 90% of mineral processing.¹² These minerals are important for clean energy, but of much more importance to the administration is how critical these minerals are for the Department of Defense (DOD) and the nation's defense manufacturing needs.¹³ Given the necessity of these minerals for the defense industry and the threats that a China reliant supply chain poses to national security, the US must find a way to meet its mineral needs that reduces dependence on China.

Efforts to build a critical mineral supply chain that is not reliant on China are important for national security, but these efforts are focused on the wrong place. The current administration has focused efforts on mineral security on being the first nation to take advantage of DSM.

While talking about the critical minerals found in polymetallic nodules during a recent congressional hearing about DSM, one US representative said "If we don't get them, China will."¹⁴ While that statement is not literally true, as the areas allocated to both China and the US in the CCZ are separate from one another, it reflects much of the sentiment and reasoning that has pushed the current administration to see DSM as not just a path toward mineral security, but a race with China that they want to win.

The issue of mineral security and the interest of adversarial nations in DSM have led the US to fast track the approval process for US DSM operations in both international and

⁵ "Deep-Sea Mining." IUCN, July 7, 2022. <https://iucn.org/resources/issues-brief/deep-sea-mining>.

⁶ Schubel, Jerry R., and Kimberly Thompson. "Farming the Sea: The Only Way to Meet Humanity's Future Food Needs." *GeoHealth* 3, no. 9 (September 2019): 238–44. <https://doi.org/10.1029/2019gh000204>.

⁷ Tortorella, Emiliana, Pietro Tedesco, Fortunato Palma Esposito, Grant Garren January, Renato Fani, Marcel Jaspars, and Donatella De Pascale. 2018. "Antibiotics from Deep-Sea Microorganisms: Current Discoveries and Perspectives" *Marine Drugs* 16, no. 10: 355. <https://doi.org/10.3390/md16100355>.

⁸ Souster, Terri A., David K. Barnes, Raul Primicerio, and Lis Lindal Jørgensen. "Quantifying Zoobenthic Blue Carbon Storage across Habitats within the Arctic's Barents Sea." *Frontiers in Marine Science* 10 (January 26, 2024). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fmars.2023.1260884>.

⁹ "Voices Calling for a Moratorium." Deep Sea Conservation Coalition, May 22, 2026. <https://deep-sea-conservation.org/solutions/no-deep-sea-mining/momentum-for-a-moratorium/governments-and-parliamentarians/>.

[conservation.org/solutions/no-deep-sea-mining/momentum-for-a-moratorium/governments-and-parliamentarians/](https://deep-sea-conservation.org/solutions/no-deep-sea-mining/momentum-for-a-moratorium/governments-and-parliamentarians/).

¹⁰ "Deep-Sea Mining Science Statement." Deep-Sea Mining Science Statement. Accessed February 2026. <https://seabedminingsciencstatement.org/>.

¹¹ Endorsers WWF deep sea mining. Accessed February 2026. <https://www.stopdeepseabedmining.org/endorsers/>.

¹² IEA (2025), *Global Critical Minerals Outlook 2025*, IEA, Paris <https://www.iea.org/reports/global-critical-minerals-outlook-2025>, License: CC BY 4.0

¹³ Hernandez, Ben. "How China's Rare Earths Dominance Reshapes Defense Strategy." ETF Database, June 4, 2026. <https://etfdb.com/gold-silver-investing-content-hub/china-rare-earths-dominance-reshapes-strategy/>.

¹⁴ U.S. Senate, Committee on Natural Resources, Deep Dive: Examining the Regulatory and Statutory Barriers to Deep Sea Mining, 119th Cong., 1st sess., 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/live/0B5Na6-z9ew>.

domestic waters. The unilateral decision for the US to move forward with the process to begin mining in the CCZ circumvents the ISA, which was created to regulate and manage DSM in international waters.

US Policy and Current Developments of DSM

In 1980, prior to the establishment of the ISA, President Carter passed the Deep Sea-bed Hard Mineral Resources Act (DSHMRA). It declared the ability of the US to create its own regulation of DSM in ABNJ.¹⁵ Under DSHMRA the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) is given the ability to issue US companies exploration licenses and commercial recovery permits in ABNJ.¹⁶ When UNCLOS was ratified in 1982 the US refused to ratify the treaty because it would require it to relinquish its sovereignty over mineral exploitation in international waters. As a non-party to UNCLOS, the current US administration has used the DSHMRA to argue it has the right to unilaterally pursue DSM in international waters, specifically the CCZ, through NOAA.

The 1953 Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (OCSLA)¹⁷ is the primary legal authority for US offshore mining in domestic waters, within its EEZ. The area of the Outer Continental Shelf is defined as “all submerged lands lying seaward of state coastal waters (3 miles offshore) which are under U.S. jurisdiction.”¹⁸ Under the OCSLA the department of the Interior’s Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) is charged with the administration of mineral exploration and development in the Outer Continental Shelf, including the granting of these leases to US companies.

On April 24, 2025, President Trump issued Executive Order 14285 *Unleashing America’s Offshore Critical Minerals and Resources*, which showed strong support for the US DSM industry.¹⁹ This Executive Order has been the basis for

federal legislation aimed at bypassing existing regulatory processes and fast-tracking federal funding for DSM related projects. It also got the ball rolling for US companies to apply for DSM permitting through NOAA.

The most prominent US-based company that has been trying to leverage any means possible to start DSM operations is The Metals Company (TMC). Prior to the current effort of US-led DSM in the EEZ, TMC and its subsidiaries, led by CEO Gerard Barron, have been aggressively spearheading controversial DSM projects in both Nauru and Tonga.²⁰ TMC and their application with NOAA have been at the center of congressional investigations and have received much international backlash.²¹

On May 1, 2026, despite, and in the midst of, much scrutiny from congressional representatives, community groups, indigenous communities, and countries around the globe, NOAA moved forward with approval for The Metals Company by announcing its determination of full compliance for TMC USA’s consolidated exploration and commercial recovery application. Not only does this move them one step closer to starting DSM in the region but the application increases their recovery area from the previous ~25,000 sq. km to an area of ~65,000 sq. km.²²

Global Pushback against US DSM

Opposition of US DSM in International Waters, the CZZ
On April 30, 2025, the secretary-general of the ISA issued a response to US Executive Order 14285 and TMC’s application for DSM in international waters. The secretary general implored that “that any unilateral action not only threatens this carefully negotiated treaty, and decades of successful implementation and international cooperation, but also sets a dangerous precedent that could destabilize the entire system of global ocean governance.” and

¹⁵ Deep Seabed Hard Mineral Resources Act, H.R. 7137, 96th Cong., 2nd sess., 1980, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/96th-congress/house-bill/7137>.

¹⁶ US Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. “Deep Seabed Hard Minerals Mining.” NOAA’s National Ocean Service, May 15, 2025. <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/deep-seabed-mineral-resources/deep-seabed-mining/>.

¹⁷ “Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act”, [The Act of August 7, 1953, Chapter 345, as Amended] [As Amended Through P.L. 119–21, Enacted July 4, 2025 <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/COMPS-857/pdf/COMPS-857.pdf>.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ “Unleashing America’s Offshore Critical Minerals and Resources.” The White House, April 24, 2025. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/04/unleashing-americas-offshore-critical-minerals-and-resources/>.

²⁰ Andreotti, Nicolò, and Franka Nodewald. “Redefining the Rules: A New Generation of Sponsorship Agreements in Deep Sea Mining?” Web log. *EJIL:Talk! Blog of the European Journal of International Law* (blog). European Journal of International Law, August 27, 2025. <https://www.ejiltalk.org/redefining-the-rules-a-new-generation-of-sponsorship-agreements-in-deep-sea-mining/>.

²¹ Tomassoni, Teresa. “Nations Denounce Deep Sea Mining Company’s Bid to Exploit Metals in the Pacific Under US Law.” *Inside Climate News*, July 29, 2025. <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/29072025/nations-denounce-deep-sea-mining-bid-pacific-us/>.

²² “NOAA Determines TMC USA’s Consolidated Deep-Seabed Mining Application Is in Full Compliance | the Metals Company.” The Metals Company, May 1, 2026. <https://investors.metals.co/news-releases/news-release-details/noaa-determines-tmc-usas-consolidated-deep-seabed-mining-0/>.

continued saying that “At a time when the global community is working collectively to develop a robust regulatory framework, any unilateral action risks undermining the fundamental principles that have guided deep-sea governance for decades.”²³

The unilateral US decision to pursue DSM in international waters has also been called out by state leaders at ISA. During the ISA’s July 2025 Council and Assembly Meeting, many member states emphasized their support for multilateralism in their opening remarks. They affirmed their support for the ISA as the only body which has the authority to manage and regulate DSM in ABNJs with some state representatives directly calling out the US and TMC.²⁴

Opposition of US DSM in Domestic Waters

Acting under the OCSLA, the US-based company Impossible Metals has begun the application process through the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) for leasing permits for DSM on the Outer Continental Shelf off the shores of American Samoa. This project has received extensive pushback from Pacific and international communities and leaders.²⁵

This is happening even though the governments of both American Samoa and Guam have orders banning DSM in their territorial waters.²⁶ Unlike DSM bans by US states, these bans are not recognized as binding by the US. Because of their status as a territory, US federal law takes precedence over territorial laws. These laws cannot prohibit US companies or BOEM from moving forward with the leasing process to mine the Outer Continental Shelf beyond the US territories’ waters.

As part of the process to move forward with lease application in American Samoa, BOEM held a community comment period for the Impossible Metals project. When this comment period concluded, the number of comments opposing the project were staggering. But even with the overwhelming opposition from the people of American Samoa, the company continued with the leasing process.

“BOEM received more than 76,000 public comments, most warning of environmental and cultural harm. It advanced anyway. Worse, BOEM expanded the potential lease area, nearly doubling its size, because it does not yet know enough about what is down there.”²⁷

On April 1, 2026, the Department of the Interior released a document that announced its plan to offer lease sale in American Samoa in August 2026. The same document announced plans for lease sales in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) in November 2026 and in the Alaska Region in December 2026.²⁸ Communities around the globe spoke out across social media and through demonstrations and rallies in strong opposition to the BOEM and Impossible Metals project in American Samoa and also in protest of U.S. DSM leases of the shores of CNMI and Alaska.²⁹

When NOAA announced the opening of applications for exploratory and commercial recovery permits on Jan. 22, 2026, TMC was the first company to submit an application, less than 24 hours after NOAA’s announcement. TMC’s submission of a full and comprehensive exploratory and commercial recovery permit application to NOAA less than a day after applications were open raised concerns from congressional leaders about the nature of TMC’s relationship with NOAA. Since the Executive Order and input of application for exploration by TMC, there have been multiple congressional hearings on both TMC’s

²³ Letra, Leda. “Statement on the US Executive Order: ‘Unleashing America’s Offshore Critical Minerals and Resources’ - International Seabed Authority.” International Seabed Authority - International Seabed Authority, May 1, 2025. <https://isa.org.jm/news/statement-on-the-us-executive-order-unleashing-americas-offshore-critical-minerals-and-resources/>.

²⁴ Robb, Samantha. “Deep-Seabed Mining: Key Take-Aways from the International Seabed Authority’s July 2025 Council & Assembly Meeting.” Ocean Vision Legal, August 18, 2025. <https://www.oceanvisionlegal.com/post/deep-seabed-mining-key-take-aways-from-the-international-seabed-authority-s-july-2025-council-ass>.

²⁵ Lamp, Kelsey. “Letter from Scientists Opposing Deep Sea Mining in American Samoa.” Environment America Research and Policy Center, August 19, 2025. <https://environmentamerica.org/center/resources/letter-from-scientists-opposing-deep-sea-mining-in-american-samoa/>.

²⁶ “An Order Implementing a Moratorium on Deep Seabed Mining Exploration and Exploitation Activities”, EO# 006-

2024, Article IV, §§6 and 7 of the American Samoa Revised Constitution and the A.S.C.A. c4.0111(b) <https://www.osas.as/ea-2024/an-order-implementing-a-moratorium-on-deep-seabed-mining-exploration-and-exploitation-activities>.

²⁷ Dragon, Jackie. “American Samoa Said ‘no’ to Deep Sea Mining, Washington Heard ‘Faster’ (Commentary).” Edited by Erik Hoffner. Mongabay, April 14, 2026. <https://news.mongabay.com/2026/04/american-samoa-said-no-to-deep-sea-mining-washington-heard-faster-commentary/>.

²⁸ “Budget Justifications and Performance Information FY 2027: Minerals Management Administration.” U.S. Department of the Interior, 2026. <https://www.doi.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2026-04/fy2027greenbookmma.pdf>.

²⁹ Brooks, Tanya. “Trump Administration Rushes Offshore Mining Lease Sales in Pacific Waters, Sidestepping Indigenous Consultation.” Greenpeace, April 17, 2026. <https://www.greenpeace.org/usa/trump-administration-rushes-offshore-mining-lease-sales-in-pacific-waters-sidestepping-indigenous-consultation/>.

application to NOAA and the prospects of US DSM projects in the Pacific and at large.³⁰

During a congressional hearing earlier this year, representatives, scientists, and activists all shared concern about DSM and TMCs application through NOAA.³¹ Concerns about DSM raised by representatives and speakers during the hearing cited potential environmental harm, impacts to biodiversity, cultural heritage, lack of stakeholder benefit, and concerns to economic viability of the proposed projects. Among the numerous concerns brought up in the hearing was the reality of mineral processing.

Even if the US were to move forward with its DSM plans, it does not have the domestic processing capabilities to utilize the critical minerals that are in the polymetallic nodules that it intends to collect from the seafloor. With the proposed permits for DSM in the CCZ, the extraction and processing of any minerals must be done strictly by U. companies. Involvement in US DSM in the CCZ by any vessels or processing companies that are headquartered in countries that are parties to UNCLOS, which is every country that has these capabilities, would be a violation of international law.

The US should be stockpiling critical minerals, including minerals in their unprocessed raw material state. But as the US lacks the capabilities to domestically process the raw material that DSM would be extracting from the seafloor, fast tracking the industry is not beneficial to short-term or medium-term investments. Even with building a US processing industry, experts say that it could take decades of investment and innovation before any realized profit is seen.³²

Congressman Jared Huffman (CA) emphasized that the only beneficiaries of DSM are a handful of CEOs and investors, several of whom were present to testify that day. Huffman reminded the committee about Nautilus Minerals, a company that TMC CEO Gerard Barren was a key promoter of and investor in,³³ and its project that Papua New Guinea Prime Minister James Marape, called “a total

failure” which led to the bankrupting of Papua New Guinea. The project got investments from the PNG government that reached nearly \$70 million, leaving the nation in staggering debt.³⁴

Opposition of US DSM from States and Territories

In the US, the states and territories that would be first to experience the impacts of DSM have been the most vocal in opposition; this same trend has been seen globally. Domestic opposition to US DSM efforts has not just been seen in congressional hearings but on the state legislative level as well.

Pushback against DSM has been happening through state legislatures since the 1990s, with Oregon being the first state to pass legislation banning DSM in its state waters in 1991. With the addition of California, Washington, and Hawai‘i, there are now four states that have passed legislation banning mineral extraction in their state waters, three nautical miles from the state’s coastline.³⁵ Both American Samoa and Guam have also passed orders banning DSM in their territorial waters. In Guam and American Samoa, though, the lease areas for the proposed DSM projects are beyond three nautical miles offshore, leaving the areas under the jurisdiction of the federal government and not the territories. Aside from the US territories in the Pacific, Hawai‘i is the US state with the most at stake with DSM.

Hawai‘i’s Leadership in DSM Opposition Hawai‘i led State-level Legislative Action

The passing of the Hawai‘i Sea-bed Mining Prevention Act (HSMMPA)³⁶ on July 9, 2024, was a massive accomplishment for the Hawai‘i state legislature and community in their efforts to oppose DSM. Like other states that have passed legislation banning DSM, the Hawai‘i Sea-bed Mining Prevention Act prohibits all mineral extraction from the seafloor within Hawai‘i state waters. While the banning of DSM in state waters is foundational to the HSMMPA, the seabed within Hawai‘i state waters is not an area of interest

³⁰ “Deep Seabed Mining: Notice of Receipt of Applications for Deep Seabed Mining Exploration Licenses and Announcement of Public Comment Period and Virtual Public Hearings.” Federal Register :: Request Access, December 23, 2025. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/12/23/2025-23795/deep-seabed-mining-notice-of-receipt-of-applications-for-deep-seabed-mining-exploration-licenses-and>.

³¹ U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources, “Deep Dive: Examining the Regulatory and Statutory Barriers to Deep Sea Mining,” hearing, January 22, 2026, video, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/live/0B5Na6-z9ew>.

³² House Natural Resources Committee, “Deep Dive.”

³³ Pyteraf, Marzena. “Crushing Report on TMC’s Deep-Sea Mining Plans.” GeoExpro, September 12, 2025. <https://geoexpro.com/crushing-report-on-tmcs-deep-sea-mining-plans/>.

³⁴ Vari, Matthew. “Papua New Guinea: Prime Minister Supports a Regional Moratorium on Seabed Mining While ‘informed Decisional Research’ Is Unavailable.” *Business and Human Rights Centre*, August 23, 2019. <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/papua-new-guinea-prime-minister-supports-a-regional-moratorium-on-seabed-mining-while-informed-decisional-research-is-unavailable/>.

³⁵ Deep Sea Conservation Coalition, “Voices Calling.”

³⁶ Hawaii State Legislature, SB2757 Text, PDF, <https://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/sessions/session2024/bills/GM1329.PDF>

for the DSM industry. With little threat of mining in Hawaiian waters, the real impact of the Act is twofold: first, inclusion of an additional amendment addressing the real threat of exploitation that DSM poses for Hawaii, and second, its function as a message of Hawai'i's stance against DSM.

What makes the HSMPA impactful legislation is its amendment of the Hawai'i Revised Statutes. This amendment introduced Article b of Chapter 190D-25, which reads: "No permit shall be issued for or in connection with the development or operation of any facility or infrastructure associated with the mining, extraction, or removal of minerals from the seabed within state marine waters."³⁷ Although the extraction of minerals from the seafloor in Hawai'i's state waters was never much of a real threat, Hawai'i's location for the DSM industry is. Hawai'i's geological proximity to the CCZ and the state's port capacity make it a prime location for the development of DSM infrastructure by any DSM companies operating in the Pacific and CCZ, particularly US companies. By including this amendment in the HSMPA, Hawai'i is removed as an option for infrastructure support of DSM operations in the Pacific. With Hawai'i taken out of the equation for DSM infrastructure development, prospective operations in the Pacific and CCZ are much more difficult and costly for companies looking to begin DSM in the region. Because of the HSMPA's inclusion of §190D-25 article b, Hawai'i is protected from being used and exploited by the DSM industry while also increasing the amount of resources and effort necessary for DSM companies to operate in the Pacific.

The second impact of the HSMPA is the message that it sent to other states, the federal administration, and the global community; Hawai'i stands against Deep Sea-bed Mining. As SB275 moved through the Hawai'i state Senate committees in 2024, over 170 pages of written testimony were submitted in support of the bill.³⁸ These testimonies came from concerned individuals, native Hawaiians, environmental activists, fishermen, local businesses, community organizations, and non-profits. This was a pivotal step in Hawai'i's fight to protect the deep sea through banning DSM, and it also brought to light how much is at stake for Hawai'i and Hawaiians when the ocean is being threatened.

Hawai'i led Congressional Efforts against DSM

In January 2025, Hawai'i Congressman Ed Case introduced two measures to Congress calling for both a national and

international moratorium on Deep Sea-bed Mining. These measures, the American Seabed Protection Act H.R.664³⁹ and the International Seabed Protection Act H.R.663,⁴⁰ affirm and reflect the voices of Hawai'i standing in opposition to DSM.

In the conclusion of his remarks, Case implored that "we should not and cannot simply fling ourselves headlong into a practice that, wholly unknown and improperly regulated, would certainly cause irreversible damage to our oceans and the communities that rely on them, damage that would far outweigh any arguable short-term benefit."⁴¹ Joining Case as co-sponsors of the measures are Representatives Huffman (D-CA-02), ranking member (senior Democrat) of the House Natural Resources Committee, Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR-01), Chellie Pingree (D-ME-1), Rashida Tlaib (D-MI-12), and Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC).

Local Action, Native Hawaiian Leadership, and Cultural Identity

While Hawai'i state legislators can influence policy within the US, the people of Hawai'i and Native Hawaiian leaders have made themselves a voice for Hawai'i and the Pacific in both local and global conversations.

In December 2023, one of the largest DSM vessels, the *Hidden Gem*, was set to arrive at a port in Honolulu. Native Hawaiian activists and community leaders organized a protest at Sand Island, where they called out the vessel and the DSM industry. Offshore from the gathering a traditional Hawaiian voyaging canoe, the *Hikianalia*, and her crew sat anchored, with the Hawaiian flag being flown on her mast. There they waited, sitting in opposition to the incoming DSM vessel. On the shore, event participants and organizers carried signs and wore shirts with the text "'A'OLE DEEP SEA MINING". With "'A'ole" meaning "no" in 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, the Hawaiian language, the message of the day was clear; Hawai'i says NO to DSM.

Following the protest, leaders of the event gathered on stage at Sand Island for a press conference with over 12 news outlets and an audience present as they spoke. They shared about the growing prospects of DSM, the irreversible consequences it could have for the ocean and marine ecosystems, and most importantly they shared about the threat that DSM poses for Hawai'i and the Native Hawaiian people and why the fight to stop DSM is so dire. During the press conference, Lahaina-born Hawaiian waterman Archie Kalepa shared about the deeply rooted connection of the Hawaiian people to the ocean and how

³⁷ Hawaii State Legislature, S.B. 2757.

³⁸ SB2575 Written Testimonies, PDF, https://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/sessions/Session2024/Testimony/SB2575_HD1_TESTIMONY_FIN_04-02-24_.PDF

³⁹ American Seabed Protection Act. Bill, Congress.gov § (2025). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/664>.

⁴⁰ International Seabed Protection Act. Bill, Congress § (2025). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/663>.

⁴¹ "Case Reintroduces Measures to Halt Potentially Destructive Deep-Seabed Mining." Congressman Ed Case, February 19, 2025. <https://case.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=3521>.

integral that relation is to his identity. “As Indigenous people who come from the sea, our responsibility is to be the voice for those who cannot speak: the beings that live beneath the sea. If we cannot protect that, who are we?”⁴² Native Hawaiian culture, beliefs, practice, and identity are all deeply rooted in the ocean, the life that exists in it, and the intrinsic responsibility to be caretakers of it. DSM threatens all of that and more.

Brittany Kamai, a Native Hawaiian professor, astrophysicist, Hokulea apprentice navigator, waterwoman, and emerging leader in Hawai‘i’s DSM opposition implored that “This [DSM] isn’t just about picking up some rocks from the bottom ocean, this is about our spiritual connections to the oceans.”⁴³ What Dr. Kamai emphasized is something rarely addressed in DSM conversations and decision-making spaces; the intangible. Even in discussions of DSM impacts on biodiversity and communities in the Pacific, the importance of the intangible connection to and relationship with the deep sea that is held by indigenous peoples is not fully grasped or given adequate consideration. Perspectives, beliefs, and cultural heritage of Hawaiians and of the many indigenous peoples of the Pacific must be taken into consideration when their home and identity is at stake.

Since the December 2023 Sand Island protest, there have been continued efforts through community organized DSM protests, summits, and paddle outs to raise awareness of the threat of DSM and show decision makers and the world that Hawai‘i says NO to DSM. Shortly after the announcement of President Trump’s Executive Order in April of 2025, Hawaiian leaders responded, calling out the president and the administration’s decision to pursue DSM in international waters.⁴⁴ Hawai‘i leaders and communities have also directly spoken out against the decision of the US to continue their pursuit of DSM on the outer continental shelf in American Samoa and CNMI.

Through continued collective action, education, and advocacy the people of Hawai‘i have been a pillar of opposition to DSM. Hawai‘i stands with communities across the Pacific urging decision makers to understand that what is at stake for indigenous people across the world, including Native Hawaiians, is much deeper than they

know. As efforts to begin DSM projects are happening across the Pacific and world, the people of Hawai‘i’s efforts to protect the deep sea have stretched far beyond the Hawaiian archipelago.

Hawaiian voices in International Arenas

One of the central leaders in Hawai‘i’s opposition to DSM has been making waves not just across Hawai‘i and the US but also in the international arena by representing Native Hawaiians in global conversations and decision-making spaces. Solomon Pili Kaho‘ohalahala, widely known as “Uncle Sol,” has become a leading voice standing up for the deep-sea, biodiversity, native Hawaiian rights, and indigenous cultural heritage in the UN and the ISA. He has fought for social and environmental justice in Hawai‘i for decades and once he learned about DSM, he decided to do something about it.

In speaking about his international work representing Hawai‘i, Kaho‘ohalahala noted that when the Hawaiian Kingdom was overthrown one of the many resulting consequences for his people was the removal of Hawai‘i and Hawaiians from the international arena. With his people’s seat at the table left vacant in international policy-making spaces, he decided to become the voice that would fill that seat.

Since it is not a party to UNCLOS, US representatives can only attend the ISA as observers. Within the US observer seats at the ISA there has been no Pacific or Hawaiian representation. Since 2021, Uncle Sol has attended the ISA sessions in Kingston Jamaica not as part of the US observer delegation but as a Native Hawaiian and a voice for the ocean. The impacts of his presence and participation in the annual sessions of the ISA have been significant, notably his leadership in efforts to make indigenous perspectives more central to the ISA’s agenda.⁴⁵

In his words; “Indigenous knowledge and perspectives have been shut out of negotiations for too long – they should be recognized and we should have the power to influence decisions that directly affect us.”⁴⁶ When The Metals Company presented their DSM proposal at an ISA session in Kingston, Uncle Sol challenged TMC on the

⁴² Fernandez-Akamine, Puanani. “‘Ōiwi Leaders Firmly Rebuke Deep Sea Mining.” *Ka Wai Ola*, January 3, 2024. <https://kawaiola.news/aina/%CA%BBoiwi-leaders-firmly-rebuke-deep-sea-mining/>.

⁴³ Richardson, Mahealani. “Native Hawaiian Leaders Take a Stand against the World’s ‘next Gold Rush.’” *Hawaii News Now*, December 15, 2023. <https://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/2023/12/15/some-hawaiian-leaders-say-no-deep-sea-mining/>.

⁴⁴ “Native Hawaiian, Environmental Leaders Raise Alarms Federal Deep-Sea Mining Order.” *Hawaii News Now*, May 1, 2025. <https://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/video/2025/05/01/nativ>

[e-hawaiian-environmental-leaders-raise-alarms-federal-deep-sea-mining-order/](https://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/video/2025/05/01/nativ).

⁴⁵ Evans, Monica. “The U.S. Wants to Mine the Ocean Floor. Can Anyone Stop Them?” *Think Landscape*, September 1, 2025. <https://thinklandscape.globallandscapesforum.org/96923/can-we-stop-deep-sea-mining/>.

⁴⁶ Kaho‘ohalahala, Solomon Pili. “What Global Deep Sea Mining Negotiations Are Missing.” *Greenpeace International*, March 29, 2024. <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/story/66154/uncle-sol-pacific-voices-say-stop-deep-sea-mining/>.

absence of cultural considerations in their plan. TMC countered that prior to his presence in the ISA that wasn't something that they had considered but now they plan to address the issue, though at the time they still did not know how to do so. Uncle Sol cited this interaction as an example of why having a seat at the table in the ISA is important to him.

"We are not just here to be participants, we are here because we carry responsibility to protect our world for future generations. Indigenous People of the Pacific have been defending the oceans for centuries and hold the key to protecting it for future generations, just like my Kūpuna have protected it for me."⁴⁷

Because of leaders like Solomon Pili Kaho'ohalahala and his decision to stand up for the ocean, for Hawaii, and for future generations, in both the UN and the ISA, spaces where the United States fail to represent the needs and perspectives of the people whose land they claim and occupy, the voice of Hawai'i and the ocean is being heard. With the wellbeing of the ocean is at stake, the people of Hawai'i will continue to challenge the administrations, corporations, policy makers, and decision-making bodies that threaten the deep sea and Hawaiian identity. Though the Deep Sea may be too far away for us to hear, the people of Hawai'i and Hawaiian leaders like Uncle Sol have made sure that its voice does not go unheard.

DSM Pursuit Jeopardizes US Security Interests : Undermining of International Ocean Governance Framework

While being a leader of, or even merely a participant in, global ocean governance is not a priority for the current U.S. administration, US DSM efforts pose a threat to the foundations of global ocean governance. In a response to Executive Order 14285, the Secretary-General of the ISA stated that "any unilateral action ... sets a dangerous precedent that could destabilize the entire system of global ocean governance."⁴⁸ As the US continues its unilateral efforts to begin DSM in the CCZ, circumventing the ISA regulations and procedure that 168 other countries are abiding by, it could have impacts on more than just the ISA.

Threats to Inter-state Relations in the Indo-Pacific and Beyond

US relationships with its partners and allies, especially within the Indo-Pacific region, are central to its defense and international relations. The administration's decision to

open US applications for DSM in the CCZ, through NOAA as the regulatory authority, and their decision to move forward with BOEMs permitting in American Samoa, CNMI, and Alaska pit the interest and decisions of the US against those of many states in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. Although U. actions may not be breaking international law, they are knowingly going against the rules, regulations, and procedures set by the ISA that the 168 states party to UNCLOS are abiding by.⁴⁹ Not only would US mining in the CCZ undermine the collaborative governance of the world's ocean but it would undermine decades of work and collaboration with US partners across the Indo-Pacific. The decision by the US to move forward with current and future DSM projects in international and domestic waters would be fundamentally counterproductive to national security goals. By going against internationally recognized regulations and the concerns of the Pacific community, the US puts at risk many of its relationships in the Indo-Pacific region and abroad.

Though mineral security is a top priority for the current administration and the DOD, there exist multiple avenues to achieve these goals that do not have the potential negative impacts to US relations in the Indo-Pacific. The US should be allocating resources and effort to exploring these options rather than DSM.

Alternative Pathways Toward Mineral Security Technological Innovations

With increasing demand and subsequent price of critical minerals, innovations in current and emerging technologies look to shift away from dependence on these materials and find better ways to source them. Leading developers in battery technology have been pioneering sodium-ion technology as a replacement for standard lithium-ion.⁵⁰ Sodium, in contrast to lithium, is a vastly abundant and easily accessible material.

Along with technical innovation working to shift industry needs away from reliance on critical minerals, to easily accessible and abundant materials, industry leaders are finding ways to utilize accessible sources of critical minerals. Efforts toward a circular economy are continuing to grow as innovations in recycling technology led to the capability to recover minerals from existing components and waste. Another viable avenue for sourcing critical minerals that is the result of technological innovation is revisiting existing land-based mines. With modern advancements to mineral processing, the yields recovered from just the tailings of closed mines would be higher than

⁴⁷ Kaho'ohalahala, "Global Deep Sea Mining."

⁴⁸ Letra, "Statement on the US Executive Order."

⁴⁹ "Chronological Lists of Ratifications of, Accessions and Successions to the Convention and the Related Agreements." United Nations Oceans & Law of the Sea. Accessed March 2026.

https://www.un.org/depts/los/reference_files/chronological_lists_of_ratifications.htm.

⁵⁰ Li, Qiang, Ulderico Ulissi, Zibin Liang, Xiaoxia Chen, Bingkun Guo, Xinxin Zhang, and Chuying Ouyang. "Progress and Prospect of Industrialization of Sodium-ion Battery in China." *Advanced Energy Materials* 16, no. 2 (October 23, 2025). <https://doi.org/10.1002/aenm.202504877>.

the yields of those same mines during peak production. Accessibility of and unique advantages offered by the recovery of critical minerals from existing domestic mine tailings strongly justify its prioritization as part of a comprehensive US supply-security strategy.⁵¹

Strengthening Partnerships with Allies

Investing in alternative battery technology, a circular economy, and revisiting already accessible mine tailings are viable options to promote mineral security. What is needed, in addition to and conjunction with these alternatives, is to work closely with allies to build a diverse resistant supply chain.

Recently, the US brought together 40 countries to discuss building a mineral supply network. Creating a global network/collaboration/body to ensure critical supplies security would strengthen relations within the Indo-Pacific and globe, rather than threatening those integral relationships (like DSM would).⁵² If the underlying interest is security, not just beating China to metals in the deep sea, then relationships with partner and ally states globally and specifically in the Indo-Pacific are what the federal administration should direct efforts and investment in.

Recommendations for the US

1. Stop all efforts to fast-track US-based companies' approval to begin DSM in the CCZ and in US domestic waters.
2. Prioritize working closely with allies to develop a diverse and resistant critical mineral supply chain that does not involve DSM.
3. Ratify the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, allowing the US to become a member of the International Seabed Authority where it can bring its interests into the regulatory decision-making process.
4. At a minimum, the US should follow the example of other states and put a precautionary pause on efforts to begin mining in the CCZ, and in US waters.

Conclusion

US efforts to pursue DSM in both state and international waters have become the center of international conversation and concern. As the United States moves forward with the intention of becoming the first nation to begin Deep Sea-bed Mining in international waters, the international community and the people of the US are

waiting to see what this risky venture could mean for the world, international law, regional tensions, and our ocean. Leaders across the globe and from the US have condemned and called out the US actions and decisions to unilaterally engage in DSM in international waters and within its domestic waters. In multiple congressional hearings leaders, representatives, experts, and leaders have pushed back against DSM efforts and raised an extensive number of concerns and consequences that lay in the wake of the proposed DSM projects. Individual states have pushed back against the prospective industry by passing legislation banning DSM in their state waters. Of those opposition pressures, the efforts and actions from Hawai'i have substantial significance.

Hawai'i has become a leader for DSM opposition in the US, the Pacific, and the international community. Along with Hawai'i-led state and federal legislative action, the people of Hawai'i and Native Hawaiian leaders have spoken up locally and in the international arena to oppose an industry that threatens their livelihood, their home, their cultural heritage, their identity, and their future. Thus far, the US and the companies it is working with have not listened to those voices nor that other people across the Pacific and the broader international community.

The people of Hawai'i and Hawai'i state legislators have utilized the means at their disposal to push back against DSM. While their efforts have been impactful, they have not been able to stop the federal government's relentless pursuit of DSM. It will require action from the federal administration for current U.S. DSM efforts to be halted.

While meeting mineral needs is important for the US economy and security, especially in efforts to lessen dependence on China for defense critical minerals, the prospective gain of mineral supply and control that DSM would provide is not worth the exacerbation of existing disputes and inter-state tensions in the Indo-Pacific that it would create. If the current administration's goal in achieving mineral independence is to maintain and bolster US security, then it must stop the pursuit of DSM in both international and domestic waters and instead invest in solutions that utilize and strengthen relationships with partners and allies. It is unwise and shortsighted for the US to fast track an economically risky industry venture that requires blatant disregard to international laws and regulations. Long-term US security depends not just on defense and critical mineral resource control, but also on strong allies and partnerships, regional stability and trust, and participation in collaborative international governance.

⁵¹ Podgorney, Robert, Travis McLing, Anthony Nickens, Shannon Bragg-Sitton, and John Wagner. "Critical-Minerals Recovery from Mine Tailings: A Technical Review and Strategic Assessment." Idaho National Laboratory, April 2026. <https://inl.gov/content/uploads/2023/07/Mine-Tailings-April-26.pdf>.

⁵² Usman, Zainab. "The US Is Internationalizing Its Critical Minerals Industrial Policy." Web log. *Energy Explained* (blog). Center on Global Energy Policy at Columbia University SIPA | CGEP, February 13, 2026. <https://www.energypolicy.columbia.edu/the-us-is-internationalizing-its-critical-minerals-industrial-policy/>.

Conrad Morgan

Whether the US will abandon its efforts to do DSM is uncertain, but in the midst of this uncertainty, one thing is certain is the people of Hawai'i will not stop fighting Deep Sea-bed Mining. Only time will tell if the US will recognize that what is best for the ocean is also best for our nation's security.





Food Security

A Case Study of Hawai'i

By
Quinn Sakihara

Introduction

When you ask most people about the Pacific, they tend to generalize the place rather than think about the specific islands that exist throughout the region. Yet, the Pacific is extremely diverse on almost every metric. This diversity means that each of the many small islands and atolls faces different issues with different solutions. One problem that runs throughout the Pacific is food insecurity and this paper explores that with a focus on Hawai'i.

Food security is defined as "the state of having reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food."¹ But food security is more than a mere definition; it is a concept that exists "when all people at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life."² Food insecurity can also reflect the difference between what is preferred by a society and what they need. This paper focuses on food insecurity within Hawai'i and explores ways to practice food sovereignty. Ancient Hawai'i once enjoyed food security, but in recent years, it has faded as a result of modernization and reliance on imported goods. Though there are many cases where locals practice food sovereignty on smaller scales to allow themselves to become secure with their food, it is only a drop of water within the ocean. As time passes and generations shift, imported food has become the new norm for "food security" here in Hawai'i but it is not sustainable or reliable in the long run.

Often the terms "food security" and "food sovereignty" are seen as different terms, but that is not the case. Food sovereignty is defined as "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems."³ The idea of food sovereignty is incorporated into the idea of food security because it puts the people's aspirations and needs ahead of who produces the food.⁴ This all comes together when it is recognized that both Hawai'i and Samoa once had food sovereignty to create food security. Samoa is worth mentioning when discussing food security because Samoa, like Hawai'i, is also very reliant on imported goods. The problem becomes clear when focusing on the quantity of imported goods in both Hawai'i and Samoa. A decade

ago, Hawai'i imported 85-90% of its food.⁵ This high reliance on imported foods suggests that Hawai'i's food sources might not be as secure as perceived.

Being reliant on imported foods may seem like a good thing, but there are many reasons why this is not a secure food source. Relying on another place or country for food is slightly insecure. It is not completely insecure because it is good to have a balance of imported goods and locally grown goods in case one source struggles. Having a fallback if a source of food is struggling is a form of security but relying mostly on other places to import food is like putting all your eggs in one basket. What if that basket breaks? In addition, the global economy and price fluctuations also influence good imports. Fluctuating prices will make some smaller islands vulnerable to overspending on food or not being able to afford as much food as they need and or want. Transportation prices also impact imported goods. For example, keeping five vessels going (assuming they cost the same) for a whole year would cost \$218,605,800.⁶ Fuel is not cheap and it accounts for 50-60 per cent of total ship operating costs.⁷ Trade policies also have affected prices for consumers with the most notable being Trump's "America First" trade agenda which imposes a 10 percent tariff on all imported goods (as of February 24, 2026). While this does not affect the entire Pacific, it does affect notable islands in the Pacific such as Hawai'i and American Samoa. To find a solution to today's crisis of food insecurity, understanding how food sovereignty was used to create food security in Old Hawai'i is key.

Hawai'i was once a place where people lived off of the land, where there was a common understanding of structure and commitment needed to do so. This mentality, in turn, allowed Native Hawaiians to be more secure when it came to food production. Generations of native Hawaiians in Old Hawai'i cared about feeding themselves, but they also had a focus on being able to feed generations to come. That future-orientation was something that Native Hawaiian culture prided itself on and it showed through food production organization and cultural beliefs. For example, consider how the *ahupua'a* system was a lifestyle organized and divided by natural flowing streams. Traditionally, land distribution within a kingdom or group of people was strictly done, with land being divided among each of its

¹ Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, "Food security," accessed July 13, 2026, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/food-security>.

² World Bank, "What is Food Security? There Are Four Dimensions," accessed July 13, 2026, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/agriculture/brief/food-security-update/what-is-food-security>.

³ La Via Campesina, "What Is Food Sovereignty?," accessed July 13, 2026, <https://viacampesina.org/en/what-is-food-sovereignty/>.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Hawaii State Office of Planning, Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism, *Increased Food Security and Food Self-Sufficiency Strategy: A State Strategic/Functional Plan* (Honolulu: Office of Planning), accessed July 13, 2026, https://files.hawaii.gov/dbedt/op/spb/INCREASED_FOOD_SECURITY_AND_FOOD_SELF_SUFFICIENCY_STRATEGY.pdf.

⁶ Elizabeth Stratotis, "Fuel Costs in Ocean Shipping," *More Than Shipping*, January 22, 2018, <https://www.morethanshipping.com/fuel-costs-ocean-shipping/>.

⁷ *Ibid.*

rightful owners. While there was land ownership in Old Hawai'i (with wedges of each island being overlooked and managed by [ali'i](#) and [konohiki](#)), there was a common understanding that inhabitants living on an island must work together to sustain their island.⁸ This in turn loosened the strict ideology of land ownership. Furthermore, the enforced idea of seasonal restrictions and careful gathering of certain resources, depending on the conditions of the *ahupua'a* and the "resource stewardship guided by cultural authorities,"⁹ was put into place to practice food sovereignty and to gain food security.

Just as the *ahupua'a* system was a lifestyle, the *kapu* system was as well. The word "kapu" in this context essentially means forbidden, sacred, holy, or taboo."¹⁰ Native Hawaiians used *kapu* as a system to regulate society, power, or resources. Furthermore, because the *kapu* system regulates resources, it acts as a way to achieve food security. For example, chiefs would put *kapus* on certain fishing grounds or specific areas during spawning season to prevent overfishing and overuse of land. This ensured balance with society, where Natives Hawaiians knew that if they obeyed this *kapu* then they would not have to worry about future famine or worry about a lack of resources in the future. A more practical example of the *kapu* system was when cows were first introduced to Hawai'i in 1793.¹¹

When cows were introduced to the island of Hawai'i, there was an immediate *kapu* put on them. King Kamehameha I put a ten-year *kapu* on them to let the population grow and prosper. This decision and the thought of future generations not only ensured food security, it created opportunities for ranching industries which also helped grow the population of cows even more. Another aspect of the *kapu* system that ensured food security was social roles in men and women, particularly in men. Men in Old Hawai'i had many different responsibilities, one of them being strenuous labor that included farming and building to sustain each agricultural system within each *ahupua'a*. Commoners and their social roles in Old Hawaii society were not to be underestimated; they were the foundation of regulation, ensuring the productivity of food for the present and the future. Once there were many other ways Native Hawaiians were able to be secure with their food,

but obtaining food security is not something that is merely obtained. To keep food security in Hawai'i, it must be managed, people need to trust the process, and there needs to be a common understanding of what it can look like.

All around the world, different places, at some different times, have all been secure with their food. Though different places have different ideas of how to reach food security, there is one thing that most places lack: resilience to shock. Resilience to shock can come in many different forms, but generally it means having a "plan B" and being able to triumph through difficult situations. Being shocked and or surprised by something such as a natural disaster, war, and or government corruption are a few things that governments and people sometimes cannot control. A good, but unfortunate, example of this is Samoa/American Samoa. Throughout time, Samoa has been secure with their food, being reliant on themselves to create organized, sustainable, year-round cultivation of certain crops.¹² In many ways they were like Ancient Hawaiians: they shared a common understanding of some type of organization to feed themselves and future generations. But Samoa's collapse of food security didn't happen because of colonization; frequent natural disasters had a role as well. In 2009, Samoa was devastated by a tsunami that caused over \$200 million dollars in damages and killed hundreds of people; even before, they were subjected to severe cyclones in 1990, 1991, 2004, and 2012.¹³ Frequent severe natural disasters mean that they have been unable to acquire food security. Today, 67% of retail beef and roughly 95% of chicken consumed is imported rather than locally grown.¹⁴

The problem of food insecurity is being recognized nationally as well as by communities in Hawai'i, with people trying to make a difference by locally selling, growing goods, and teaching traditional ecological knowledge to attempt to cut costs and support the local economy. A prominent community in Hawai'i that demonstrates this is Waimānalo, on the east side of O'ahu. Its residents try to make a difference through their actions. Their mission is "to propagate and perpetuate Hawaiian culture by teaching community members to grow their own food through multiple methods of home food

⁸ Nation of Hawai'i, "The Ahupua'a System: Traditional Hawaiian Land Management," last modified February 22, 2026, <https://www.nationofhawaii.org/ahupuaa/>.

⁹ Nation of Hawai'i, "Ahupua'a System."

¹⁰ Mary Kawena Pukui and Samuel H. Elbert, *Hawaiian Dictionary*, s.v. "kapu," in *Nā Puke Wehewehe 'Ōlelo Hawai'i*, accessed July 13, 2026, <https://www.wehewehe.org>.

¹¹ National Park Service, "The Paniolo," Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park, last updated June 24, 2024, <https://www.nps.gov/havo/learn/historyculture/paniolo.htm>.

¹² Holger Droessler, *Coconut Colonialism: Workers and the Globalization of Samoa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022).

¹³ National Centers for Environmental Information, "On This Day: 2009 Samoa Islands Tsunami," National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, September 29, 2019, updated August 25, 2023, <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/news/2009-Samoa-Tsunami>.

¹⁴ Government of Samoa, *Samoa Food Systems Pathway 2030: Transforming Food Systems for a Resilient and Healthy Samoa Where No One Is Left Behind* (Apia: Government of Samoa, September 2021), https://www.unfoodsystemshub.org/docs/unfoodsystemslibraries/national-pathways/samoa/2021-09-20-en-samoa-food-systems-pathway-report-unofficial.pdf?sfvrsn=54926048_1.

production.”¹⁵ One of the most prominent ways is backyard hydroponics. Backyard aquaponics supports the idea of self-sustainability, and it also shows how food sovereignty leads to food security. This essentially mimics the *ahupuaʻa* system, “where fish and plants symbiotically grow in a sustainable and ecological system” by optimizing the usage of the water itself and the nutrients within it.¹⁶ This concept is shared among the community and not just kept within an inner circle. Waimānalo community leaders have been working with the MALAMA program to get grants to spread their message of food sovereignty and food security by practicing it and holding workshops for the community. Based on the previous work of Waimānalo community leaders and the MALAMA program, they were able to hold seven hands-on family-based workshops over three months with 10 different families (Chung-Do, 2024).¹⁷ Each workshop was about three hours long and “focused on increasing participants’ knowledge and skills related to gardening, fish help, aquaponics technology, nutrition, traditional medicine, etc.” with participants also giving up their weekend to learn how to build their own aquaponics system in their home.¹⁸ This program has allowed a part of the island that is susceptible to floods to have a fallback if their normal source of food is not available, making it more food secure. Though this is a great way to spread the message of self-sustainability, food sovereignty, and food security, it only focuses on a part of the island rather than the entire chain of Hawaiian Islands. Importantly, it could be applied to each island, and I want to build off that.

Being able to reach food security in Hawaiʻi is not straightforward and there are many things that need to be addressed to do so. For starters, the community and the people must be on the same page when it comes to food security. This can either be done through policy or through community engagement. There needs to be more of a balance between both community engagement and food policies. Though this balance exists within Hawaiʻi, the state has more of a policy approach to solving this problem. The policies already in place are helpful, but there needs to be more community engagement to allow communities across Hawaiʻi to be on the same page for food sovereignty and food security. This is not an instant process, but the example set by Waimānalo is a good first step. To further expand those ideas and actions, the MALAMA program could fund more communities in other islands to spread

the idea of food sovereignty and food security. Another important element is having balance between imported food and foods that are locally grown. Being dependent on locally grown foods should be a goal, but having a fallback is more secure. Finally, communities must be involved when it comes to food security. A community needs to embody the idea of being self-sustainable and people need to actually care and take action. This differs from being on the same page because one feels embodiment, which means you deeply care. Embodiment requires action.

There are many different policies in Hawaii that address the issue of food insecurity for the people who live on the islands. There are SNAP benefits for families that need help to put food on the table or free lunch and breakfast for students in public schools who cannot afford to regularly pay for meals during school, and others. Looking at the bigger picture, the first policy that needs to be tweaked is the policy behind Native Hawaiian Public Land Trust Allocations. This policy refers to “the State of Hawaii’s obligation to allocate 20% of revenues from ceded lands to the Office of Hawaiian Affairs”;¹⁹ that percentage should be higher. Today, there is an annual disbursement of \$15.1 million. That is a lot of money, but if that percentage was even slightly higher it would allow for more money to go toward community grants, loans and financial assistance to Native Hawaiian individuals and families, and advocacy and operations. This will in turn allow communities to depend less on imported goods because the money will allow communities to depend more on their own food supply while allowing for more advocacy for self-dependency when it comes to food.

Other policies that need to be tweaked are the Hawaii Senate Bill 1249/Act 235 and Hawaii Senate Bill 1249. These bills penalize individuals who trespass, poach, and steal off of farmland. But they should be stricter, especially when it comes to illegal poaching and theft on agricultural lands. Currently, first time offenders are fined a minimum of \$500 and up to 3 days in jail for trespassing and \$10,000 dollars and 5 years in prison for illegal poaching.²⁰ If the state were to increase fines and jail time then less people would commit these acts, allowing more room for farmers to grow locally with less worry. This, in turn, would allow for more opportunities for people to buy local food and encourage food security. So, instead of three days as a penalty increase

¹⁵ Jane J. Chung-Do, Phoebe W. Hwang, Ilima Ho-Lastimosa, Ikaika Rogerson, Kenneth Ho Jr., Kauʻi DeMello, Dwight Kauahikaua, and Hyeong Jun Ahn, “MALAMA: Cultivating Food Sovereignty through Backyard Aquaponics with Native Hawaiian Families,” *Genealogy* 8, no. 3 (2024): 101, 3, <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy8030101>.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁸ Chung-Do et al., “MALAMA,” 6.

¹⁹ Office of Hawaiian Affairs, “Fulfilling the State’s Public Land Trust Revenue Obligations,” last modified March 20, 2026, <https://www.oha.org/plt/>.

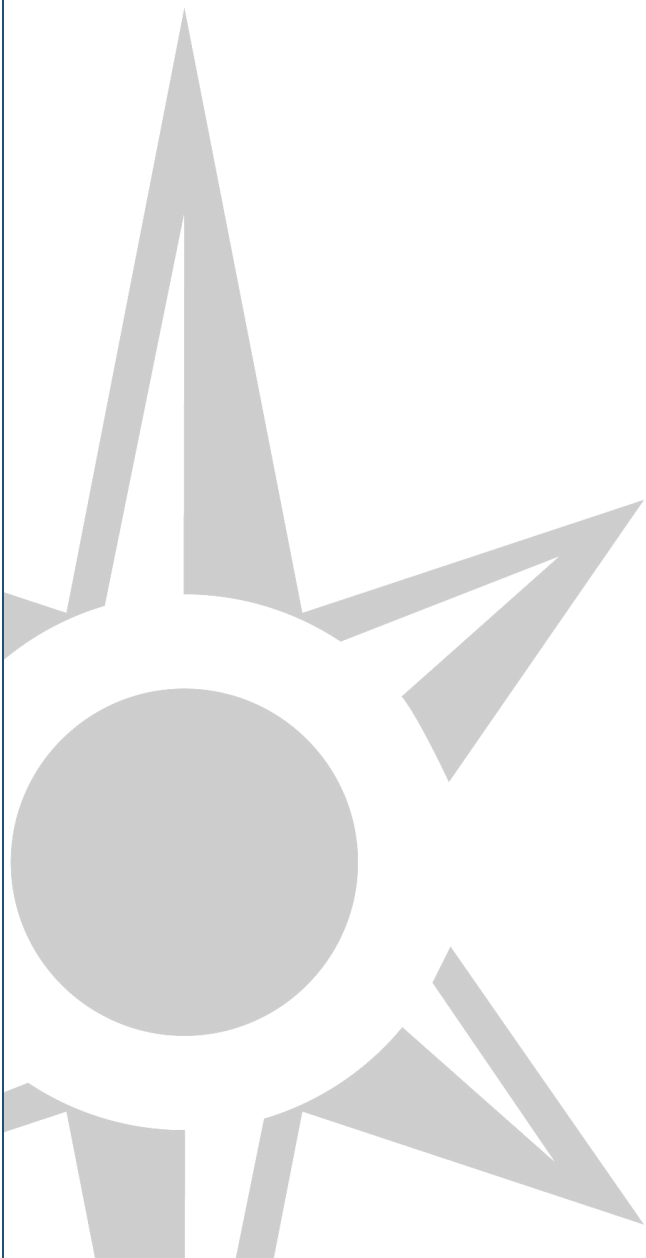
²⁰ Hawaii State Legislature, Senate, S.B. 128, Relating to Trespass, 2025 Regular Session, introduced January 10, 2025, https://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/session/measure_indiv.aspx?billtype=SB&billnumber=128&year=2026.

Thomas Heaton, “Agricultural Crime Remains Rife Across Hawaiʻi As Security Lags,” Honolulu Civil Beat, June 4, 2025, <https://www.civilbeat.org/2025/06/agricultural-crime-rife-hawaii-security-lags/>.

it to a year or instead of five years, make it seven years, forcing a miscreant to think more about his or her potential actions.

Another aspect of food security is storage for food that is produced and not shipped in. Hawai'i already has establishments that store fresh food, but there is not enough. To reach my threshold of a comfortable amount of food security in Hawaii, there must be more space to hold more fresh, locally grown food. Spending money and time to create or expand storage would be in the state's best interest. The price of food will go up, but it will be worth it. The quality of food will be better, and it would allow Hawai'i to be more prepared for natural disasters or increased shipping prices of imported foods. Clearly, Hawai'i cannot stop importing food but we should rely less on it and create more space for locally grown food to be stored. That will allow Hawai'i to be less reliant on imported goods while encouraging more people of Hawai'i to grow and buy locally to be more secure with their foods.

Food security is important because not having to worry about food security will promote stability and anxiety will diminish as there will be enough food for everyone and citizens won't have to worry about future generations not being able to eat. Unfortunately, Hawai'i is dependent on imported foods, which raises great concern about future stability. For Hawai'i to reach total food security we need to approach food security as did Native Hawaiians while also being realistic given the current state of Hawai'i. There needs to be a balance between policy and action, a balance between imported goods and locally grown goods, and the actions taken need to be embodied by the people that inhabit the land. If more people took action to promote food security while also following my other criteria, there will be significant change in Hawai'i. The next step is to figure out how we can get people to take action and care about the future of their food.



Predatory Governance or Pacific Partnership? Risk-Shifting and Worker Agency in the PALM Scheme and Beyond

By
Natan Mariusz Mazur

The Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme is one of Australia's principal labor-mobility programs for the Pacific. It permits approved Australian employers to recruit workers from nine Pacific island countries and Timor-Leste for short-term jobs of up to nine months and long-term placements of one to four years when domestic labor is unavailable.¹ Australia presents the scheme as mutually beneficial: employers fill persistent vacancies, while workers earn higher incomes, develop skills, and send money to their families. Those benefits are real and should not be minimized. Yet the scheme also places unusual control over migration status, work, housing, transport, and sometimes debt repayment in the hands of employers. This paper therefore asks whether PALM operates as an equitable Pacific partnership or whether its institutional design shifts a disproportionate share of economic and social risk onto workers. I use "predatory governance" not to claim that every employer exploits every worker, but to identify a system in which predictable vulnerabilities are created by policy and then treated as individual employment disputes. Worker agency, in turn, means the practical ability to choose, leave, report abuse, and obtain a remedy without risking deportation, destitution, or exclusion from future recruitment.

The consolidated PALM visa stream commenced in April 2022, and the Seasonal Worker Programme and Pacific Labour Scheme were fully consolidated under a single program deed and guidelines in July 2023. The unified scheme now serves sectors including agriculture, meat processing, hospitality, and care work. Its development rationale is inseparable from foreign policy. Australia's own public materials describe labor mobility as central to engagement with the Pacific and as a means of deepening connections among governments, businesses, and communities. That framing does not itself prove exploitation. It does, however, mean that working conditions under PALM have consequences beyond ordinary labor administration. A program promoted as evidence of regional partnership will damage Australia's credibility when workers experience wage theft, unsafe housing, or retaliation. In a Pacific environment marked by sharper strategic competition, the treatment of mobile workers becomes part of the evidence by which island governments and communities judge whether Australian partnership is reciprocal or extractive. This is an analytical inference from the program's stated diplomatic role, not a

claim that labor mobility was created solely to counter China.²

The most important structural issue is the relationship among the worker's visa, approved employer, and right to exit. PALM workers are recruited for employment with an approved employer, and transfers generally require formal authorization rather than unilateral movement through the labor market. The approved-employer guidelines impose welfare, pay, accommodation, recordkeeping, and grievance obligations, but they also organize the worker's stay around the sponsoring employer. This creates a basic asymmetry. An Australian worker who encounters poor conditions may resign and seek another job; a PALM worker must consider whether leaving will jeopardize lawful status, income, accommodation, and eligibility to return. The state has added transfer pathways and compliance safeguards, yet the practical bargaining position remains unequal because the costs of exit are concentrated on the worker. The result is not literal ownership of labor, but a constrained labor market in which the legal capacity to change jobs is weaker than the formal right to complain.³

Evidence from workers confirms that this constraint affects behavior. A Migrant Justice Institute survey of 370 PALM workers conducted in late 2024 found that 64 percent would change employers if labor mobility were permitted, 60 percent wanted to move in order to be treated better, and 30 percent identified unsafe work as a reason to move. The same study found substantial reluctance to report workplace problems: 42 percent believed that no or few workers would tell anyone beyond friends or coworkers about incorrect pay, only 34 percent said they would report an unsafe instruction outside that circle, and fear of losing a job was the most common reason for silence. The survey was not a random census of every PALM worker, so it should not be used to estimate an exact scheme-wide prevalence of abuse. Its value is narrower but still significant: it demonstrates that fear, employer dependence, and anticipated retaliation are common enough among respondents to shape reporting and exit decisions. In other words, formal complaint channels do not automatically produce effective access to justice.⁴

Official enforcement data point in the same direction while also showing why careful wording matters. The Fair Work

¹ Australian Government, "Employers," Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme, accessed July 27, 2026, <https://www.palmscheme.gov.au/employers>.

² Australian Government, "Frequently Asked Questions," *Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme*, under "When Did the PALM Scheme Visa Commence?" and "Does the PALM Scheme Replace the Seasonal Worker Programme and the Pacific Labour Scheme?," accessed July 27, 2026, <https://www.palmscheme.gov.au/faq>; Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "The Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) Scheme," accessed July 27, 2026, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/pacific/engagement/pacific-australia-labour-mobility-scheme>.

³ Australian Government, PALM Scheme Approved Employer Guidelines, version 2.1, effective March 27, 2025, Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme, accessed July 27, 2026, <https://www.palmscheme.gov.au/resources/palm-scheme-approved-employer-guidelines>.

⁴ Laurie Berg and Bassina Farbenblum, "Right or Wrong, Just Accept It": How Employer-Tied Visas Foster Fear and Silence among Pacific Workers on the PALM Scheme (Migrant Justice Institute, 2025), 18–25, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/593f6d9fe4fc5c458624206/t/693a265cc289ff4b24517cd0/1765418588541/MJI%2BPALM%2BREPORT%2BFINAL%2B11Dec.pdf>.

Ombudsman reported that, from July 2019 through the end of the 2024–25 reporting year, its compliance activity involving PALM-approved employers had commenced 288 investigations, issued fourteen infringement notices and seventy-two compliance notices, and recovered more than A\$807,000 for approximately 2,000 workers. These figures establish verified noncompliance; they do not show that all approved employers violate the law or that every investigation found wrongdoing. The defensible conclusion is that underpayment and related breaches are recurrent enough to require a specialized enforcement effort. Because many PALM workers live in regional areas, depend on employer-arranged transport, and may fear consequences for future recruitment, it is reasonable to treat detected violations as a minimum measure rather than a complete count of harm.⁵

Income volatility and deductions further transfer risk from firms to workers. Current PALM settings require minimum hours and a minimum net-pay guarantee, reflecting the government's recognition that workers need protection against weeks in which deductions and insufficient work leave them unable to meet basic expenses. Even under strengthened rules, workers may repay employer-fronted travel and arrival costs, and employers frequently arrange accommodation and transport. Those arrangements can be useful, especially on arrival, but they also combine several relationships—boss, creditor, landlord, and transport provider—within one institution. The concentration matters because a worker disputing a deduction may also depend on the same employer for a bed and a ride to work. A Lowy Institute analysis by Matt Withers, drawing on Australian government estimates for 2018–22, reported that PALM employers earned A\$289 million in direct profit, while workers remitted A\$184 million, spent A\$136 million with Australian businesses, paid A\$74 million for accommodation, and contributed A\$70 million in taxes. These aggregate estimates do not prove that any particular deduction was unlawful. They do show that the scheme's economic gains are distributed across workers, employers, landlords, businesses, and government rather than flowing primarily to Pacific households.⁶

The scheme's social costs are less easily measured but equally central. Long-term placements can separate workers from spouses, children, and community support

for years. Employer-arranged rural accommodation may intensify isolation, while limited transport can make health care, union assistance, and independent legal advice difficult to reach. The approved-employer framework requires welfare support and grievance procedures, but a right that cannot be exercised safely is weaker than it appears on paper. The Migrant Justice Institute's findings are especially important here: respondents overwhelmingly wanted to return to Australia, yet many also feared that reporting a problem could cost them work or future access. That combination, high demand for the opportunity and fear of exclusion, helps explain why workers may tolerate conditions they would reject in a labor market with genuine mobility. Economic benefit and vulnerability can coexist; one does not cancel the other.⁷

New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme provides a useful comparison because it was often presented as a well-managed model of circular migration. The New Zealand Human Rights Commission nevertheless reported evidence of exploitation, unreasonable pay deductions, restrictions on personal and cultural freedoms, and grossly inadequate housing after consulting workers and visiting accommodation sites. The comparison suggests that pastoral-care obligations and employer accreditation are necessary but insufficient. When a visa is tied to a limited group of employers and workers rely on those employers for housing and transport, the same structural risks can emerge even in programs designed around development partnership. New Zealand's experience therefore reinforces the core institutional point: monitoring individual employers cannot substitute for giving workers credible exit options.⁸

Hawai'i offers a different, historically grounded comparison. The Kingdom of Hawai'i's 1850 Masters and Servants Act established a system of contract labor. The analogy to PALM must be used carefully. Contemporary PALM workers possess legal rights, wages, modern labor protections, and access to government enforcement that nineteenth-century contract laborers did not. The relevant continuity is narrower: plantation systems demonstrate how law can organize labor mobility around the needs of an industry while making departure costly for the worker. Hawai'i's history warns against judging a labor system only by whether workers entered a contract formally. The

⁵ Office of the Fair Work Ombudsman, Annual Report 2024–25 (Canberra: Australian Government, 2025), 52–53, <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-10/office-of-the-fair-work-ombudsman-2024-25-annual-report.pdf>.

⁶ Australian Government, "Minimum Hours Requirement," *PALM Scheme*, accessed July 27, 2026, <https://www.palmscheme.gov.au/resources/minimum-hours-requirement-and-interaction-minimum-net-pay-guarantee>; Australian Government, "Frequently Asked Questions," *PALM Scheme*, accessed July 27, 2026, <https://www.palmscheme.gov.au/faq>; Matt Withers, "The Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme Is Helping Some Workers but Harming Others," *The Interpreter*, October 23, 2024,

<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/pacific-australia-labour-mobility-scheme-helping-some-workers-harming-others-it>.

⁷ Berg and Farberblum, "Right or Wrong, Just Accept It," 18, 25–28.

⁸ New Zealand Human Rights Commission, *The RSE Scheme in Aotearoa New Zealand: A Human Rights Review* (Wellington: New Zealand Human Rights Commission, 2022), 5–7, https://tikatangata.org.nz/cms/assets/Documents/Reports-and-Inquiry/Employment/The_RSE_Scheme_in_Aotearoa_New_Zealand_A_Human_Rights_Review_HRC_website.pdf.

substantive question is how much meaningful choice remains after recruitment, debt, housing, and legal status are combined.⁹

The modern Compact of Free Association (COFA) case is also instructive, though for a different reason. Citizens of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau may live and work in the United States without an employment-sponsored visa, so they possess far greater formal job mobility than PALM workers. Hawai'i state research estimated that COFA migrants supplied roughly 5,130 workers during the 2013–17 period and generated substantial household spending and economic activity, while average COFA household income was far below the statewide average. Federal policy historically excluded many COFA migrants from key safety-net programs, shifting costs toward host jurisdictions and families. Congress restored Medicaid eligibility in December 2020, and the Compact of Free Association Amendments Act of 2024 restored eligibility for SNAP and several other federal programs. These restorations require correction of older accounts that still describe blanket exclusion from Medicaid or SNAP. Even so, the historical record shows that free movement alone does not guarantee equal social protection. PALM and COFA thus illuminate opposite sides of worker agency: PALM restricts exit through employer-linked migration administration, while the COFA experience shows how economic insecurity can persist even where legal mobility is broad.¹⁰

Taken together, these cases support a reform agenda focused on reducing concentrated employer power rather than merely adding information sessions. First, PALM should move toward portable, sector-based visas that allow a worker to transfer among compliant employers without requiring the original employer's consent. A rapid, independent transfer mechanism is essential for workers alleging underpayment, violence, harassment, or unsafe work. Second, minimum-income rules should operate as a genuine weekly floor rather than a distant average, with deductions disclosed before departure and independently reviewable. Third, accommodation should be inspected by bodies independent of the employer, and workers should have access to alternative housing where a serious grievance exists. Fourth, government-funded interpreters, unions, and community legal services should be able to contact workers without employer mediation. Finally, long-term workers should receive expanded options for family accompaniment or funded home leave. These

proposals follow the risks documented by enforcement agencies, worker surveys, and the New Zealand human-rights review; they are not claims that a single reform will eliminate exploitation.

Reform is also strategically rational. Australia has chosen to present PALM as a flagship expression of Pacific partnership. That claim will be credible only if workers can exercise the rights the scheme promises. A program that produces higher earnings while making exit dangerous is development with a structural flaw; a program that combines higher earnings with mobility, enforceable minimum income, independent housing oversight, and safe reporting is a more defensible partnership. The central policy test is therefore not whether PALM creates benefits—it plainly does—but who bears the loss when crops fail, hours fall, deductions rise, housing becomes unsafe, or an employer breaks the law. At present, too much of that risk remains with the individual Pacific worker. Shifting it back toward employers and the state would strengthen worker agency and make Australia's regional-development narrative more consistent with the lived experience of the people on whom the scheme depends.

⁹ University of Hawai'i–West O'ahu Center for Labor Education and Research, "Hawai'i Labor History Timeline," accessed July 25, 2026, <https://westoahu.hawaii.edu/clear/research-resources/labor-history-narratives/hawaii-labor-history-timeline/>.

¹⁰ Hawai'i Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism, *COFA Migrants in Hawaii: Their Contributions and Impact on the State Economy* (Honolulu: DBEDT, 2020), 3–8, https://files.hawaii.gov/dbedt/economic/reports/COFA_Migrants_in_Hawaii_Final.pdf; U.S.

Department of the Interior, "The Compacts of Free Association and Living in the United States," accessed July 27, 2026, <https://www.doi.gov/oia/COFAinUS>; Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, "COVID-19 All-State Call," March 9, 2021, 12, <https://www.medicaid.gov/resources-for-states/downloads/TranscriptCOVID19AllStateCall03092021.pdf>.

Tokyo Reflections from the 2026 APAL Young Leaders

Once in a lifetime experience. I first heard this phrase in a course learning 茶道 (chadō), Japanese tea ceremony. Meaning “one time, one meeting,” 一期一会 is a popular term in tea ceremonies, signifying every ceremony as unique. This way of thinking can also be applied outside of tea. Acknowledging that every interaction and experience is special, it teaches us to be mindful in our everyday life. Therefore, we must cherish these experiences and reflect upon them with gratitude, as no two encounters are the same. Reflecting on our trip to Japan with the Asia-Pacific Affairs Leadership (APAL) Program, I came to understand 一期一会 as a lived experience that encouraged me to value each interaction, embrace discomfort as part of growth, and approach cross-cultural exchange with greater intention.

In the final year of my Geography Master’s at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, life has felt especially demanding. At the same time, growing up in Kaua‘i, Hawai‘i taught me to embrace opportunities as they come. As a first-generation student, I have been supported by my family in seeking adventure and broadening my perspective by experiencing the world. For this reason, I chose to participate in the APAL Japan trip to learn more about our program in an international context. In addition, having previously studied Japanese abroad in Kyoto, I was especially excited to return to Japan for a different purpose.

One of the most meaningful parts of the trip was deepening relationships with others in the program. During our regular meetings, there are rare moments for us to talk casually or get to know one another on a personal level. Traveling together created space for those connections to grow, and I was able to see different sides of my peers. We learned more about the important work each of us are doing, which allowed us to exchange knowledge and culture. The deeper relationships we developed are especially valuable for APAL, as we build ideas through shared understanding.

Moreover, the trip gave me the opportunity to build relationships beyond our cohort. I found myself inspired by the younger high school students who joined the program. Watching them participate so openly and thoughtfully made me reflect on my own experiences and younger self. At their age, I do not think I would have had the courage to participate in an experience such as this. It can be intimidating to enter professional and academic spaces with people who are older. However, seeing them engage so thoughtfully with the material and cross-cultural issues was encouraging, and it made me excited to see where the future takes them. Having the opportunity to engage with Japanese university students also made the trip impactful, as it created a space where we could exchange ideas across cultural and national backgrounds. Reflecting on the trip, I truly value the interactions with and input from the students outside of our direct cohort, as it further diversified our conversations.

Meanwhile, given the nature of the program and the issues we discussed, the trip also included difficult conversations and uncomfortable moments. At times, those moments revealed that not all perspectives were equally present or represented in the space. That discomfort stayed with me, making visible the limits of who is often included, listened to, or centered. Sitting with those moments was not easy, but it became an important part of the experience for me. It made me realize how important it is for people with different positionalities and lived experiences to be part of these conversations. With this, although the discomfort was challenging, it solidified my participation in this trip and program, and I have come to see it as an opportunity to grow. Representation matters, especially in leadership, international dialogue, and cross-cultural spaces. More than anything, the experience reinforced my sense of responsibility to speak up and offer my perspective in these uncomfortable spaces.

For the APAL program, it is vital to create space where students feel comfortable and safe to share our perspectives and experiences. Especially given the program’s focus on Hawai‘i issues and our place within the global order, I believe the trip would have been strengthened by including an opportunity for us to share the Hawai‘i-based research projects we are developing through the program. Doing so could have created more room for meaningful dialogue, mutual learning, and a deeper understanding of the perspectives each of us brings. It also would have given us the valuable opportunity to receive feedback from our peers and the other students. With this in mind, future programs might consider having students begin their research projects earlier so they are better prepared to share them during the international trip.

Ultimately, this trip reminded me why 一期一会 remains such a powerful way of approaching everyday life. At this stage in my life, 一期一会 felt especially pertinent as I am often so focused on deadlines and other academic responsibilities to fully appreciate the present. I found the significance of this experience in the people I met, the conversations we shared, and the moments that challenged me. It deepened my relationships, broadened my perspective, and reminded me to stay present even during a busy and demanding time. Reflecting on this journey, I am grateful to those who took the time to meet with us, as well as for the chance to experience these moments as no encounter can be repeated in exactly the same way. Thus, the trip reminded me that growth often begins in the moments we are willing to truly be present for. As I move forward, I will carry this experience with me as a reminder to meet each moment with gratitude and an openness to grow.

Of course, Japan is known for its unique culture, breathtaking skylines, and mouth-watering food (despite me not eating fish). On this trip with the Asia-Pacific Leadership group, I expected to have meaningful conversations about Japan and come home with a better understanding of the country. What I did not expect was how deeply the experience would shape my thinking. What stayed with me most was the deeper reflection Japan stirred in me about leadership, vulnerability, responsibility, and the human side of security.

One of the most profound parts of the trip was the opportunity to visit the National Diet, Japan's equivalent of Congress, and to meet with Representative Kusama Tsuyoshi, whose work spans national security, digital society, and next-generation defense industries. I was able to share my personal insights regarding the United States' defense posture and innovations in the Hawaii theater. It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity! There was something powerful about stepping into a place where policy was not so abstract, where decisions are not just debated in theory in roundtable exercises but shape the future of an entire nation. I was standing in a space where leadership carries consequences that are immediate and real.

The defense conversations deepened that realization and highlighted a contrast between Japan and the United States that stayed with me long after the trip. In the US, defense can sometimes feel like a concept shaped by abundance (abundance of distance, abundance of resources, and abundance of assumptions about our role in the world). In Hawaii, we always talk about the tyranny of distance, meaning the distance has unforgiving disadvantages, but after hearing about the challenges Japan faces, we are fortunate for some of that distance. We are buffered by oceans, protected in ways that allow many Americans to think of defense as something far away, something that happens elsewhere, something mediated through headlines and institutions rather than by proximity. Japan does not have that luxury. Japan's strategic reality feels much more intimate, much more compressed, and much more urgent. When I reflected on the idea that Japan may have only minutes to respond in certain threat scenarios, it changed the way I thought about defense entirely. It stopped feeling theoretical. It became human. It became immediate. It became a matter not of broad political rhetoric, but of time, coordination, survival, and consequence.

That contrast deeply affected me because it revealed how geography shapes not only policy, but national psychology. Japan's leadership, especially in defense, seems shaped by a constant awareness of vulnerability. The country is an archipelago. It sits close to regional threats. It lives with the realities of missile timelines, contested waters, and natural disaster risk all at once. Because of that, defense does not seem to exist in a separate category from daily life. It is not only about military power or the possession of weapons, but is about readiness, integration, civil protection, logistics,

infrastructure, and the ability to act quickly when time is unforgiving. It made me realize that true security is not flashy. It is not measured by what a nation owns, but by whether it can organize, communicate, and respond when the moment comes.

One of the ideas that affected me most during the trip was the distinction between having capability and being able to operationalize it. That sounds simple. It is easy to admire the visible parts of defense, like technology, systems, weapons, advanced platforms, but those things mean far less without structures that allow them to function under pressure. What struck me in these conversations was the emphasis on integration; joint operations across land, sea, and air, the need for strong intelligence collection and organization, and the challenge of shortening the loop between observing, orienting, deciding, and acting. This idea applies far beyond military strategy and applies to leadership itself. Much of life is not about what we say we value, but whether we are prepared to act on those values when tested. In that way, the defense conversations in Japan felt unexpectedly personal to me. They became a reflection not only on nations, but on people, on how readiness, discipline, and clarity matter in moments when there is no time to pretend.

The tabletop exercise was probably the most eye-opening part of the trip for me, because it pushed all those ideas from theory into perspective. Being placed in a group, given a scenario, and asked to think through a country's priorities and concerns forced me to step outside my own frame of reference. The exercise exposed how easy it is to assume that others think the way we do, respond the way we expect, or define their interests the way we define ours. Once we began working through the scenario, it became clear that every country has its own historical memory, economic dependencies, domestic pressures, and strategic fears. Decisions that might seem obvious from an American perspective are not obvious when viewed through someone else's geography, vulnerabilities, or political realities.

That was one of the deepest impressions Japan left on me: a heightened respect for complexity and a stronger awareness of how dangerous it is to flatten the world into simplified narratives. I was especially struck by the conversations about Southeast Asia and how many countries in the region do not want to be forced into rigid alignments, even when larger powers want clarity. It made me think deeply about the limits of American assumptions. We often imagine that countries should respond according to our strategic logic, but they are not extensions of our worldview. They are navigating their own realities, often in environments shaped by trade relationships, fragile cohesion, historical wounds, and difficult choices between autonomy and dependence. Seeing that more clearly made me reflect on how important it is to approach international issues with humility. Real understanding requires more than identifying threats; it requires contextual literacy, the

By Kyla Lee

ability to connect the dots without erasing the people who live between them.

What also stayed with me, in a way that felt especially emotional, was the emphasis on civil resilience. That phrase sounds technical at first, but the more I sat with it, the more personal it became. If a nation becomes a battlefield, what happens to the people who call that place home? What happens to families, to infrastructure, to the ordinary rhythms of life that are so easy to overlook in strategic conversations? That question moved me deeply because it reminded me that security is never just about deterrence or force posture. It is also about care. It is about whether leadership remembers the people beneath the maps and battle plans. That awareness left a lasting impression on me because it reframed defense as something more moral than I had previously considered. It is not only about preventing war; it is about protecting the conditions that make life possible.

Beyond the policy and defense discussions, what made the trip so meaningful was the range of people we met and the diversity of perspectives we were able to engage in. There was something incredibly energizing about being in conversations with people from different backgrounds, different areas of expertise, and different ways of seeing the world, all of whom were united by a seriousness about the future of the region. Those conversations reminded me how much growth happens when you are willing to listen carefully, ask better questions, and let yourself be changed by what you hear.

By the end of the trip, I began to think more seriously about leadership, vulnerability, and defense, and it helped me see the Indo-Pacific not just as a region shaped by power and competition, but as a deeply human space shaped by history, dependence, and consequence. Even though I had been to Japan before, this trip reached me differently because I experienced it not just as a traveler, but as someone trying to understand the world more honestly. It challenged me to sit with complexity instead of looking for easy answers. What I brought home was more than just omiyage, it was an impression that quietly changed the way I see the world.

From March 10th to March 13th, I had the opportunity to travel to Tokyo, Japan as a participant in Pacific Forum's Hawai'i Asia-Pacific Affairs Leadership (APAL) Program Study Tour. Throughout our three busy yet eventful days, we had the opportunity to meet various experts, academics, and other young leaders involved in the U.S.-Japan relations, foreign diplomacy, and national security and defense. We attended presentations on U.S.-Japan relations and Japan's role in the Indo-Pacific, partook in moderated discussions on next-generation perspectives, conducted a scenario-based simulation, and visited the National Diet. Before partaking in the study tour, I was unsure about what to expect. My main academic focus throughout college has been anthropology, sustainability, and development within international relations so I had limited knowledge about American national security and defense. I also had very basic knowledge on Japan's national security since I had only briefly learned about Japanese military history and Article 9 from my Japanese politics course.

Through a presentation about Japan's role in the Indo-Pacific, I gained a greater understanding of pressing challenges and concerns regarding national security in Japan such as technology outflow and nuclear arms in China, North Korea, and Russia. Efforts to counter those challenges and concerns have not been easy. For instance, Japan has been pushing for cross-operations but have not been successful due to different functions and culture. Emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) and 3D printing may help, specifically for improving logistic capacity. In terms of defense preparedness, there was discussion about Japan's lack of preparedness due to Article 9.

I was surprised to learn about the lack of awareness and discourse of defense issues in Japan as well as misinformation in social media about national defense. I had the opportunity to pose a question about how contextual literacy about Japan's national defense can be promoted within the general public. My question was answered by various recommendations such as fact checking centers and increased local government involvement in monitoring misinformation. The absence of a Japanese military and national defense as a topic in daily conversations, especially compared to the U.S., became more prominent to me as we continued on the study tour. Since we returned from the study tour, I have actually been reading various news reports and scholarly articles to learn more about the U.S.-Japan alliance and Japan as one of America's most critical allies in the Indo-Pacific.

Aside from national security, I was also able to learn about the U.S.-Japan relations through cultural diplomacy, which is one of my main interests. A presenter shared his perspective on shifts between the U.S.-Japan bilateral grassroots relationship, especially within exchange programs and challenges such as decrease in federal funding for international exchange scholarships. As someone heavily involved in global education and

international exchange programs, it was initially disheartening to hear but I remained hopeful because I believe that our participation in this study tour contributed to strengthening the U.S.-Japan bilateral relationship.

One of my personal highlights in the study tour was being part of the moderated discussion on next-generation perspectives with other participants from APAL, Japan and South Korea. I was initially nervous because this was my first time participating in a moderated discussion with a focus on the Indo-Pacific but this ended up being one of the most intellectually stimulating discussions I have been a part of. Many of us came from different socioeconomic, cultural, academic, and professional backgrounds so I enjoyed hearing each participant's perspective. There were nuanced conversations about Japanese and South Korean youth engagement in politics, power divisions in the global order, and geopolitical implications with new administrations in Japan and the US. During student discussions, I had the opportunity to ask the Japanese and Korean students about their views of youth engagement in politics in their own respective countries which challenged my previous assumption about low youth engagement in politics. The Japanese and Korean students expressed that they felt optimistic about youth political representation. One participant stated that after the martial law crisis in 2024, there was actually an increase in civic participation within the South Korean youth. In addition, another participant shared that there was a rise of young voters in Japan's most recent election. The usage of social media played a significant role in political candidates garnering support from youth voters. The public also had mixed opinions about the first female Prime Minister, Sanae Takaichi. From the discussion, I heard various different views and arguments about Prime Minister Takaichi shaped by her stance on women's empowerment, gender stereotypes, and foreign policies. They also discussed about whether or not the Japanese constitution should be revised specifically to address Article 9 and laws about same-sex marriage.

The following day after discussions, we visited the National Diet and met with a member of the House of Representatives, which further challenged my previous assumption about low youth engagement in politics. I was shocked to see large groups of students from elementary to high school, partaking in tours around the National Diet. As we were walking with the representative, we passed by a group of elementary students. They immediately recognized him and were very excited to meet him. It was this moment where I started reflecting on the discussion from the previous day about youth engagement. Being able to witness students learn about politics at a young age and talk with other young leaders during our moderated discussion broadened my understanding of youth participation in Japan and South Korea.

This study tour greatly challenged me to think about foreign policy and the U.S.-Japan relations outside of my own academic experiences and research. I left Japan with a

By Reycajen Magbulos

greater interest in national security, especially about Japan's national defense. I am incredibly grateful to have gotten the opportunity to partake in this study tour and be part of the next generation of young leaders in the major political, economic, and security issues of the region. Mahalo nui loa Pacific Forum and the Takitani Foundation for this transformative experience!

My time in Tokyo with the Pacific Forum expanded and made tangible my understanding of the US relationship with Japan, and it allowed me to gain a fuller and more expansive understanding of everything I have learned, discussed, and been working on since starting as a participant in the APAL Program. The formal lectures, conversations, and simulations we had while in Tokyo opened my eyes to the nuances and considerations present in US-Japan relations and international relations both globally and in the Indo-Pacific Region. The most reorienting of my takeaways was how central human relationships are in all levels of our international relations. Even within the complicated arenas of global politics and shifting power dynamics, both historically and presently, the personal relationships of individuals, along with their understanding of and experience with another person's culture, shape their perception of the other. If we are to strive for peace, cooperation, collaboration, and mutual flourishing within the global community, we as individuals, along with our diplomats, policy makers, and leaders, must continue to create and foster real human relationships with the people in the places we serve.

The experience that brought together a lot of the different things that we'd been learning, talking about, and observing was a simulation where we all were divided into groups and played the roles of advisors to the US-Japan, and Korea. During this simulation, I saw firsthand how important it is to be able to put ourselves in the shoes/perspectives of others when working with them and figuring out how to navigate these complex relationships in tense situations. When we have a better understanding of a person, actor, group, or state, we are able better predict how they will respond/react in potential scenarios. Simply put, if we don't have a real understanding of who the people and states we are trying to work alongside and with are, then we are not able to make informed decisions that take into account the position and perspective of the other. While understanding the other is advantageous in foreign relations in a tactical sort of sense, that is not the only reason that we must seek to understand the people we aim to work with or against. To do diplomacy well, we must have an understanding of who the other is, their history, the history of our relationship with them, and what their values and motivations are. While the list of what it takes to understand another person or state extends further than that, it was made evident through our simulation how critical it is to know and understand who we are working with, not just in a transactional way, but rather in a human way. We must build human relationships with people. For when we can see others as individual people, who have feelings, families, hardships, struggles, joys, and lives just like our own, we are not only able to gain a necessary understanding of who they are, but we can see them for what they are: a person.

Prior to our group's simulation exercise, we had a lecture from and conversation with an American professor from Temple University Japan. We were presented with an in

depth look at the reconciliation journey that was taken by the United States and Japan. During this discussion, he highlighted the importance of relationships in seeing humanness in the other, especially when they, their race, or country is villainized. He shared with us about how John Hershey's work, *Hiroshima*, which was published in 1946, just a year after the atomic bombings, was pivotal in the reorientation of the American people's moral compass. As it made its way to the people of an America, which was saturated with racist and dehumanizing depictions of Japan and its people, this book drastically reshaped Americans' perception of the Japanese people by doing one key thing: making them human. John Hershey's writing opened the eyes of Americans to the reality that the Japanese were not what hate filled war time propaganda had painted them to be. Rather, they were just like them. They were real people, with real stories, with real pain, and everything else that can be summed up into humanness. Through the stories of the six individuals whose pictures were printed on the back of the book, Hershey was able to create a relationship between them and the reader, instilling in the reader the understanding that the people of Japan were just that: people.

While history and ideas can be learned in a classroom, having the opportunity to see and experience those things firsthand illuminates so much of the picture. The importance of relationships, while understood idealistically in my mind, wasn't fully understood until I started to take in and observe how central the relationships between our Pacific Forum leaders and the people we met with were to us, even being in Japan. With each individual that we got to meet, learn from, and talk with while in Tokyo, it was obvious that at the heart of the connection of the Pacific Forum with Japan are the person-to-person relationships. From the Diet member, we got to meet with our program leaders' friends who joined us for meals; each person we met was there because of their relationship with someone from or with the Pacific Forum. On top of that, their involvement with and connection to the Pacific Forum didn't stop at the end of a program or fellowship, but it carried on because of the relationships they have with the people who make up Pacific Forum. The connection is maintained because it was made by relationship, by friendship.

Having the opportunity to see relationships made by Pacific Forum members and to make our own relationships with people there, really made me aware on a new level of the fact that even policy, international relations, and decision-making spaces function and success are all contributed to and made possible by individual relationships that people make and have with one another. As I move forward in my pursuit of connecting policy makers with community visions across the Pacific, I will carry with me a curiosity to understand, learn about, and learn from the people, communities, and places that I aim to work with and serve. I will strive to build long-lasting personal relationships. The time and experience I shared with my fellow APAL Program participants in Tokyo

By Conrad Morgan

helped me gain a fuller picture and understanding of our role as global individuals representing our home in the Pacific as we build relationships with our allies and friends across the globe.

Having visited Japan on several occasions, I didn't anticipate that this trip would offer anything new. While I had always appreciated the city's vibrant lights and the remarkable politeness of its people, I previously assumed I had seen all there was to experience. However, my 2026 trip to Tokyo as a part of the APAL program stands out as my most enjoyed and memorable experience to date. A massive part of that shift came down to the sheer expertise and comfort that Brad and Jesslyn brought to the table. In my previous travels I'd often resort to Ubers or taxis to avoid the intimidating complexity of the Japanese transit system. This time, navigating the city felt like second nature. Learning to master the public transportation system under Brad's guidance was good for getting from point A to point B, but also feeling like I ingrained myself into the culture a little more as well.

Brad and Jesslyn were great organizers, but they also served the function of tour guide as well. Whether we were walking through a quiet neighborhood or a bustling district, they would pepper the journey with relevant historical context and local insights that would be difficult to find in a guidebook. This removed the typical stress of commuting through a foreign metropolis, allowing us to actually soak in our surroundings rather than staring at google maps on my phone. This part is extremely invaluable I think, because I know that if I were to navigate around the city myself I would not know half the things I know today. I obviously learned a lot of information in the lectures and discussion sessions, but Brad and Jesslyn gave me some nuance to my understanding by putting some things into perspective as we would travel around.

Another benefit of the experience that the both of them brought to the trip was the locations that were selected for our dinners and lunches. All of our food was spectacular and I discovered a lot of new tastes that I would be reluctant to try on my own. Being put into these new situations with people that knew what they were doing, while being with others who also were doing things for the first time was a very healthy mix. On our last night, we went to a location that was owned by Brad's good friend, and we were taken care of splendidly. The owner, Andy, was extremely kind and welcoming to us, and spoke with some of us after the meal briefly. He shared a little about himself and his background, even letting us sign his bathroom wall with his pen. As delightful as spending time with the group was, I thought the fact that we were able to have time to ourselves to explore alone was also fantastic. I was able to roam around Shibuya and experience some more of the touristy locations of the city. On the very last day, I set off to buy some sunglasses and a wallet, and even took the metro myself to get there, saving about 40 minutes I would have spent on walking. Three days before, this would have been unthinkable and I would go and fire up the uber app immediately.

In terms of the education experience itself, the educators themselves were very well selected for the most part. The first day was fantastic, with both of the speakers from

Tokyo and Temple university being very well versed in their topic and giving very engaging presentations and great answers to our questions. That same day we had a pretend war scenario with some Japanese students, and I thought that was very special to better understand the Japanese perspective on a lot of issues. The Japanese students themselves were also very smart, while some did struggle with English that made it slightly difficult to understand them. However, the eldest of the students was able to act as an interpreter of sorts and bridge the gap between us. The eldest Japanese students were very intelligent and I felt very proud of myself to have put myself in such a room with such insightful and smart people to learn from. I was very glad that they were then able to join us for dinner, where we could continue conversation and learn a little bit more about each other.

The second day was also very interesting, where we were able to meet with Kusama Tsuyoshi. We got a tour of the diet building, along with the chambers in which the biggest decisions in the country get made. Mr. Tsuyoshi was a fantastic host and seemed to be very genuine and generous with his time and attention towards us. Afterwards, we went and explored more of the city, which was another cool thing, the trip was planned so that some fun historical activities were sprinkled into the educational moments.

To be perfectly honest, I would give this experience a 10/10 in terms of how well it aligned with my personal interests. That said, looking toward future iterations of the program, there are a few nuances that could be refined. For a group traveling from Honolulu, many participants felt that certain regional or niche interests were left largely unexplored. Specifically, topics regarding ecological preservation and indigenous perspectives seemed to take a backseat in favor of a heavy focus on national defense and security. While I recognize and respect that these are the primary specializations of the experts who so graciously volunteered their time, a more balanced approach to these varied subjects would be a welcome addition.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

REYCAJEN MAGBULOS is an undergraduate student at Hawai'i Pacific University majoring in International Studies with a concentration in Anthropology, Development & Sustainability and a minor in Japanese.

CONNOR MCKENZIE currently serves as a research assistant with the Pacific Forum, a non-profit foreign policy research institute based in Honolulu. Born and raised in Honolulu, HI, he attended the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, where he earned his B.A. in Political Science, and recently received his M.A. in International Relations at American University's School of International Service through their online program. Connor taught English from 2016 to 2019 as an assistant language teacher with the JET Program. Upon returning, Connor served as an administrative assistant at the Consulate General of Japan in Honolulu. His international experience also includes a semester with the study abroad program at Yonsei University in Seoul, South Korea.

KEEGAN KESSLER is a 2026 Hawai'i Asia-Pacific Affairs Leadership Program participant from Wailua, Kaua'i. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Geography and Environment at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, where she also earned her M.A. She received a B.A. in Geography and Japanese from Colgate University in Hamilton, New York. Her research interests include Pacific studies, Indigenous methodologies, and GIS.

KYLA LEE is a cybersecurity and defense technology professional based in Honolulu, Hawai'i, with a background in computer science and information systems. Her work focuses on cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, unmanned systems, advanced manufacturing, and workforce development in support of national security and the Indo-Pacific region. She is also actively involved in community and professional organizations that expand access to STEM education, technical training, mentorship, and career opportunities for students and emerging professionals across Hawai'i. Through her work, Kyla is committed to strengthening Hawai'i's role in technology, defense innovation, and regional leadership.

KYLAR CADE is a future public servant who is interested in mediation and public administration at the international level. Several pieces of his on matters pertaining or relevant to Pacific Islands have been published. He received his B.A. in International Relations from IE University in Spain.

DIPSHAY KRISHNAN REDDY is a first generation student from Fiji, on a full ride by the US Department of States' US South Pacific Scholarship. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Ethnic Studies and Bachelor of Arts in Gender Studies. Within APAL, his research focused on Gender-based Violence in Asia and Pacific with focus on Hawai'i, Fiji and the Philippines. He is a passionate scholar who is committed towards peace and security in Asia Pacific region.

CONRAD MORGAN is an environmental educator and activist who has been fighting to protect the ocean since 2017. After graduating with a Bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies and Communication Studies from Westmont College in 2023 Conrad spent two years as the Action Specialist for Sustainable Coastlines Hawai'i while also engaging in local and international education, advocacy, and policy oriented around plastic pollution, Deep Sea-bed Mining, and climate security in the Pacific. Born and raised on the island of O'ahu, he finds hope in looking to kūpuna and traditional ways of knowing and being as the foundational framework for reorienting our relationship to 'āina and one another as we work towards a climate-secure future for the Pacific and world. His work is oriented by the understanding that what is best for our oceans' health and wellbeing is also what is best for humanity, our world, and for future generations.

QUINN SAKIHARA is a recent graduate from the University of Hawai'i Manoa, where he got a Bachelor's Degree in Anthropology with a focus on Cultural Anthropology. He has a passion for Hawai'i and the issues that occupy life in the state.

NATAN MARIUSZ MAZUR is a first-year finance and international relations undergraduate at the University of Hawaii. Originally from Poland and raised on the island of Oahu, Natan is trilingual and aspires to join the U.S. Foreign Service as a diplomat.

Appendix A

APAL participants took a five-day study trip to Tokyo, Japan, on March 9-13, 2026. This is their itinerary.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
March 9	10	11	12	13
12:55 pm Departure on flight NH 185 (codeshare UA 7985)	5:20 pm Arrival in Tokyo (Haneda) <i>Group transit to the APA Hotel Shibuya Dogenzakaue</i> 8:15 pm Meet in lobby 8:30 pm Group dinner	8:15 am Meet in hotel lobby <i>Transit to RCAST</i> 9:00 am Lecture on Japan in the world with Ryo Hinata-Yamaguchi <i>Break</i> 10:45 am Lecture on Where history, geography & interests converge: The US-Japan relationship in 2026 & beyond with Mark J. Davidson 12:15 pm Bento lunch 1:00 pm Discussion on next-generation perspectives 2:00 pm – 5:00 pm Scenario-based exercise 5:45 pm Group dinner	9:15 am Meet in hotel lobby 10:00 am Meeting with Rep. Kusama and tour of the National Diet 11:10 am Hie Jinja 12:15 pm Group lunch 1:15 pm Meiji Jingu 2:15 pm Harajuku 4:00 pm teamLab Planets 6:30 pm Group dinner	10:00 am Hotel check-out <i>Free time</i> 4:15 pm Meet in hotel lobby <i>Group transit to Narita Airport</i> 8:20 pm Departure on NH 184 (codeshare UA 8010)

Appendix B

On the first day of their Tokyo tour, APAL participants were joined by members of the Tokyo Young Leaders cohort and a group of Pacific Forum Emerging Leaders for moderated discussions and a tabletop simulation. This is the crisis they explored.

It is the summer of 2026. The world is very much as it is today. The conflict in Ukraine continues to be a bloody stalemate. The Iran situation is stalled; a new government has been installed but it remains a revolutionary regime that expresses anger about the US-Israeli attack, the killing of its top leadership, and vows revenge. The US maintains a substantial military presence in the region. China has been increasing pressure on Taiwan, insisting that the government of President Lai Ching-te harbors a desire for independence. President Trump's visit to Beijing in April was a success, with the two men declaring their desire to work together for their countries' mutual benefit. Trump has applauded Chinese President Xi as "a strong and visionary leader with whom he can do business." China continues to call Japanese Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae a militarist who will destabilize the region. North Korea has been testing missiles and announced that it has developed "a revolutionary new weapon that will secure the nation and has our adversaries trembling at our strength and innovative power."

Early one morning a Japanese fishing boat sends a distress call. It is not clear if the boat has broken down or been disabled. There are no subsequent communications from the vessel. An aircraft is dispatched to the area where the boat often worked and where the call originated; an oil slick and some debris are found. South Korea sends a message to Japanese authorities that it detected unusual movements by the DPRK navy and suspects that one of its vessels was involved. Pyongyang does not respond to queries from Japan but releases a statement saying that it is resolute in its efforts to safeguard the homeland and it will not be slandered by foreign enemies. "Those who tar the DPRK will be punished a thousand times," adding that China is correct to denounce the warmongering of the Tokyo cabal and calls on "all peace-loving countries in the region" to teach them a lesson.

Please answer the following questions:

1. What are your three top priorities?
2. What are your top three concerns? What are you worried might happen?
3. To which capitals do you make your first three phone calls? Why?