Australia signs anti-China security pact with Solomon Islands

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Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and his Solomon Islands counterpart Matthew Wale signed a landmark new security treaty on Wednesday at a ceremony in Canberra, watched by 17 members of the Solomon Islands cabinet.

The two leaders described the Australia-Solomon Islands Treaty as "historic." Albanese declared it cemented Australia's view that "the priority for security cooperation comes from PIF [Pacific Islands Forum] members and it states very clearly that Australia remains the Solomon Islands' security partner of choice."

The Australian prime minister boasted on X that the signing was "a massive win for the Pacific," taking the two countries' security partnership "to the next level." Albanese was patting himself on the back not only for signing the new agreement, but at ensuring that the 2022 Solomon Islands security pact with China would be allowed to lapse next year.

Under the terms of the new agreement, the Solomon Islands government will be required to consult with Canberra on national security and "sensitive" infrastructure—including ports, airports, energy, telecommunications, roads and bridges—while also looking to PIF members for future security cooperation. "Pacific-led" security is fraudulently deployed by Canberra and Wellington to embed their own domination over the region, which they regard as their own "backyard."

Under the treaty the Solomon Islands' designated infrastructure "shall remain free from militarisation, any form of foreign interference or unauthorised access" and it will not "permit its territory to be used for any foreign military or security base."

The former British colony occupies a strategic location in the Southwest Pacific and was a major battleground in World War II, including the 1942–43 Battle of Guadalcanal. Like other impoverished Pacific nations, the Solomons is confronted with Washington and its local allies, Australia and NZ, seeking to secure unchallenged geostrategic control.

The PIF is embroiled in turmoil over the escalating tensions. Many Pacific countries do not want to alienate Beijing as it provides significant development aid and loans. The leadup to the PIF summit in September was marked by intense diplomatic pressure from the US, Australia and New Zealand on Pacific Island members to issue a joint statement condemning a Chinese missile test in the region in July.

Wale, a critic of his country's security pact with China, won a leadership contest in parliament in May, defeating the displaced Jeremiah Manele government's pro-China foreign minister Peter Agovaka. Manele had lost a no confidence vote amid mass cabinet resignations and coalition fractures. Washington promptly congratulated Wale on his elevation, stating that the US looked forward to working "to grow our cooperation" with the Solomons.

The Australia-Solomon Islands Treaty is designed to freeze out China. The Solomon Islands will scrap its five-year security deal with China when it expires next April. Wale had already flagged in a meeting with Albanese in Canberra in June that his government would "review" the pact, which allowed China to rotate police training teams in Honiara alongside two dozen permanent Chinese police stationed in the country.

That security agreement infuriated the US and Australian governments. In blatant disregard of international law, American officials suggested they would invade the Solomon Islands if the Chinese military established a base there.

In a media conference in Canberra, Wale declined to discuss the China pact. In a thinly veiled reference to former prime minister Manasseh Sogavare who had signed it, he said that under the previous government, the Solomon Islands had been "a source of uncertainty and

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doubt in the region. Those days are done, gone."

Voicing the satisfaction of Australia's ruling establishment, the *Sydney Morning Herald* on November 24 hailed the treaty as a "triumph" and a major setback for Beijing. Lachlan Strahan, a former Australian high commissioner in Honiara, told the newspaper: "China would have been doing everything possible to prevent this from happening." The 2022 pact with China had generated "enormous heartburn" in Canberra, he said. "I'm very happy to see the back of it."

Australia has a string of deals giving it the right to intervene in the foreign and defence policy of Pacific countries. Canberra conducted an intensive diplomatic campaign to bully governments into signing neocolonial agreements—including with Fiji, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Naoero (Nauru), Tuvalu and Tonga—all with security components aimed at entrenching Australia's diplomatic and military presence and blocking China.

In the Solomon Islands, Canberra is extending its longstanding imperialist relations with a country that is among the most impoverished in the world. The protracted Australian-led military occupation under the 2003–2017 Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), left the country wracked by an economic and social crisis.

The new treaty has been signed exactly five years after Australia's Scott Morrison government deployed troops and police to Honiara in November 2021, ostensibly to help quell riots. The violent uprising was instigated by US-financed separatist forces from the province of Malaita, which attempted to storm the parliament and then razed much of the capital.

Australia will tighten its grip on the Solomons state forces, supporting the expansion and modernisation of the police and assisting with border management systems. These measures are in line with the Australian-led Pacific Policing Initiative, designed to push back against China and prepare for looming popular unrest.

Canberra will also provide $A740 million in new funding over 10 years—comprising $A670 million in grants and $70 million in loans—beginning in January 2027. In addition to funding the police and border security, the Australian government says some of this money will go towards education, renewable energy and infrastructure, but the exact breakdown has not been published.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) reported in September that a leaked text message from Australian High Commissioner to Solomon Islands Jeffrey Roach, to Deputy Solomons Prime Minister Francis Sade, revealed the Albanese government initially promised more than $A980 million in order to lock in the security treaty and buttress Wale's domestic political position. Support in the Solomons parliament was secured with a scheme to funnel $A1.9 million directly to each of the country's 50 MPs to spend on their "community priorities."

The deal expands Solomon Islands' participation in the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme to include work in the aged care and early childhood sectors in Australia, with longer stay periods and extended visa validity. The PALM scheme is a highly exploitative program providing Australian employers with a pool of cheap Pacific Island labour.

Divisions persist in the Solomon Islands ruling elite. Sogavare, the official opposition leader, warned in a statement on November 23 that the country "should not be placed in a position where it must choose between China and Australia." The government "must carefully consider what it stands to lose" by scrapping the agreement with Beijing, he said. Two days later he declared that the government had "sold our sovereignty for 30 pieces of silver" and demanded clarity about how the promised funds would be used.

Such neo-colonial treaties against China are another step on the path to military conflict a disastrous global conflict, which would devastate the region and threaten nuclear annihilation. What is required is the unity of the working classes throughout the Pacific and internationally in a common struggle against militarism, war, poverty and their sources in the outmoded capitalist system.

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