

Pacific Partners Outlook

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The Pacific Islands Development Forum: Keep Calm and Carry On

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Fiji played host to the inaugural Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF) on August 5-7. The new institution bills itself as a venue to boost collaboration on green development and climate mitigation among the nations most affected by rising sea levels and increasingly extreme weather. But some commentators, especially in Australia and New Zealand, view it as something else—an attempt to undermine the well-established Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), which holds its next leaders' meeting in the Marshall Islands on September 3-6.

The PIDF's membership is explicitly closed to developed nations. The 42-year-old PIF, on the other hand, has long been dominated by Australia and often includes high-level representation from heavyweight observers like China and the United States. Fiji was suspended from the PIF in 2009 after failing to hold democratic elections, and its leaders clearly carry a chip on their shoulder over that decision.

Fiji's interim prime minister, Commodore Frank Bainimarama, has fueled speculation that the PIDF is an intentional effort to lessen the role of the traditional donor nations, especially Australia, in Pacific Island multilateralism. He has said that the PIF is flawed because it only includes governments at the table and is too **dominated by a few**, in

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veiled references to Australia and New Zealand. The first PIDF gathering, in contrast, brought civil society, academia, business, and government representatives together for meetings.



Then-secretary of state Hillary Clinton at the 2012 Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). The high-level attention major donor nations pay to the PIF ensures that it will remain the premier multilateral venue in the Pacific Islands. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/46907600@N02/7927855544/>

Whatever the goal of the PIDF was and will be, the story of the inaugural session became one of competing influences, which Fiji clearly lost. Only 14 of the 23 Pacific nations invited sent representatives, and only three leaders joined Bainimarama for the summit: Kiribati president Anote Tong, Solomon Islands prime minister Gordon Darcy Lilo, and Timor-Leste prime minister Xanana Gusmão. The governments of Australia and New Zealand reportedly pressured Gusmão and others not to attend, and their displeasure was certainly clear to the invited nations, especially in Polynesia, that chose not to send any representation at all.

The PIDF is not and is unlikely to become a competitor to the PIF. Despite apparent funding from [China](#), [Russia](#), and some Arab states, the PIDF is in no position to unseat its regional competitor as the coordinating hub for Pacific development. China, the bogeyman behind many of the PIDF conspiracy theories, [contributed about \\$850 million](#) to the eight Pacific Island nations that officially recognize it from 2006 to 2011. Australia contributed more than that—over \$1.2 billion—in 2011 alone.

In contrast to the poor attendance at the PIDF, the PIF sees nearly every independent head of state in the Pacific Islands show up annually. It also sees increasingly high-level delegations from observer countries, including the largest-ever U.S. delegation led by then-secretary of State Hillary Clinton last year. This year's PIF will feature a U.S. delegation led by a principal deputy assistant secretary and a deputy assistant secretary of state. The inaugural PIDF, meanwhile, saw a grand total of 25 observers from nonmember countries.

So relax. The PIDF is not a threat to the PIF, nor is there any indication it will be.

But the endgame cannot be to see the PIDF collapse. That is an unlikely prospect. And just as importantly, it would make the Pacific donor nations, including the United States, look just the way Bainimarama characterizes them—like bullies. Those Pacific Island leaders most critical

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of Bainimarama, like Samoa prime minister Tuilaepa Sailele, will stay away from the new institution for the time being. But most will seek to engage both forums. This is precisely what Papua New Guinea prime minister Peter O’Neill said his country will do, pointing out that as long as the PIDF does not attempt to mimic the role of the PIF, there is no reason to snub it.

The real message the traditional donor nations in the Pacific—Australia, France, Japan, New Zealand, and the United States—should take away from the PIDF is the weaknesses it highlights in the PIF. The new forum might have been promoted by Bainimarama as a way to stick it to Australia and New Zealand, but that was not why 14 Pacific Island nations sent representatives or why more are likely to in the coming years. They did so because the PIDF offered something they feel is missing in the region’s architecture.

Bainimarama’s insistence that the PIF is too heavily weighted toward the leaders’ meetings resonates with his counterparts in the region. As long as heads of state and cabinet ministers are in attendance, meetings with nongovernmental organizations, academics, and businesspeople will be relegated to the sidelines. This presents a hole that the PIDF can fill.

Workers build a sea wall as part of the Kiribati Adaptation Program, which seeks to protect the country from sea level rise. Donor countries must redouble their commitment to help the Pacific Islands mitigate the effects of climate change, including through the Pacific Islands Forum.
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/40412379@N02/8590007066/>

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Organizations on the ground in the Pacific Islands offer valuable input for leaders deciding how and where to support development. As long as the PIDF is going to stick around, and it will, the traditional donors would be better served by supporting the forum and using the discussions it engenders to inform their Pacific strategy.

Bainimarama also played on the region's general disappointment with the failure of donor nations, which happen to be the largest emitters of greenhouse gases, to grapple with climate change. This is why the PIDF's mission is explicitly to move forward the agenda of the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development, called Rio+20. The Pacific Islands had high hopes for that historic conference and for the most part left it feeling betrayed by the developed world.

Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and other donors have been boosting their aid to the Pacific in recent years. This was exemplified by the development projects announced by the United States at the 2011 PIF. But assistance for climate change mitigation remains woefully inadequate. The Pacific Island countries are among the most susceptible to climate change, the least responsible for it, and the least able to manage it alone.

Rising sea levels and increasingly violent weather patterns are an existential threat to the Pacific Islands. If donor nations want to protect the PIF from subversion by other bodies like the PIDF, their best strategy is to use the older forum as a venue to double-down on coordinated responses to climate change. The upcoming PIF in the Marshall Islands offers the ideal chance; its official theme will be "Marshall-ing the Pacific Response to the Climate Challenge." ▲

The Month That Was



Australian opposition leader Tony Abbott, whose Liberal/National coalition leads Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's Labor Party in polls with just over a week until national elections. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/14670374@N05/4881799373/>

AUSTRALIA

Federal elections set for September 7. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd officially launched Australia's 2013 election campaign on August 4, announcing that federal elections will be held on September 7. Rudd has attempted a presidential-style campaign, capitalizing on his personal popularity and trying to distance himself from the internal dysfunction and unpopular policies of the ruling Labor Party. But the Liberal/National coalition continues to lead in the latest polls 53 to 47 percent, despite opposition leader Tony Abbott's low personal popularity.

Central bank cuts interest rates. The Reserve Bank of Australia cut its benchmark interest rate to a historic low of 2.5 percent on August 7 amid falling commodity prices and the winding down of Australia's decade-long mining boom. The central bank in early August cut the country's 2013 growth forecast from 2.5 to 2.25 percent, well below Australia's long-term average of around 3.25 percent. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd praised the rate cut as relief for working families, while opposition Treasury spokesperson Joe Hockey attributed it to economic stagnation because of poor government management.

Australia announces end to combat duties in Afghanistan. The Australian Defense Force announced on August 13 that its special forces will stop carrying out raids in Afghanistan by the beginning of 2014, ending more than a decade of combat operations. The multinational Base Tarin Kot in Uruzgan Province will be closed in December and 1,000 Australian personnel will be brought home. Australia has sustained 40 casualties over the course of the war in Afghanistan.

Australia apologizes for airport search of Solomon Islands' prime minister. The Australian government apologized on August 20 for conducting a body explosives search of Solomon Islands prime minister Gordon Darcy Lilo at Brisbane Airport. The *Solomon Star* reported that airport security conducted the search in response to a tip from an intelligence officer in Honiara, Solomon Islands, who had misunderstood a tip in the local pidgin dialect. Lilo accepted Canberra's apology, but opposition politicians in the Solomon Islands continue to decry the incident as an affront to national pride.

Legal challenge lodged against Papua New Guinea asylum seeker plan. Australian attorney general Mark Dreyfus confirmed on August 19 that a legal challenge has been lodged against the government's recently announced Papua New Guinea (PNG) asylum seeker plan. Lawyers acting

on behalf of an Iranian asylum seeker sent to PNG filed the challenge, claiming that the deal contravenes Australia's treaty obligations as well as local PNG law. Under the new arrangement, asylum seekers caught in Australian waters are relocated to PNG for processing and eventual resettlement there.

NEW ZEALAND

Contamination scares affect New Zealand dairy companies. New Zealand authorities ordered a mass recall of products by dairy producer Fonterra on August 4 after tests found traces of potentially deadly botulism-causing bacteria. In response, countries from China to Sri Lanka banned or quarantined Fonterra products, which include baby formula. In a separate incident, Chinese authorities quarantined products from dairy producer Westland after the New Zealand-based company reported higher than average nitrate levels in a milk-derived protein product. Dairy products account for more than a quarter of New Zealand's exports.

Parliament passes controversial intelligence law. New Zealand's parliament passed legislation to increase the data collection powers of the country's main intelligence agency on August 21. The Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB) will now be able to intercept citizens' communications for cyber-security purposes if a warrant is granted. Previously, the bureau could only engage in foreign intelligence gathering. Facing a popular backlash, Prime Minister John Key has offered to resign if the GCSB abuses its new powers.

Governing party slips in the polls. The popularity of Prime Minister John Key's National Party sank 7 percent in just one month, according to an August 20 poll by market research firm Roy Morgan. The party enjoys just a 44 percent popularity rating, trailing the opposition Labour/Greens coalition. Parliament's passage of highly controversial intelligence collection legislation is being blamed for the governing party's sinking poll numbers.

New Zealand Navy conducts antipiracy mission in Gulf of Aden. New Zealand Navy frigate *Te Mana* departed Auckland on August 12 for a counterpiracy mission in the Gulf of Aden. With a crew of 177, the *Te Mana* will take part in a seven-month training exercise with 26 other countries. Prime Minister John Key expressed his support for the mission, citing the necessity to deter piracy and defend ships carrying goods to and from New Zealand.

Christchurch hosts multilateral earthquake exercise. New Zealand hosted military officials from Australia, the United States, and China for a training exercise in Christchurch on August 13. In an unprecedented multilateral



A gunner aboard the New Zealand navy frigate Te Mana in the Persian Gulf in 2008. Te Mana has been deployed to the Gulf of Aden to take part in a seven-month training exercise to combat piracy. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/nzdefenceforce/6122258758/>

effort, the four countries examined the 2011 Christchurch earthquake as a model for disaster response and ran through simulations to observe how each military responds to humanitarian crises. The 2011 earthquake took 185 lives, and the damage to the city remains visible.

PACIFIC ISLANDS

No-confidence motion unseats Tuvalu's prime minister. Tuvalu's opposition successfully passed a motion of no confidence against Prime Minister Willy Telavi on August 4 after eight months of attempts. Parliament subsequently installed Enele Sopoaga as the country's new leader. In a parting shot, the outgoing government allegedly arranged for Fiji to impose a travel ban on the chief justice who had ordered the legislature to allow the no-confidence vote, frustrating his commute to Tuvalu from his home in New Zealand.

New Zealand foreign minister on five-nation Pacific tour. New Zealand foreign minister Murray McCully traveled to Samoa, the Cook Islands, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Vanuatu, and the Solomon Islands between August 4 and 16. McCully announced multiple investment projects during his travel, including commitments for roads and runways in the Solomon Islands. Leaders in the PNG's Bougainville Autonomous Region took McCully's visit as an opportunity to start a war of words with the central government over a suspension of funds.

Pacific Islands Development Forum holds first summit, elicits mixed reactions. Leaders from across the Pacific Islands attended the inaugural Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF) in Fiji on August 5-7. Fiji's interim prime minister, Commodore Frank Bainimarama, declared the forum a necessary complement to the long-established Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), which he suggested is dominated by Australia and New Zealand. Other Pacific leaders were more cautious, with Papua New Guinea's government saying it will support the new forum so long as it does not duplicate functions of the PIF.

Fiji releases new constitution. The Fijian government released the final version of its new constitution on August 22, four years after abrogating the previous one. The new constitution makes a directly elected president, rather than the prime minister, the commander in chief and replaces regional parliamentary districts with a single national constituency. The constitution also demands that Hindi be taught in schools along with Fijian and English to avoid ethnic tensions. Foreign leaders, including Australian foreign minister Bob Carr, have cautiously praised the new constitution, while domestic critics insist it is intended to keep the current leadership in power. ▲



Former Tuvalu prime minister Willy Telavi, who was ousted in an August 4 motion of no confidence. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/21065822@N03/6288387024/>

Looking Ahead

Discussion with West Papuan activists. George Mason University's School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution will host West Papuan independence activists Herman Wainggai and Jeremy Bally for a discussion on August 30. Wainggai and Bally will talk about nonviolent activism in the Indonesian provinces of Papua and West Papua. The event will run from 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. in Metropolitan Building 5183, 3434 N. Washington Blvd., Arlington, VA. More information is [available here](#).

Pacific Islands Forum. The Marshall Islands will host this year's Pacific Islands Forum in the capital city of Majuro from September 3 to 6. Officials from the 15 active member states, along with observers and dialogue partners, including the United States, will participate. Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs William Craft and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Australia, New Zealand, and Pacific Island Affairs Dennise Mathieu will lead the U.S. delegation. For more information on the forum, visit its [Web site](#).

Navy chief on the U.S. rebalance. The American Enterprise Institute (AEI) will host Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Jonathan Greenert on September 5 as part of its series of talks with members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Admiral Greenert will discuss how the U.S. military can conduct its rebalance toward the Asia Pacific in the face of budgetary restrictions. The event will take place from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. at 1150 17th St., NW, 12th floor. Please [click here](#) to RSVP.

CSIS conference on Asia Pacific regional architecture. The CSIS Scholl Chair in International Business, Simon Chair in Political Economy, and Sumitro Chair for Southeast Asia Studies will cohost a conference September 12 on evolving security and economic architecture in the Asia Pacific. The conference will provide an important platform for U.S. and Asian policymakers, business executives, and academics to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing the region as President Barack Obama prepares to attend the East Asia Summit in Brunei and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Bali in October. Registration for the event is not open yet, but more details will follow.

Ambassadors' Cricket Cup. New Zealand ambassador to the United States Mike Moore and Trinidad and Tobago ambassador to the United States Neil Parsan will cohost the inaugural Ambassadors' Cricket Cup on September 7. The tournament will feature players from seven different countries, including Australia and New Zealand. It will be held from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at South Germantown Recreational Park, 18401 Central Park Circle, Boyds, MD. Details are available on the [New Zealand Embassy Web site](#). ▲

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