

# Pacific states under pressure

## Why does neutral, landlocked Switzerland need to conduct NATO war games in the Pacific?

by Ursula Cross and Thomas Scherr\*

On 12 September, the 54th meeting of the heads of state and government of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) ended with a declaration entitled “Blue Pacific Ocean of Peace”, which opposes the increasing militarisation of the region.<sup>1</sup> The many island states in the Pacific Ocean, with their diverse populations, are trying to use diplomatic skill to stay out of the growing geopolitical tensions. It is becoming increasingly apparent that NATO and its allies are exerting greater influence to exclude China. “Swiss Standpoint” has reported on this on several occasions.<sup>2</sup> Now we are entering another round, and official Swiss institutions are also playing a dubious role.



Participants in the 54th Pacific Islands Forum from 8 to 12 September 2025. (Picture <https://forumsec.org>)

To protect themselves from the rising pressure of their “partners” (USA, Great Britain, France, European Union, Taiwan, China), several island states sought to limit the number of participants at the “Pacific Island Forum Leaders Meeting” in Honiara, Solomon Islands. In a two-stage mechanism, participation was to be restricted to the heads of government of the island groups. So-called “dialogue partners” were to be kept at bay. This proposal was initiated by the Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands, Jeremiah Manele, on the grounds that decisions should be made among themselves.

\* Ursula Cross is an educator, long-standing entrepreneur, translator CAS and member of the editorial team at “Swiss Standpoint”.  
Thomas Scherr works as a freelance journalist for “Swiss Standpoint”.



### Also, against the interests of the inhabitants

However, those who have a foothold in the “Pacific Island Forum” (PIF)<sup>3</sup> can have a say in its structure and orientation, thus gaining considerable influence over the entire Pacific region. Until now, dominance in the Pacific has been clearly determined by the Western alliance of the former colonial powers of the USA, Great Britain and France, as well as the former British colonies of New Zealand and Australia. With the economic rise of China, an economic and political rival has emerged that these countries now want to sideline, even against the interests of the island states concerned.

New Zealand is secretly using its diplomatic weight among the island states to strengthen the direct influence of the USA on the decision-making structures of the PIF, as a report by investigative journalist *Mick Hall* from New Zealand makes clear.<sup>4</sup> The New Zealand government is thus clearly exploiting the trust of individual island states, as confidential communications from the New Zealand administration make clear. In doing so, the New Zealand government is actively preventing the island states from pursuing an independent and neutral path.

### German warships in the Pacific

For several years now, the *North Atlantic Treaty Organisation* (NATO) has expanded its area of responsibility to cover the entire world, including the Pacific region. As a result, German frigates are carrying out questionable “defence tasks” far

from their home in the South China Sea or in the Pacific between the island groups.

Such operations are conceived and planned in NATO think tanks, such as the “NATO Defence College Foundation”. This was founded in Rome in 2011 with the aim of carrying out work “that could go beyond the usual and institutional activities in the fields of public relations, communication and scientific research”.

In June, the “Centre for Security Studies” at the *Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich* (ETH Zurich) joined forces with this NATO think tank to organise an event entitled “Prevention and Dialogue. Indo Pacific 2025”.<sup>5</sup>

### **ETH Zurich and NATO in the Pacific**

But what role does a tax-funded university institution in neutral Switzerland such as the “Centre for Security Studies” (ETH Zurich) play in a NATO think tank? Would it not be more appropriate to support the small island states in their independent path as the *Pacific Island Forum*, rather than grinding them down in a NATO simulation game as mere pawns in the Great Game? Why should neutral, landlocked Switzerland support NATO plans in the Pacific?

Will the Pacific island groups find a way between the spheres of influence? And could Switzerland’s expertise as a neutral microstate be helpful to them?

<sup>1</sup> Mick Hall, «Ocean of Peace in a militarised Pacific». <https://mickhall.substack.com/p/ocean-of-peace-in-a-militarised-pacific>, 13 September 2025

<sup>2</sup> Ann Wright, Oberst (a.D.), «Was will die Nato im Pazifik?». <https://swiss-standpoint.ch/news-detailansicht-de-international/was-will-die-nato-im-pazifik.html>, 21 June 2024

Jan Oberg, «Nato expandiert in die Indopazifik-Region – ohne Rechtsgrundlage und gesunden Menschenverstand». <https://swiss-standpoint.ch/news-detailansicht-de-international/nato-expandiert-in-die-indopazifik-region-ohne-rechtsgrundlage-und-gesunden-menschenverstand.html>, 15 November 2024

German Foreign Policy, «USA/Nato/Japan versus China. Die Militarisierung der ersten Inselkette». <https://swiss-standpoint.ch/news-detailansicht-de-international/die-militarisierung-der-ersten-inselkette.html>, 28 February 2023

M. K. Bhadrakumar, «Zwischen den USA und China zeichnet sich eine gewisse Entspannung ab». <https://swiss-standpoint.ch/news-detailansicht-de-international/zwischen-den-usa-und-china-zeichnet-sich-eine-gewisse-entspannung-ab.html>, 4 July 2022

<sup>3</sup> The participating states of the Pacific Island Forum are Australia, the Cook Islands, Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Marshall Islands, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. See <https://forumsec.org/>

<sup>4</sup> Mick Hall, “NZ anger over Pacific summit’s partner ban simmers”. <https://mickhall.substack.com/p/nz-anger-over-pacific-summits-partner>, 8 September 2025

<sup>5</sup> cf. <https://www.natofoundation.org/indo-pacific-ii-2025/>, (uploaded 14 September 2025)