



Security Deal between China and Solomon Island

For Prelims: Location of Solomon Island, AUKUS, Boe Declaration.

For Mains: Security agreement between China and Solomon Island and its Geopolitical Configuration in the region.

Why in News?

A recent leaked document has revealed that the [Solomon Islands in the South Pacific](#) has reached a deal with China which outlines an unprecedented level of security cooperation.

- This is the **first deal of its kind for China in the region**, which is not yet signed and it is not fully known whether the provisions mentioned in the leaked document are present in the final draft.

What are the Key Highlights about Solomon Island?

- The Solomon Islands is **part of the ethnically Melanesian group of islands** in the Pacific and lies between Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu.
- The islands were initially controlled by the **British Empire during the colonial era**.
- It went through the **hands of Germany and Japan** and then back to the U.K., after the Americans took over the islands from the Japanese during [World War II](#).
- The islands became **independent in 1978 to become a constitutional monarchy** under the British Crown, with a parliamentary system of government.
- Still, the country, [a member of the Commonwealth](#), is independent, and the governor-general is appointed on the advice of the unicameral National Parliament.

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What are the Provisions under the Proposed Deal?

- The document **explicitly enables China to send its “police, armed police, military personnel and other law enforcement** and armed forces” to the islands on the latter government’s request, or if the former sees that the safety of its projects and personnel in the islands are at risk.
- It also provides for China’s naval vessels to **utilise the islands for logistics support.**

What are the Reasons for China’s Interest in the Solomon Islands?

- **Role of Taiwan:**
 - The Pacific islands are among the few regions in the world **where China has competition from Taiwan for diplomatic recognition.**
 - **China considers Taiwan to be a renegade territory** awaiting reunification, and opposes its recognition as an independent state on the international stage.
 - Hence, any country which has to officially establish relations with China will have to break diplomatic ties with Taiwan.
 - The Solomon Islands **was one among the six Pacific island states** which had official bilateral relations with Taiwan.
 - However, in **2019, the Solomon Islands, along with Kiribati, switched allegiance to China.** Now, **only four regional countries backing Taiwan,** mostly belonging to the **Micronesian group of islands** which are under the control of the US.
- **Potential Vote Banks for Mobilising Support:**

- The small Pacific island states act as **potential vote banks for mobilising support** for the great powers in international fora like the [United Nations](#).
- **Presence of Large Maritime Exclusive Economic Zones:**
 - These Pacific island states have **disproportionately large maritime Exclusive Economic Zones** when compared to their small sizes.
- **Presence of Reserves of Timber and Mineral Resources:**
 - Solomon Island in particular has **significant reserves of timber and mineral resources**, along with fisheries.
- **Strategic Significance:**
 - The islands in the Pacific are **strategically located for China** to insert itself between America's military bases in the Pacific islands and Australia.
 - This is especially significant in the current scenario, given the emergence of the [AUKUS \(Australia, the UK and the US\)](#) which seeks to elevate Australia's strategic capabilities vis-à-vis China through Anglo-American cooperation.

What are the Implications for Geopolitical Configuration in the Region?

- All Pacific countries have a stake in protecting the stability and security of the region.
 - Pacific Islands Forum members, including Australia, agreed in the 2018 [Boe Declaration](#) to **address regional security challenges collectively**.
- A bilateral agreement such as the one proposed between China and Solomon Islands **undermines that sentiment and shows a limited appreciation for the security of the region** as a whole.
- Earlier, the [US announced plans to open an embassy in the Solomon Islands](#), laying out in unusually blunt terms a plan to increase its influence in the South Pacific nation before China becomes "strongly embedded".
- The smaller island nations of the region are heavily dependent on them, **especially Australia as it is a resident power**.
 - This established power structure in the region is being increasingly challenged by China through the steady displacement of Taiwan and the cultivation of economic and political clout.
- The **geopolitics of the region is undergoing an unprecedented flux** in tandem with the larger shifts in the [Indo-Pacific](#), suggesting an intensification of regional great power rivalry and domestic volatility for the Pacific island states in the coming years.

[Source: TH](#)

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