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Shift in Fiji's Cooperation and Foreign Policy from China to Australia during the period of 2022-2023

Muhammad Ficky Yusuf¹

¹ Universitas Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia, muhammad.ficky@ui.ac.id

*Corresponding Author: muhammad.ficky@ui.ac.id

Abstract: Countries in the world frequently experience alterations in their collaboration and foreign policy. Fiji is a nation located in the South Pacific region that recently underwent alterations in its foreign political collaboration. The previously strong alliance between Fiji and China, which was formed during the coup in 2006, experienced a quick decline and transformation when Fiji decided to prioritize its relations with Australia. This transition occurred due to Australia's frequent disagreements with China on the global stage. The shift in Fiji's foreign policy from China to Australia over the era of 2022-2023 prompts the inquiry into the rationale behind this decision, given the contrasting positions of Australia and China in the global arena. This study employs the balance of threat theory, which involves countries in the international system striving to achieve a state of equilibrium in power with other nations, in order to minimize the risks and dangers they face. This study employs a qualitative methodology, including data collection methods such as literature reviews, scientific papers, and reputable news media sources. The study findings suggest that Fiji is engaging in a strategy of balancing against China because to the perceived higher level of threat posed by Australia. This research is anticipated to offer empirical investigations to assist countries in addressing analogous circumstances.

Keyword: Balance of Threat, Foreign Policy, Pacific Islands, Fiji-China Relations, Fiji-Australia Relations.

INTRODUCTION

The end of the Second World War resulted in numerous challenges, including substantial material damages and the immense suffering of civilians. This event also fostered the belief among many nations that future battles between countries would be unlikely to transpire. Countries worldwide have started seeking avenues to enhance collaboration across several domains through bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral partnerships, as well as regional cooperation among neighboring nations. For the purpose of meeting requirements and pursuing interests, it is essential for every country to build cooperative connections with other nations, rather than relying solely on unilateral actions. Cooperation also seeks to proactively identify possible disputes among nations, so enhancing trust and comprehension. Furthermore, countries vary in their evaluation and approach to cooperation. There are

several areas of cooperation, such as economics, culture, security, and politics, that are commonly adopted and can be tailored to a country's specific aims. An intriguing collaboration worth mentioning is the partnership undertaken by small nations that still require ample room for growth. According to William E. Peterson, tiny governments are unable to depend solely on their military strength in the realm of international politics (Paterson, 1969). Therefore, small nations require assistance from larger countries in order to enhance their presence on the global stage. This aligns with the perspective of Ocampo J. A. Those who recognize the potential for tiny countries to enhance their position through international collaboration.

The Pacific Islands comprise numerous small island nations that remain relatively underdeveloped and necessitate significant advancements in economic well-being, defense and security, and education. Small nations in the Pacific Islands region have willingly embraced collaboration with larger nations. Fiji is one of several countries that have highly contentious political relationships with other nations. Fiji is a nation situated inside the archipelago in the South Pacific region. Fiji is situated between Vanuatu and Samoa, giving it a vital position in the Asia-Pacific region. With a population of 944,720, Fiji is relatively more populous than other countries in the South Pacific region. Fiji, serves as a hub for regional business activity and marine transit routes in the South Pacific. This advantageous position offers foreign businessmen opportunities to invest, as stated by Markovic (Markovic, 2009). In 2022, Fiji's population remains higher than the average population of countries in the Pacific region, which is 943,737 people (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2022). China and Australia are now two countries that have opposing and divergent positions in the international arena. In its foreign political history, Fiji has frequently established close cooperation with both of those countries. A trade conflict has arisen between China and Australia, with Chinese trade penalties in recent years causing significant damage to certain Australian industries (Long et al., 2021). The Australian government acknowledges that the bilateral relationship between the two nations has faced significant challenges in recent years (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2022). Furthermore, there exist significant disparities in perspectives about security, which have been more prominent with the establishment of AUKUS, where the United States, China's primary competitor, is one of the participants. AUKUS is a trilateral security alliance comprising Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Consequently, the bilateral relationship between Australia and China experienced a further decline following the signing of an agreement among the three nations to establish AUKUS (VOA Indonesia, 2021).

The establishment of cooperative relations between China and Fiji commenced in 2006. The partnership between the two countries is focused on providing development aid and promoting economic growth in Fiji. Chinese contribution to Fiji totaled 36 million USD in 2006 and rose to 251 million USD in 2007 (Komai, 2015). Furthermore, China holds the distinction of being the primary bilateral contributor to Fiji (Salem, 2020). In addition to providing foreign debt to Fiji, the Fiji Government has extended substantial loans to China, amounting to fifty-one percent of the country's GDP (Salem, 2020). Fiji is a prominent country in the Pacific Islands due to its significant impact, primarily attributed to its abundant natural resources and potential as an investment destination. Fiji and China engage in reciprocal cooperation in the field of security, with China dispatching its police officers to deliver training to the Fijian Police. According to the Lowy Institute Pacific (2018), Fiji received a total of 291 million USD in Chinese aid from 2011 to 2018, making it the second greatest beneficiary in the Pacific Islands area, after Papua New Guinea.



Source: news.co.au, Lowy Institute Pacific Map

Figure 1. China's Economic Assistance in the Pacific Islands

However, in 2022, Australia is providing significant financial aid. Anthony Albanese has confirmed that his meeting with Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka has resulted in an additional \$81 million of budget support for the 2023 budget. This aid is intended to help the Fiji government maintain essential sector services, ensure community protection, and contribute to economic growth led by the private sector. Australia has pledged to give a total of 132 million dollars to Fiji in the 2022-2023 fiscal year as official development assistance. This includes 60 million dollars specifically for bilateral investment, while the other funds will be sourced from Australia's global and regional aid programs (Naikaso, 2023). Furthermore, Prime Minister Albanese reiterated Australia's dedication to ongoing collaboration in the areas of economy, defense-security, climate change matters, and safeguarding future generations through a cooperation known as the Vuvale cooperation (family partnership). Australia and Fiji share a strong desire for a peaceful, safe, and prosperous Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) region. In early 2023, Fiji Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka announced that Fiji would terminate its police training collaboration with China. He further stated that Fiji would adopt a democratic system similar to that of Australia and New Zealand, which was deemed more appropriate. (Al Jazeera, 2023) The Fijian Government, in fact, temporarily terminated the services of the long-serving Police commissioner, who had been in office for sixteen years since 2006 (Needham, 2023).

The collaboration between China and Fiji has been highly intimate since 2006. From development support to the economy, and even Fiji's security cooperation in the Police agency. From 2011 to 2018, Fiji received the second highest amount of financial aid from China among the Pacific Islands countries. Conversely, towards the end of 2022, Australia, which has maintained a certain level of separation from Fiji in recent years, once again offered substantial financial aid. Furthermore, the two leaders frequently engage in extensive communication, ranging from holding meetings to expressing a strong desire to collaborate in numerous sectors, known as the Vuvale Partnership. Sitiveni Rabuka unequivocally declared his intention to terminate the Police collaboration established with China and temporarily remove the Police Commissioner responsible for overseeing the security cooperation. Rabuka has expressed his intention to reintroduce the democratic system, modeled after the one used by Australia and New Zealand.

In the 2022-2023 timeframe, Fiji's cooperation and foreign policy switched considerably from China to Australia. This development prompts the question of why Fiji made this transition. In this instance, the author will endeavor to examine the changing trajectory of Fiji's foreign policy towards China and Australia, both of which are prominent nations situated in opposing factions.

METHOD

This study examines the shifts in Fiji's collaboration and foreign policy towards China and Australia, two nations situated on opposing sides of the international power spectrum. The balance of threat theory is employed to assess Fiji's relationship with the two countries. Therefore, in order to examine the issue thoroughly, this study utilizes qualitative research methods. This approach employs a technique of gathering diverse empirical data, such as writings, photos, and research, which are then organized into a coherent pattern to represent the subject under analysis and draw a conclusion (Bakry, 2016). This study used a qualitative research approach to examine Fiji's foreign policy concerning two other nations, specifically Australia and China.

In this study, the author utilizes two distinct kind of data: primary and secondary. Primary data refers to data that is originally released by a country or its institutions. It also includes secondary documents that can be obtained through sources such as journal papers, books, news reports/media, and previous study (Bakry, 2016). The statistics were acquired from official documents issued by the Governments of Fiji, Australia, and China. During the analysis step, the author selects the time frame of 2022 - 2023 to examine the processes and dynamics that took place during Fiji's shift in international political position. Furthermore, researchers employed the desk-library research data gathering approach and triangulation as a data processing method to gather each piece of data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The prior analysis on Fiji's foreign policy turnaround and collaboration from China to Australia in the period 2022-2023 can be categorized into two main focuses. Fiji has established multiple collaborations with China, while also maintaining a longstanding tradition of cooperation with Australia.

The primary emphasis of the literature evaluation in the first category is the collaboration between Fiji and China, with a particular focus on economic and developmental priorities. In addition, the former Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama had a strong desire to enhance Fiji's reputation on the global stage by leveraging the support and collaboration between Fiji and China. China's association with Fiji helped to enhance its reputation as a dominant economic force in the region. The collaboration has also generated strain in the area, as it is perceived as a component of the Chinese influence expansion in the Pacific Islands region via the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project. China provided assistance and support to Fiji when it was isolated and faced sanctions from regional countries and allies, including Australia, following a coup in 2006. The sources cited are Tarte (Tarte, 2021), Yang (Yang, 2011), Salem (Salem, 2020), and Rodd (Rodd, 2020).

The literature evaluation in the second group centers on the historical collaboration between Fiji and Australia. During the 2000s, numerous coup incidents took place in multiple nations across the Asia Pacific region. Fiji is among the nations that underwent a coup specifically in the year 2006. The coup was perceived as a breach of democratic ideals, leading to a significant deterioration in the relationship between Fiji and Australia. After some time, the relationship between the two countries started to improve when Fiji expressed its willingness to conduct general elections in 2014. However, certain parties believed that Australia's approach was still ineffective and inconsistent, particularly because Australia did not acknowledge China's influence in the Pacific Islands region (Herr, 2018)(Kelly, 2015)(Firth, 2013).

According to the findings from the two focus groups in the previous research, it was discovered that the historical tie between Fiji and Australia has endured for a significant duration. The coup in Fiji had a detrimental effect on the relationship between Fiji and

Australia, resulting in significant disruptions to their cooperation across all domains. Amidst Australia's termination of foreign aid collaboration with Fiji, China took advantage of the situation to establish cooperation primarily focused on economic assistance. Moreover, China's involvement in the Pacific Islands is seen as having undermined the stability of regional security. Despite Australia's efforts to improve relations with Fiji through various methods, these attempts were deemed ineffective. Furthermore, while prior research has emphasized the connection between Fiji, China, and Australia, there has been no examination of the initial stages of China's reduced collaboration with Fiji and the shift in Fiji's foreign policy orientation towards Australia during the timeframe of 2022-2023.

This article is divided into seven parts. The first part provides an explanation of the background and purpose of the research, along with a literature review of Fiji's historical foreign relations with China and Australia. The second part describes the theoretical framework used by the author, specifically the balance of threat theory proposed by Stephen Walt. The third part explains the research methods employed. The fourth part consists of an analysis. Finally, the last part of the study presents a conclusion regarding the reasons behind Fiji's shift in foreign policy from China to Australia during the years 2022-2023.

Balance Of Threat Theory

The author employs Stephen Walt's balance of threat theory to aid researchers in obtaining answers to their study inquiries. This hypothesis can elucidate the reasons behind Fiji's substantial shift in foreign policy, which involved a transition from a twelve-year alliance with China to aligning with Australia, a country that held contrasting positions in the global arena.

In 1985, Walt first presented this hypothesis to describe how countries tend to respond when they perceive threats in their vicinity. Furthermore, he introduced the notion of balancing and bandwagoning, whereby balancing refers to the act of fighting the entity that poses a threat (aggressor), while bandwagoning refers to aligning oneself with the entity that poses the threat. In his 1987 publication "The Origins of Alliance," Walt elucidated that the perceived menace posed by a nation to other nations can be quantified, enabling concerned countries to devise and implement measures and tactics to counteract the underlying source of the perceived threat. The author selected this theory due to the presence of a suitable unit of analysis that can be applied to the variables within it. In addition, Stephen Walt identifies four criteria that might be employed to assess potential risks emanating from foreign nations. There are four factors that determine a country's likelihood of being aggressive towards other countries. The first factor is aggregate power, which refers to the total amount of power a country possesses. The second factor is geographic proximity, which measures the distance between a country and potential threats. The third factor is offensive power, which refers to a country's military capability to carry out attacks. The fourth factor is aggressive intentions, which indicates a country's intention to act aggressively towards other countries (S. Walt, 1987).

Furthermore, the author incorporates several references pertaining to indications of the balance of threat idea derived from the perspectives of other prominent individuals. John Mearsheimer's understanding of power enhances the aggregate power indicator. Furthermore, the author reinforces the offensive power and aggressive intention indications by incorporating insights from Robert Jervis. The subsequent elucidation pertains to the four indications within the framework of the balance of threat theory:

The aggregate power of a country is a significant factor in determining its threat level in the balance of threat. The defense and security components are seen as the primary pillars upon which the response to a danger is built. Power has a crucial role in safeguarding a country's sovereignty from external threats. According to the neorealist perspective of John

Mearsheimer, a prominent academic in the United States, power is seen as a means of survival for a country. The primary motivation for a country to increase its power is to ensure its own survival (Mearsheimer, 2001). Furthermore, there exists a correlation between power and money, as the possession of strength necessitates a robust economy to sustain a nation's military forces. Mearsheimer categorizes power into two distinct forms: military power and latent power (Mearsheimer, 2001).

The indicator represents the combined strength of a nation, encompassing its military and industrial capacities, population, and technical advancement (S. Walt, 1987). Aggregate power can be utilized to assess a country's potential threat to others. This includes factors such as population, territorial size, defense budget allocation, technological military power, and the possession of main defense system equipment (alutsista). Analyzing these factors can help identify potential threats to other countries.

Geographic Proximity is an indicator that quantifies and computes the geographical distance between a country and other potential threats. The level of threat increases as the distance between them decreases (S. Walt, 1987). The assessment of potential threats from geographical distance often involves measuring the distance between a country's capital city and other countries. However, this assessment can also consider the distance between the capital city and military outposts of other countries.

The offensive power indicator is a quantitative measure used to assess a country's offensive capabilities, which can be taken into account while making judgments regarding threat balancing. Robert Jervis argues that offensive military capabilities create a sense of fear among other nations. These weapons enable other parties to more easily violate sovereignty, become more assertive, and even invade the territory of other countries (Jervis, 1978). Offensive power is a type of danger that will be indirectly interpreted as a threat by other parties. This statistic measures the capacity and effectiveness of a country to launch assaults on other nations during times of heightened conflict. The level of a country's military capability, which encompasses factors such as the size of its active troops and the quality of their weaponry, directly correlates with the country's potential to pose a threat to other nations.

The presence of aggressive intentions is a crucial factor in recognizing threats. The above three signs cannot be classified as a threat unless there is a deliberate aim of aggression from another nation. Jervis (1978) argues that a country can discern the aggressive intents of other countries by observing their activities and the military capabilities that can support offensive acts. This metric can be employed to gauge a nation's level of aggression in terms of its efforts to enhance defense collaboration or forge alliances with neighboring countries in order to cultivate an intimidating and provocative image, with the ultimate goal of establishing defense cooperation with countries perceived as potential threats. Consequently, when a country has numerous alliances or defense cooperation agreements with other nations, it signals a stronger inclination towards that country, thereby motivating more countries to join the alliance.

These four indications can offer guidance to a government in addressing potential sources of hazards. Furthermore, the four indications carry similar significance, implying that no single signal holds more strength or dominance in influencing a country's choice to form alliances with other nations. Every nation employs a methodology to assess the risks it faces from its surroundings.

Moreover, when confronted with a threat, a nation will have two options: either to rely on its own might and exertion, or to collaborate with other entities. In this instance, the author observes a behavior of balancing that is rooted in the concept of balance of threat. Stephen Walt acknowledges that the terminology used in his concept is influenced by one of the prominent researchers. Kenneth Waltz is the author of the publication titled "Walt" in 1987.

Waltz's perspective focuses on the distinct forms of balancing, which include internal and external balancing. The first form is referred to as internal balance, which involves achieving equilibrium via the utilization of domestic capabilities, rather than relying on the power of alliances (Waltz, 1979). The second concept is known as external balance, in which the application of the balance of threat theory is implemented through a coalition (Waltz, 1979). Therefore, besides examining the aforementioned four indicators, two forms of equilibrium can also be employed to elucidate the shift in Fiji's foreign policy trajectory from China to Australia throughout the 2022-2023 timeframe.

Discussion

Aggregate Power

The assessment of a country's threat level is a crucial factor in determining the balance of threat. The defense and security components are seen as the primary pillars upon which the response to a danger is built. The function of power is crucial in preserving a country's sovereignty against foreign challenges. According to the neorealist perspective of John Mearsheimer, a prominent academic in the United States, power is seen as a means of survival for a country. The primary motivation for a country to increase its power is to ensure its own survival (Mearsheimer, 2001). Furthermore, power is intricately linked to income, as the presence of a robust economy is essential for sustaining a country's defense forces. Mearsheimer categorizes power into two distinct forms: military power and latent power (Mearsheimer, 2001).

When considering the accumulation of power, countries must consider this factor in order to assess the state's response to threats. The Military Balance statistics indicates that the population of Fiji in 2022 was 943,737 individuals. Fiji's gross domestic product (GDP) for that year amounted to 4.8 billion USD. Fiji has a geographical area of 18,277 km². Regarding the military budget, Fiji sets aside 42 million USD to sustain its defense. Fiji's military comprises an active army of 4,040 individuals and a reserve force of 6,000 personnel, resulting in a total of 10,040 soldiers (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2022).

According to the same statistical source, the population of China in 2022 was 1,418,451,639 individuals, and its GDP amounted to 20.3 trillion USD. China has a land area of 9,562,910 square kilometers. China's defense expenditure amounts to 196 billion USD, and its armed forces consist of 2,545,000 troops, according to The Military Balance report for 2022. However, Australia's population in 2022 stands at 26,141,369, accompanied with a GDP of USD 1.72 trillion. Australia has a land area of 7,741,220 square kilometers. Australia's defense budget amounts to USD 30.8 billion, and it has a total of 89,550 military personnel (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2022).

Regarding the aforementioned data exposure, it indicates that China possesses significant superiority over Australia in terms of accumulated power. According to Stephan Walt's hypothesis, there is a direct correlation between a country's power and the level of threat it poses. The more power a country accumulates, the greater the potential threat it poses. This assumption was proposed by Walt in 1987. Therefore, Fiji's response to China's supremacy is to counterbalance against China.

Geographical proximity

Refers to the closeness or nearness of two or more locations in terms of their physical distance. The second crucial factor in assessing the probability of a threat to a country is its geographical proximity. Typically, the proximity between a nation's capital and other countries is taken into account when assessing potential risks. However, this assessment can also involve measuring the distance between the capital and military sites of other countries. Those in closer proximity to the source of dangers face a higher probability of being affected

by those risks compared to those that are farther away geographically (S. Walt, 1987). Threats influence a country's decision to either align itself with or distance itself from other countries, a choice known as balancing or bandwagoning. The distance between the capital of Fiji, Suva, and Beijing is precisely 9,086.22 kilometers, as reported by Embassies.net. China has established a military station on the Spratly islands in the South China Sea region (Hendler & Motta, 2021). Hence, the proximity of China's military installation on the Spratly islands to Suva can be perceived as a plausible menace. The author has gathered data indicating that the distance between Suva and the Spratly islands is precisely 7,576 kilometers, as per Google Map.

Conversely, Australia's geographic location is in closer proximity to Fiji than China. Based on the author's data, the distance between Suva and the Australian capital, Canberra, is 3,450 kilometers (Google Earth, 2024). Furthermore, Australia possesses significant economic interests in the Indo Pacific region, as stated in the Australian Foreign Policy White Paper of 2016. Therefore, maintaining stability and dominance in this region is crucial for Australia, both alone and in collaboration with its defensive alliance, AUKUS. Nevertheless, there are other factors that contribute to Australia's potential threat to Fiji.

Based on the above statistics, it can be concluded that Australia poses a higher potential threat to Fiji compared to China. Nevertheless, Australia's focus on economic strategy takes priority over the possible threat it poses to Fiji. In contrast, China's greater assertiveness in the Asia Pacific region may be seen as more menacing compared to Australia.

Offensive Power

The state considers offensive power as one of the indications when assessing possible threats. Hence, the state's decision to engage in military aggression is contingent upon its military capability. Nevertheless, Walt emphasized that the military capability's influence decides whether a state will choose to balance or bandwagon in response to threats. When a country is confronted with an unexpected threat, it tends to seek support from other countries in order to enhance its own capabilities. Conversely, if the danger source launches a large-scale and rapid attack, it will be challenging for the targeted country to protect itself. Choosing to balance is deemed irrational, as coalitions are unable to promptly offer military aid (S. M. Walt, 1985).

Fiji allocated a military budget of USD 42 million in 2022 to protect its sovereignty. The country now has a total force of 10,040 troops. Fiji possesses a limited number of offensive weaponry systems in terms of attack capabilities. The country possesses exclusively armored battle vehicles and artillery, according to The Military Balance report of 2022. This situation is highly susceptible to possible threats from other nations, such as Australia or China.

China possesses a comprehensive array of offensive weaponry across land, sea, and air. The author's data reveals that China possesses a comprehensive array of offensive defense equipment, including surface-to-surface missiles, strategic submarines, armored fighting vehicles for land, sea, and air operations, artillery, unmanned aerial vehicles, aircraft carriers, cruisers, frigates, destroyers, bombers, ground attack fighters, air-launched missiles, and helicopters. Additionally, China's military personnel strength stands at 2,545,000 individuals (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2022). China's offensive weapons system and personnel numbers far surpass Fiji's, making China significantly superior in offensive weapons strength.

Meanwhile, Australia, being considered one of Fiji's possible countries that pose a threat, possesses a number of offensive weapons systems that are also deemed capable. Australia possesses a range of military assets including submarines, destroyers, frigates, F/A 18 Super Hornet and F 35A Lighting II aircraft, P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft, air-

launched missiles and bombs, armored battle vehicles, artillery such as the M 777 A-2, Mortar MOR 81, L16, and M252 AI, as well as the Tiger helicopter. Furthermore, Australia is bolstered by a substantial force of 89,550 men, as reported by The Military Balance in 2022.

Stephen Walt identifies two primary motivations for countries' decision to engage in balancing behavior against strong powers. States jeopardize their own existence if they neglect to foresee the rise of potential dominance before it reaches a formidable level. Forming an alliance with a dominant power entails relying on its ongoing support and favor. A more secure approach is to form alliances with individuals who lack the ability to readily overpower their partners, in order to prevent being overpowered by those who possess such dominance (S. Walt, 1987).

Furthermore, aligning with the weaker party will amplify the sway of new members, given that the weaker party is more reliant on support. On the other hand, when a new member joins a more powerful party, their influence will diminish because they are smaller in comparison to the coalition. This also makes them susceptible to the unpredictable actions of their new partner. Thus, forming an alliance with the less powerful party is the favored choice (S. Walt, 1987).

Despite China's superior military strength compared to Australia, Fiji opts to adopt a balanced approach towards China. In other words, Fiji aligns itself with a smaller possible threat, namely Australia. The purpose of this is to anticipate the growing power of China, which is likely to become a dominant force, and to enhance the military strategy of Australia and Fiji.

Aggressive Intentions

Due to historical tensions between Fiji and China, internal instability arose in Fiji, leading to a coup in 2006. As a result, Frank Bainimarama was regarded as an anti-democratic Prime Minister. Under the leadership of Bainimarama, Fiji has been suspended from the Pacific Islands Forum and isolated by its former benefactor countries, Australia and New Zealand.

As a result, the Bainimarama dictatorship adopted the Look North Policy, characterized by establishing diplomatic ties with China. In response to Fiji's policies, China provided financial aid and expected the establishment of diplomatic relations between Fiji and Taiwan. Prior to the conclusion of Frank Bainimarama's tenure, China maintained a cordial relationship with Fiji (The Sydney Morning Herald, 2010).

However, after Sitiveni Rabuka assumed power, there was a significant and sudden change in the how the country perceived threats. China, formerly seen as the most intimate ally, later came to be seen as a possible menace. The Rabuka dictatorship has successfully cultivated a peaceful alliance with Australia, its partner, as seen by the adoption of democratic principles in Fiji. In order to uphold the regime, it is necessary to effectively control alternative ideologies. According to The Sydney Morning Herald in 2010, China poses a significant threat to Fiji at now.

The strength of Fiji's alliance with Australia is also determined by its allies. The country's primary geopolitical partner is the United States, with whom it shares a strong alliance. Additionally, it maintains robust defense relationships with India, Japan (as part of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue), South Korea, and the United Kingdom. It is also committed to the Five Power Defense Arrangement and has close defense ties with New Zealand. Furthermore, a defense agreement was recently signed with Fiji in 2022 (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2022).

Australia is a participant in the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA), which is a defense alliance. This alliance comprises five countries: Australia, the United Kingdom, New

Zealand, Malaysia, and Singapore. Based on its membership, it is evident that this alliance is mostly focused on Western countries. The establishment of the FPDA represents a manifestation of the British obligation towards its commonwealth nations, including Singapore and Malaysia (Manullang & Rachman, 2022). Collectively, these five nations can be considered highly influential.

China has significant security partnerships with neighboring nations and fosters these links through its participation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Furthermore, China has actively cultivated defense alliances with other African and Middle Eastern nations. In February 2022, China and Russia declared a 'borderless' alliance, notwithstanding China's hesitance to provide military assistance to Russia in its conflict in Ukraine (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2022).

CONCLUSION

Fiji's foreign policy shift from China to Australia indicates that Fiji perceives China as a more significant potential threat. Due to its relatively small size, particularly in comparison to China and Australia, Fiji lacks the capacity to address these concerns solely through internal means. Thus, Fiji opted to maintain equilibrium in an outwardly focused manner. Fiji has chosen to engage with Australia as a means of counterbalancing China, which is perceived to possess significantly greater power. Therefore, the shift in Fiji's diplomatic ties, namely with Australia over the 2022-2023 timeframe, can be attributed to Fiji's proactive measures to counter the heightened risk posed by China, through a strategic partnership with Australia. Fiji, being a comparatively lesser country, is compelled to rely on one of these dominant powers for its survival. It has chosen to align itself with Australia, which is a regional hegemon. Sitiveni Rabuka's government has the capacity to diminish China's impact in Fiji in the foreseeable future, encompassing economic collaboration, defense and security, as well as political alignment that will gradually resemble that of Australia. Therefore, the Pacific Islands region has the potential to become more stable, thereby enabling Australia to continue its dominant position in the region.

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