

**Roles and Strategies**  
By Ambassador C. Steven McGann

It is a privilege to address the Asia Society this morning on the changing role of the United States in the Pacific area. The United States has a long history of enduring relationships with the Pacific islands dating from the early days of Yankee whalers to our alliances in World War II – until today, when we are seeking ways to implement a comprehensive and renewed engagement in the region. Since dedicating 2007 as the “Year of the Pacific,” and following the election of President Barack Obama, the United States has worked hard to renew its strong interest in and commitment to the region. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently held a very productive meeting with Pacific Island leaders at the UN in September 2010, where U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice works closely on issues of mutual concern with Pacific Island leaders and other Permanent Representatives. Last August, Assistant Secretary Kurt Campbell led a dynamic delegation to the Pacific Islands Forum and the Post-Forum Dialogue meeting in Port Vila, Vanuatu, where we discussed ways to accomplish our goals at the regional and bilateral levels. I am happy to add that Secretary Clinton is scheduled to visit Papua New Guinea later this fall. Many of us, at all levels of government, care deeply about the countries in the region and are serious about enhancing U.S. engagement in the Pacific.

“The United States is a Pacific Power.” The Obama administration entered office with a deep appreciation for the Asia-Pacific to American national interests. Our engagement with the region focuses not only on the role of East Asia, but also on the central role of the Pacific island nations to U.S. interests and regional stability.

The region is changing, and our engagement must change, too, if we are to continue our regional responsibilities. The Pacific’s shifting dynamic is characterized by substantial development in Guam resulting from the relocation of some U.S. forces from Okinawa, major investment in resource rich Papua New Guinea, untapped undersea riches, and climate and environmental challenges. Increased labor mobility throughout the region, primarily to Australia and New Zealand but also to the United States, provides substantial remittances that underpin the region’s economy. Pacific island countries, however, still remain extremely vulnerable.

Our priorities in the Pacific are to support and protect democracy and human rights, encourage economic growth and development, foster regional stability, elicit support for U.S. interests outside the region, and build capacity for environmental protection and resource management, as well as climate adaptation. One area of key concern is women’s participation in decision-making, and that is why the State Department’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) will, in the next few months, begin supporting a program to increase and expand the information and opportunities available to Pacific

Asia  
Society



Washington

**Where Asia and America Meet**  
The Whittemore House  
1526 New Hampshire Ave.  
Washington, DC 20036  
Phone 202.833.ASIA (2742)  
Fax 202.833.0189  
[www.asiasociety.org](http://www.asiasociety.org)

women. We will make every effort to promote the inclusion of women in government and regional organizations to spur good governance and economic growth. We will also continue to promote U.S. economic interests, such as American investments in the mineral resources, consumer products, tourism and food processing sectors; maintenance of access to Pacific waters by U.S. fishing vessels; and the pursuit of expanded routes for U.S. airline carriers.

As U.S. Ambassador in Suva, I am responsible for maintaining diplomatic relations with Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Tonga and Tuvalu, and consular functions for New Caledonia, French Polynesia, and Wallis and Futuna, which together encompass 7.57 million square miles and reflect the diversity of challenges and opportunities found throughout Micronesia, Polynesia, and Melanesia. These countries are partners in addressing critical global and regional issues. It is in the United States' interest to remain fully engaged with them. Embassy Suva also is a regional hub post that supports our missions in Port Moresby, Kolonia, Majuro, and Koror on public diplomacy, environmental, labor and security issues spanning the Pacific.

### **Working with Key Partners**

U.S. engagement in the Pacific is based on a global approach to ensure that common goals are met. This year, we have stepped up our development coordination with our important partners to overcome regional structural deficiencies.

We are not alone in the region. Many nations have significant interests in the Pacific. Australia and New Zealand's commitment to the region has been unabridged. Both have strong cultural, political, historical, and security ties to the islands. The United States collaborates closely with these two friends on policies and programs throughout the Pacific to achieve common objectives. The Pacific is of international importance and has many friends.

The European Union has become a major partner to the region. France and the United Kingdom have Pacific territories and maintain active roles to help achieve good governance in these vulnerable democracies. Japan and South Korea have a substantial presence and important aid programs. Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines are growing their presence. The United Nations also has key programs funded through its varied agencies to help meet development goals. The Asian Development Bank has also played a significant role in assisting with the region's poverty alleviation efforts.

India has a special historical relationship with Fiji, based on the contributions of Indo-Fijians who presently constitute 37 percent of the population. This population grew rapidly from the original 60,000 indentured laborers brought from India between 1879 and 1916 to work in the sugarcane fields; thousands

Asia  
Society



Washington

**Where Asia and America Meet**  
The Whittemore House  
1526 New Hampshire Ave.  
Washington, DC 20036  
Phone 202.833.ASIA (2742)  
Fax 202.833.0189  
[www.asiasociety.org](http://www.asiasociety.org)

more Indians migrated voluntarily in the 1920s and 1930s and formed the core of Fiji's business class. While Mumbai is more distant from Suva than Los Angeles or Shanghai, these historic ties, and the prominent role of Indo-Fijians - not only in Fiji but in the world of the Indian diaspora – heighten the significance of India's growing role in the Pacific region.

China is rapidly expanding ties throughout the Pacific. Beijing has set aside a \$375 million low-interest loan fund for Pacific island countries and established a new large embassy in Suva. Papua New Guinea and Fiji have become favored areas for Chinese growth in the region. We are open to working with China to develop a cooperative approach to development assistance as well as disaster preparedness and response in the Pacific. We have increasingly engaged the Chinese on the importance of showing accountability and transparency in its assistance programs to ensure that these efforts support good governance and the rule of law.

### **Climate Change**

The United States is committed to meeting the climate and clean energy challenge. Leaders made important progress in Copenhagen in December 2009. The resulting Copenhagen Accord takes a meaningful step forward in combating climate change. We are firmly committed to ramping up climate finance to Small Island Developing States (SIDS) worldwide, working with them to develop a robust, comprehensive, and sustainable approach to catalyze adaptation to the adverse effects of climate change, with an additional focus on renewable energy resources. Over the next two years, the United States Government will provide – subject to Congressional approval of FY11 funds – \$100 million to help vulnerable SIDS withstand the impacts of climate change. Of that \$100 million, more than \$21 million in Fiscal Year 2010 and requested Fiscal Year 2011 funds will be targeted specifically for the Pacific island countries.

Pacific island countries comprise approximately a tenth of a percent of the developing world's population and have negligible carbon emissions. Nonetheless, the need to have a serious conversation with Pacific governments and stakeholders on local concerns and global climate change issues remains a priority for the United States, and is a key element of our engagement going forward. While there are areas of disagreement in our policies, there are also issues where we are able to make tangible progress, both through projects on the ground and in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change process. We are glad to have many constructive partners among Pacific Islands in the climate change arena.

# Asia

Society



Washington

**Where Asia and America Meet**  
The Whittemore House  
1526 New Hampshire Ave.  
Washington, DC 20036  
Phone 202.833.ASIA (2742)  
Fax 202.833.0189  
[www.asiasociety.org](http://www.asiasociety.org)

To the extent possible, PICs should shift to using renewable energy sources, including nuclear power, that will reduce costs, carbon footprint, and importation of fossil fuels. The recently announced Tonga Energy Roadmap provides a strong example for how clean energy technologies might be implemented at a scale appropriate for small islands.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is expanding its development portfolio in the Pacific region with new programs focused on health, environment and climate change adaptation, designed in partnership with regional organizations. USAID, in conjunction with our Regional Environmental Office (REO), will provide valuable, additional technical resources alongside our Pacific partners. However, Pacific Island countries often do not have the ability to absorb, manage and dispense significant funding, and sometimes are overwhelmed by the procedures required to apply for funding from dedicated multilateral climate change and environmental funds. Strengthening existing regional donor coordination would help close gaps, prevent redundancies, and share best practices

The United States is expanding initiatives that support low emissions and energy-efficient technologies. We are also supporting adaptation programs that strengthen technical and vocational education, expand training programs, and employ environmentally sustainable technologies. Training Pacific islanders to maintain these systems would give them additional skills to improve their labor mobility and increase remittances. Addressing labor mobility would help meet core Pacific Island country concerns should any islands become uninhabitable due to sea-level encroachment. The United States should provide appropriate technologies that would improve the resilience of tenuous island economies in the earthquake, tsunami and cyclone-prone Pacific region. Increased energy, food, and economic security would be key outcomes of this framework.

### **Working with U.S. Pacific Command**

The United States understands clearly the vulnerabilities of our friends in the Pacific. In recent years, U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) Pacific Partnership/Pacific Angel missions have been one of the ways in which we have partnered with our Pacific Island counterparts to address humanitarian issues throughout the region. Working with USPACOM's Center for Excellence and the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS), the Embassy in Suva conducted workshops and table-top exercises which significantly increased the capacity of Fijian disaster management officials to better prepare for and respond to natural disasters. Within the last year, we have provided over \$1.5 million in aid for cyclone and tsunami-related disasters to governments and non-governmental organizations in Embassy Suva's district. USPACOM's Joint Interagency Task Force West (JIATF-West), the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS), and the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) have been central to our

# Asia

Society



Washington

**Where Asia and America Meet**  
The Whittemore House  
1526 New Hampshire Ave.  
Washington, DC 20036  
Phone 202.833.ASIA (2742)  
Fax 202.833.0189  
[www.asiasociety.org](http://www.asiasociety.org)

efforts to address non-traditional threats by enhancing port security, capacity-building, information-sharing and maritime domain awareness. The APCSS has supported the efforts of the Pacific Island Countries' experts to understand the current maritime security threats in the region and develop tangible steps forward to address maritime domain awareness and other issues.

### Maritime Security

The Pacific is essential to our security and critical to USPACOM and U.S. Coast Guard missions. The lack of regional maritime security architecture leaves a large area of the Pacific susceptible to external non-state actors and other non-traditional threats. The United States has the ability and assets to help address non-traditional threats, particularly transnational crime, with our friends in the Pacific. A high priority is to increase maritime security and law enforcement capacity throughout the region. Illegal, unlicensed and underreported fishing comprise the largest trans-national criminal concern in the Pacific. Commercial fishing fleets understand the limitations of Pacific island countries' patrol boat capabilities in protecting a broad swath of fishing areas and know how to work around them.

We are considering ways to expand our cooperative maritime enforcement through bilateral agreements. These "shiprider" agreements place local law enforcement officials aboard select U.S. Coast Guard and navy ships transiting their waters, thereby expanding the Pacific Island countries' ability to interdict suspicious vessels operating inside their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). Entering into a shiprider agreement is in itself seen as a deterrent to illegal fishing, so the United States is looking at ways to expand these valuable and effective bilateral solutions. The six current shiprider agreements have been a great success, resulting in a decrease in illegal fishing and an increase in applications for licenses in their EEZs. This has benefited shiprider partners with not only increased revenue but better maritime domain awareness and protection of the tuna stocks. Working closely with the other "Quad" nations Australia, New Zealand and France, we are committed to continue to find ways to partner with the Pacific Island countries in taking the necessary steps to combine air and sea assets to preserve and protect their resources.

The United States also is strengthening regional cooperation to stem the trafficking of persons, arms and drugs. The Embassy's Regional Security Office (DS) has increased engagement by the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). As a transportation hub and popular tourist destination, Fiji is especially vulnerable to transnational crime, including drug and human smuggling and trafficking. Working with the Pacific

Asia  
Society



Washington

**Where Asia and America Meet**  
The Whittemore House  
1526 New Hampshire Ave.  
Washington, DC 20036  
Phone 202.833.ASIA (2742)  
Fax 202.833.0189  
[www.asiasociety.org](http://www.asiasociety.org)

Island countries, we must expand our ability to combat non-traditional threats and other criminal activities throughout the Pacific.

### **The Situation in Fiji**

Inextricably linked with regional economic development is the vital issue of good governance. The United States is deeply concerned about the current state of affairs in Fiji. Fiji's turn away from elections-based government remains the exception in the region and cannot be attributed to "cultural" factors, as five of Fiji's Melanesian, Polynesian, and Micronesian neighbors have conducted Parliamentary elections since 2009, with Tonga on schedule to hold newly representative elections in November this year. The Asia-Pacific Democracy Partnership, chaired by South Korea, has sent election observation missions to several of these votes, under the expert coordination of the East-West Center based in Honolulu.

Since the 2006 coup, and the ascendance of Prime Minister Bainimarama's military regime, Fiji has lost its previous leadership role in the region. Fiji's coup leaders have not taken credible steps to restore democratic institutions. After breaking a promise to hold elections in 2009, they now promise to begin work in 2012 toward a new constitution and elections in 2014. They also promised to lift public emergency regulations after passing a restrictive Media Decree, but the regulations remain in place, the press remains heavily censored and is now only Fijian-owned, and the right to assembly is severely restricted.

The United States maintains sanctions and other policy restrictions, including restrictions on military and other assistance to the Government of Fiji, sanctions pursuant to Section 7008 of the Foreign Operations Appropriations Act, visa bans against coup leaders, restrictions on lethal military sales, and restrictions on certain bilateral engagement. The United States calls for an open, inclusive, and transparent process for free and fair elections, the re-establishment of an independent judiciary, and an end to media crackdowns and other limits on civil liberties.

The United States will continue to work closely with Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and other critical stakeholders in creating a process of engagement that creates necessary conditions for a democratic transition in Fiji. Close coordination and consultation between Washington, Canberra, and Wellington will remain the foundation for our approach to Fiji and will help ensure a complementary and unified approach.

Asia  
Society



Washington

**Where Asia and America Meet**  
The Whittemore House  
1526 New Hampshire Ave.  
Washington, DC 20036  
Phone 202.833.ASIA (2742)  
Fax 202.833.0189  
[www.asiasociety.org](http://www.asiasociety.org)

Disappointingly, Prime Minister Bainimarama declined an offer of senior-level dialogue with the United States that might have led to early electoral reform assistance and measurable steps toward restoring civilian government and democratic rule. The entrenchment of authoritarian rule indifferent to criticism has become a dangerous model. To date, the United States has maintained a dual-track approach whereby we maintain comprehensive sanctions and publically advocate for democratic governance, while simultaneously identify areas for potential cooperation. In close coordination with Australia, New Zealand, Pacific island countries and other partners we seek to encourage Fiji to take steps to return to a leadership role in the Pacific community.

Our approach underscores that U.S. sanctions against Fiji's military regime will not be lifted until the country returns to democracy. However, it also demonstrates that the U.S. is prepared to take steps to engage Fiji. Engagement is consistent with the administration's view that it is not a gift, rather a means, to achieve desirable outcomes. The U.S. should help Fiji address such structural issues as economic reform and land tenure that have stunted the growth of Fiji's economy beyond the tourism industry. We will work with our partners in the region to encourage Fiji to end the "coup culture" that portends to hinder regional cooperation and economic development. To these ends, the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) is funding two programs in Fiji – to train television reports in the art of reporting, and to promote dialogue and tolerance among Fiji's diverse ethnic communities.

Our desire is to assist Fiji's reintegration into international institutions and holding of free and fair elections no later than 2014. The regime could build confidence, by taking credible steps with timelines and benchmarks, toward an increased civilian role in government, early elections and other democratic reforms.

### **Regional Architecture**

A lack of governmental capacity is an impediment to development throughout the region. It limits the ability of Pacific island countries to meet their international obligations and respond effectively to either the challenges that confront them or the demands of their citizens. These small states rely heavily on a constellation of regional intergovernmental organizations to supplement their very limited human and financial resources. The United States is a member of some of these organizations and has longstanding relationships with others. Strengthening our coordination with Pacific regional institutions is one of the most constructive and cost-effective steps we could take to ramp up our regional engagement and have a positive impact on the security and prosperity of the Pacific islands. At the same time, the current regional architecture for the Pacific must be adjusted to efficiently meet our goals and objectives.

Asia  
Society



Washington

**Where Asia and America Meet**  
The Whittemore House  
1526 New Hampshire Ave.  
Washington, DC 20036  
Phone 202.833.ASIA (2742)  
Fax 202.833.0189  
[www.asiasociety.org](http://www.asiasociety.org)

The Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) is a sub-regional political institution with the potential to advance practical, shared objectives with the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and likeminded regional leaders. The PIF plays an important policy role in intra-regional affairs, and we are determined to enhance our engagement with it as a dialogue partner. Although the United States is not a member of the PIF, we will identify ways to enhance donor coordination and will work closely with that organization of Oceania leaders to ensure it is results-oriented and generates practical outcomes consistent with U.S. mechanisms for development assistance.

A key partner for the United States is the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), headquartered in Noumea, New Caledonia, but with a large office in Suva that houses over a third of its staff. The United States sees the Secretariat of the Pacific Community as an important regional organization. Founded by the United States and five other countries in 1947, the now 26 member-strong SPC is the oldest and largest regional organization in the Pacific. The SPC is important because the U.S. Pacific territories, including American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, also are full members of its technical agencies.

Thus, working with the SPC allows the United States the opportunity to harmonize policies on climate change and other key regional issues with the independent states in the Pacific. SPC can become a critical partner to advance U.S. and regional agendas in climate change adaptation, food security, fisheries, health, and other priority sectors.

### **Public Diplomacy**

The future holds many public diplomacy opportunities, including the “ribbon cutting” of our New Embassy Compound (NEC) in 2011, that will highlight Embassy Suva’s role as a regional hub post. At that time, we will host a week of intensive outreach activities to underline our expanding commitment to the Pacific. It will be an opportunity to underscore the return of the Fulbright Program and the increased availability of scholarship opportunities throughout the region, which assist in helping our nations find solutions to shared concerns. We must do more in this area. We need to reengage the Pacific Island countries through additional public diplomacy programs that promote mutual understanding and cultural exchanges.

Asia  
Society



Washington

**Where Asia and America Meet**  
The Whittemore House  
1526 New Hampshire Ave.  
Washington, DC 20036  
Phone 202.833.ASIA (2742)  
Fax 202.833.0189  
[www.asiasociety.org](http://www.asiasociety.org)



## Meeting the Challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

As a Pacific nation, the United States values its longstanding and close relationships with the countries and peoples of the region. Many of our bonds were forged by the sacrifices we made together during World War II. Today, citizens of the Freely Associated States serve honorably in the U.S. military. Tongan soldiers have fought alongside U.S. troops in Iraq and will assist international forces in Afghanistan. Other Pacific island countries contribute to regional and international peacekeeping efforts, such as Fiji in Iraq and the Sinai, and Vanuatu in East Timor and Darfur. Pacific island countries ably demonstrate their support for global stability by positive votes on key resolutions in the UN General Assembly. We greatly appreciate these contributions.

I see my responsibilities as working with countries that are connected by an ocean rather than separated by water. The United States cannot afford to neglect Pacific island countries. For their sake, and our own, we must work together to meet the challenges of the 21st Century.

Asia  
Society



Washington

**Where Asia and America Meet**  
The Whittemore House  
1526 New Hampshire Ave.  
Washington, DC 20036  
Phone 202.833.ASIA (2742)  
Fax 202.833.0189  
[www.asiasociety.org](http://www.asiasociety.org)