

Stage being set for regime change in Solomon Islands

10 May—The Australian government and its media propagandists have begun a campaign to delegitimise the government of Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare, in preparation for a potential uprising or military intervention to remove him. The pretext is that the Sogavare government's recent security agreement with China will give the latter a military foothold in Australia's "backyard", something Australian PM Scott Morrison has called a "red line" for both Canberra and Washington. The real reason is that by pursuing his country's best interests through security and economic cooperation with China, in defiance of the AngloAmerican empire's plans to divide the Asia-Pacific into Cold War-style blocs, Sogavare has shown the rest of the region what "sovereignty" actually looks like, and the empire fears his courage could become contagious.



Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare speaking in the SI Parliament blasting Australia's attitude towards his country. Photo: Screenshot

Pro-US political forces inside and outside Solomon Islands have been working to destabilise Sogavare's government ever since he switched diplomatic recognition from Taiwan (formally the Republic of China, ROC) to the People's Republic of China (PRC) in September 2019. Australian media ridiculously portray this as a declaration of "allegiance" to Beijing, rather than merely the much belated recognition that the ROC government lost China's civil war in 1949. By the same definition, Britain declared its own "allegiance" to the PRC when it switched recognition from Taiwan in March 1972, followed by Australia and New Zealand that December, and the USA in January 1979. Any moves by Pacific Island nations to do the same, however, have always been met with hostility by the USA and Australia, which prefer to keep them as an aid-dependent "buffer zone" against other great powers; hence the empire's further outrage when in December 2019 Sogavare signed up to China's infrastructure-centred Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) international development program.

The USA and Taiwan have already made one attempt to oust Sogavare, by sponsoring riots in Solomon Islands' capital Honiara last November which their agents in the political opposition used as pretext for a (failed) motion of no confidence, on the grounds that the government had "lost control" of the country.¹ Canberra sent Australian Federal Police (AFP) and military personnel to help restore the peace, per a security treaty Sogavare had signed during a previous stint as PM in 2017. According to media reports, however, Sogavare charged that the Australian personnel had refused to protect Chinese-built infrastructure and Honiara's Chinese diaspora community from the rioters. This presumably sped the passage of the security pact with China, which was reportedly already being negotiated at the time. The deal was formally announced 19 April after opposition politicians leaked a draft version late the previous month, setting Australian media and "national security" pundits squawking that it would result in a Chinese naval base in Solomon Islands, though nothing in the text could plausibly be interpreted to support such an inference.²

Invasion threats

Keying off the media furore, Morrison asserted at a 24 April press conference that no such base would be tolerated. "I share the same red line that the United States has when it comes to these issues", he said. "We won't be having Chinese military naval bases in our region on our doorstep." The US government has not itself declared an explicit "red line", at least in public, but on 22 April the White House stated in a press release that "If steps are taken to establish a de facto permanent military presence, power-projection capabilities, or a military installation, the delegation noted that the United States would then have significant concerns and respond accordingly." The 26 April *Guardian* reported that US Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Kritenbrink had "refused to rule out use of military force against Solomon Islands". Kritenbrink had been part of a delegation led by National Security Coordinator for Indo-Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell, the architect of then-President Barack Obama's military "pivot to Asia" in 2011, who had met for 90 minutes with Sogavare and senior Solomon Islands officials the previous week. "Prime minister Sogavare indicated that ... the agreement they've concluded has solely domestic implications. But we've made clear that there are potential regional security implications", Kritenbrink said.

Sogavare has refused to back down, and has hit back hard at Morrison's and the USA's threats. "We

deplore the continual demonstration of lack of trust by the concerned parties, and tacit warning of military intervention in Solomon Islands if their ‘national interest’ is undermined”, he said in a 3 May speech in the nation’s parliament. “In other words, we are threatened with invasion.”

“What is more insulting, Mr Speaker, in this attitude”, he continued, “and therefore totally unacceptable, is we are being treated as kindergarten students walking around with Colt .45s in our hands, and therefore we need to be supervised.” In an apparent mocking reference to Australian Minister for Home Affairs Karen Andrews’ remark, in a 24 March interview, that the Pacific Island nations are in “our backyard ... and we are very concerned of [sic] any activity that is taking place [there]”, Sogavare suggested Australian politicians drop their paternalistic attitude and stop referring to their smaller neighbours as the part of a property “where rubbish is collected and burned ... [and] where we relieve ourselves. I call on those people who brand us as their backyard to stop calling us that name and start to respect us as a sovereign independent nation with one equal vote in the United Nations.”

Less reported, but more cutting for the purportedly devout Christian Scott Morrison and his co-religionists in cabinet, Sogavare (himself a practising Christian, as are the vast majority of Solomon Islanders) also attacked the hypocrisy of Western countries which proclaim Christian values, but had waged “some of the bloodiest wars in the history of our planet”. Meanwhile in China (which has not started a war in centuries), contrary to Western propaganda lies about religious suppression that are being used to whip up domestic opposition to the diplomatic switch and the BRI, “there are more than 120 million real, practising Christians”, he pointed out—more than the entire population of all the Pacific Island nations, Australia, and New Zealand combined.

Smear campaign

As noted above, the US government and its fellow travellers were already working to destabilise Sogavare’s government even before he defied Canberra and Washington’s demands to abandon the security deal with China. Now the knives are out in earnest, and the mainstream media are preparing the field with a coordinated smear campaign employing all the tropes familiar from past campaigns against leaders similarly targeted. Sogavare is a long-time “puppet” of the PRC, we are told, whom the editorial of the 10 May *Australian* asserts was clearly “singing from the Beijing song sheet when he declared switching his country’s diplomatic allegiance [sic] away from Taiwan had put the Solomons on the ‘right side of history’”—and never mind that Australia got on that “side” almost 50 years ago.

In reality, as indeed the *Australian* had itself acknowledged, not only had Sogavare previously been “a long-time advocate of the Taiwan relationship”, but his realisation that Solomon Islands’ interests would be better served by establishing relations with Beijing had been driven at least in part by Australian interference in his nation’s affairs. “To be honest, when it comes to economics and politics, Taiwan is completely useless to us”, the *Australian* quoted Sogavare on 11 September 2019, from an interview with Australian National University (ANU) China scholar Dr Graeme Smith. For example, as PM in 2006 “I sent 40 police officers to go and train in Taiwan”, he recalled. “And you know what Australia did? The Foreign Affairs Minister [Alexander Downer] himself went to Taiwan and says: ‘Stop the training, that area is ours.’ So what I’m saying is, if this was China ... they’d say: ‘Get the hell out of here. This is a sovereign decision made by a sovereign government.’”



Australia media headlines since the SI-China security agreement are laying the foundation for a foreign-directed overthrow of SI PM Sogavare.

In a hilarious irony, the *Australian* editorial then trots out Downer himself to denounce Sogavare as corrupt, a “‘rogue’ with ‘absolutely no respect for the law’” who had “railed against Australia’s assistance to Solomon Islands after a period of sustained lawlessness [the 1999-2003 *de facto* civil war known as The Tensions, which Sogavare had done more than most to help end] ‘because it was interfering with his governance plans’.” Do tell. And even were Downer speaking the truth, the old schoolyard taunt springs to mind: It takes one to know one. This after all is the man who abused his authority as foreign minister to have the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS) bug Timor-Leste’s cabinet offices in 2004 to gain a commercial advantage for oil giant Woodside Petroleum, for

which both he and his chief of staff Ashton Calvert then walked straight into cushy high-paid jobs after Downer lost his seat in Parliament a few years later. A rogue with no respect for the law, indeed.

Another classic tactic in the regime-change playbook is to present the targeted leader as an “autocrat”, whose decisions go against the “democratic” will of the people. Thus the *Australian* declares that “Mr Sogavare’s ambition to draw his nation closer to China is at odds with results of surveys across the Solomons that found more than 91 per cent preferred alignment with liberal democratic countries ... [while] 79 per cent said the Solomons should not receive financial aid from China”. Aside from the notorious unreliability of opinion polls (recall how Hillary Clinton was supposed to be a shoo-in for US President in 2016), it should be noted that the *Australian* does not disclose when, how or by whom these surveys were conducted. The numbers, however, match those from a poll of a purportedly “representative” sample of 1,526 people, commissioned by parties unknown, conducted by market research firm APMI Partners in November-December 2021—immediately after the riots, with the whole country conveniently saturated with anti-China propaganda by agents of the USA and Taiwan, and the population on edge for fear of a relapse into civil war. Hardly a time to gather considered opinions.

The government itself has also got into the game, via softdrops to its media stenographers. In a 6 May “exclusive”, the *Australian* reported that the Morrison government had considered, but decided against, suspending the country from Australia’s Pacific workers program, which issues an annual quota of seasonal work visas to Pacific Islanders on relaxed terms. “About 3,000 Solomon Islanders are currently working in Australia under the scheme ... sending millions of dollars home to their families in remittances”, the Australian reported. “Senior government sources said the prospect of suspending the Solomon Islands’ access to the scheme was discussed ‘at the highest levels’, but there was a strong consensus that ‘we should not retaliate [against] or punish’ the country’s people for the actions of their Prime Minister. ... ‘We want to keep the good relationship that Australia has with the people of Solomon Islands, even if the government is angry with us.’” (Emphasis added.) The implicit threat, of course, being that their access can and will be cut off, and the population thus collectively punished, should they fail to turn against their government.

But that, of course, is the point: behind its flimsy pretence of magnanimity, all “big brother” Australia is really interested in doing is keeping Solomon Islands, and the rest of the Pacific, under its thumb. Meanwhile another China-Solomon Islands draft agreement, leaked to media on 9 May and yet to be authenticated, suggests that the two countries’ BRI cooperation will involve the co-development of industrial research organisations and technical institutes; exploration and development of Solomon Islands’ on- and offshore oil, gas and mineral deposits (which are mostly untapped, but presumed based on preliminary surveys to be rich, including substantial reserves of gold, bauxite phosphates, lead, zinc and nickel); fisheries and seafood industry, including processing; marine tourism and leisure services; and associated infrastructure, including ports, wharves, energy generation and transmission, submarine communications cables, shipbuilding and maintenance facilities, and more. Compare that to a measly 3,000 fruit-picking jobs a year, and the choice for the Solomons between China and Australia pretty much makes itself.

Footnotes

1. [“Solomon Islands crisis is largely of Australia’s making”](#), AAS, 8 Dec. 2021.

2. [“Canberra’s hysteria over imaginary Chinese naval bases”](#), AAS, 30 Mar. 2022.

By Richard Bardon, *Australian Alert Service*, 11 May 2022