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Solomon Islands Rejects Concern over Security Treaty with China

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Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare said criticism of his country's security negotiations with China was "very insulting." This was his first comment on a security treaty he said was ready to sign.

Last week, an early version of the security treaty became public. Several countries, including Australia, New Zealand and the United States, have since expressed concern over the possibility of a Chinese military base in the area.

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said Monday it was a possible "militarization of the **region**." And Australia's defense minister Peter Dutton added that his country would be concerned if the deal led to a Chinese military base in the Pacific.

The island nation is about 3,200 kilometers northeast of Australia. It has a population of 690,000.

Sogavare told the parliament on Tuesday the leaked security document was only a **draft**. He would not give details about the final deal.

"We are not pressured in any way by our new friends, and there is no **intention** whatsoever to ask China to build a military base in the Solomon Islands," he said.

Sogavare criticized Western countries in the speech. He said they did not care if the island nation went underwater because of climate change.

He also denied claims by opposition political groups that a security treaty with China would lead to an **autocratic** government. The Solomon Islands changed its diplomatic relations from Taiwan to mainland China in 2019.

During anti-government riots last year, Sogavare said the Chinatown neighborhood in the capital Honiara was burned down. There were also threats to sports buildings for the 2023 Pacific Games being built by China. He said these buildings “gifted to the Solomon Islands must be protected.”

Under a 2017 security agreement, Australia provided police assistance to restore order after the riots. New Zealand, Fiji and Papua New Guinea also later sent police.

The leaked document said the security treaty would permit China’s armed police and military to protect Chinese projects on the islands.

Sogavare rejected the idea that China was a security threat to the area. He said the nation's security treaty with Australia would stay in place.

China’s foreign ministry spokesman said Tuesday that its security agreement with the Solomon Islands was within international law and guidelines.

But Australia and New Zealand continue to raise concerns with the island nation over the proposed security agreement with China.

I’m Jonathan Evans.

The Reuters News Agency reported this story. Susan Shand adapted it for Learning English.

Words in This Story

region - *n.* a broad geographic area distinguished by similar features

draft - *n.* an early sketch, outline, or version

intention - *n.* a determination to act in a certain way

autocratic - *adj.* a person who rules with undisputed influence or power

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