

CHINA, SOLOMON ISLANDS SIGN LANDMARK SECURITY AGREEMENT

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Wang Wenbin denounced the concerns raised by the U.S., Australia over the deal.

China said on Tuesday it had signed a security pact with the Solomon Islands, a first-of-its-kind arrangement that could pave the way for further Chinese security deals overseas.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Minister of Foreign Affairs and External Trade Jeremiah Manele of the Solomon Islands signed an inter-governmental framework agreement on security cooperation.

Under the agreement, the two sides “will conduct cooperation in such areas as maintenance of social order, protection of the safety of people’s lives and property, humanitarian assistance and natural disaster response, in an effort to help Solomon Islands strengthen capacity building in safeguarding its own security.”

Military facilities

Amid concern from Australia, New Zealand and the U.S., the Solomon Islands said there was no agreement for a Chinese military base.

However, in the wake of China putting into use its first overseas military base in Djibouti near the Horn of Africa in 2017, which went against a long-standing policy of not opening foreign bases, Chinese military experts have spoken of the need for further facilities to project power as well as service China’s fast expanding navy.

Much remains unclear about the new agreement, including how China plans to support the Solomon Islands in “maintaining social order” and whether Chinese security forces will be deployed.

Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne said Australia was “deeply disappointed” and “concerned about the lack of transparency with which this agreement has been developed, noting its potential to undermine stability in our region”.

The U.S. said a delegation this week, led by senior diplomat and Indo-Pacific coordinator Kurt Campbell, would travel there. Discussions on the agreement are expected as well as on reopening a U.S. embassy.

‘Ulterior motives’

Asked about the visit, Mr. Wang of the Chinese Foreign Ministry said, “The U.S. Embassy in Solomon Islands has been closed for 29 years. The most recent visit to Fiji made by a U.S. Secretary of State was 37 years ago. Several senior U.S. officials now fancy a visit to some Pacific Island Countries (PIC) all of a sudden after all these years. Are they doing so out of care for PICs or do they have ulterior motives? People are keen to get an answer to this question?”

“PICs are not the backyard of anyone, still less chess pieces in a geopolitical contest,” he added. “PICs have the actual need to diversify their cooperation with other countries and the right to

independently choose their cooperation partners. Sensationalising an atmosphere of tension and stoking bloc confrontation will get no support in the region. Attempts to meddle with and obstruct PICs' cooperation with China will be in vain.”

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