

# U.S. ANNOUNCES \$810 MN IN FUNDING FOR PACIFIC ISLANDS

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The United States on Thursday announced \$810 million in new funding for Pacific islands at a summit with President Joe Biden amid inroads by China in the strategic but sparsely populated region.

The White House said \$600 million will be in the form of a 10-year package to clean up and develop dirty waters to support the tuna industry, while the United States will also expand climate and development aid and its diplomatic presence.

Mr. Biden later on Thursday will address the first-ever Washington summit of Pacific Island nations, including 12 heads of state or government, in hopes of using a personal touch to reconnect with a region that has been tied closely to the United States since the Second World War. With the U.S. until now often seen as taking the region for granted, China has asserted itself strongly in recent years through investment, police training and, most controversially, a security pact with the Solomon Islands.

The Biden administration also announced that the United States would recognise Cook Islands and Niue, a self-governing territory whose foreign and defence policies and currency are linked to New Zealand. The step will allow the United States to increase its diplomatic footprint in the Cook Island and Niue, which have fewer than 20,000 inhabitants.

Western officials and analysts fear that Beijing will use the Solomon Islands as a base to expand militarily into the Pacific."

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