

2025 PIF Leaders Meeting and Tuvalu's proposed Kaitasi Treaty with Taiwan

by Niuone Eliuta and Jess Marinaccio

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Tuvalu's Prime Minister Feleti Teo (left), Taiwan's Ambassador to Tuvalu Andrew Lin and Tuvalu Governor General Tofiga Vaievalu Falani at Taiwan National Day celebrations in Funafuti, Tuvalu, October 2025.

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Prior to the 2025 Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Leaders Meeting, one of us (Eliuta) argued that **China's tactics** over past Forums to marginalise Taiwan have aimed to reinforce the "One China" principle. The 2025 PIF host, Solomon Islands, made a **last-minute decision** to exclude all dialogue and development partners until the Forum completed its regional architecture review. While this justification projected neutrality, analysts and Pacific officials argued that **the measure stemmed from pressure** by China after Solomon Islands' attempt to ban only Taiwan from the meeting **met with pushback** from other Forum members. These tensions illustrate a pattern where China's **diplomatic pressure has disrupted** regional priorities and placed Pacific leaders in challenging positions, forcing them to balance sovereignty against external influence.?

We believe that the moment Solomon Islands' Prime Minister Jeremiah Manele announced he was excluding all dialogue and development partners from the PIF meeting, Taiwan emerged as a moral and diplomatic winner and that **the meeting outcomes benefited** rather than harmed Taiwan. The meeting outcomes **maintained Taiwan's development partner status** and drew international attention to the core values and **principles of Pacific regionalism**. Aside from reaffirming the 1992 leaders' decision on Taiwan's participation at PIF, the final communiqué even includes direct reference to **Taiwan's contribution** of US\$3 million to the Pacific Resilience Facility, which is six times China's listed contribution of US\$500,000.

The meeting outcomes also **reinforced solidarity** among Taiwan's Pacific allies, who likely viewed the results as a validation of fairness and inclusivity within the Forum. Even Pacific countries that recognise China, like Samoa, **stood up** for Taiwan before and during the meeting to preserve the Forum's integrity and their relationships with Taiwan's Pacific allies. According to an ABC news report, one Pacific Island

government source noted that “it was ‘impossible’ for Pacific leaders to effectively expel Taiwan so long as it maintains Pacific allies” because these allies “needed to be treated with respect”. Global observers recognised the meeting results as curbing Beijing’s influence, allowing Pacific leaders to reclaim agency over their own regional agenda. Ultimately, this reaffirmed that Pacific regionalism thrives not through external dominance but through mutual respect and shared leadership rooted in the Pacific Way.

After the leaders meeting, Tuvalu, Marshall Islands and Palau continued to show strong support for Taiwan at the 2025 United Nations General Assembly. At the recent International Civil Aviation Organization meeting, Tuvalu minister Simon Kofe supported Taiwan’s meaningful participation given its contributions to global aviation. This ongoing advocacy ensures that Taiwan’s exclusion from major forums is widely noticed.

While notable, the 2025 PIF outcomes are not necessarily indicative of long-term regional success for Taiwan. What, then, is the way forward? With pressure building from China to reject Taiwan, how can Tuvalu, Marshall Islands and Palau — Taiwan’s allies in the Pacific — more fruitfully collaborate with Taiwan while also more strongly defending their diplomatic relationship at the regional and international levels?

One recent initiative is a legally binding affirmation of the Tuvalu-Taiwan relationship through the Kaitasi Treaty Between Tuvalu and Taiwan. Tuvalu’s Prime Minister Feleti Teo announced the treaty during a press conference in July 2025. It featured in his 1 October 2025 Independence Day address. He later confirmed during multiple press conferences that Tuvalu’s cabinet had approved the draft treaty and that it may be signed at the end of November during Teo’s state visit to Taiwan.

The inclusion in the treaty’s title of the Tuvaluan word *kaitasi*, which refers to shared or communal ownership of land, is a nod to the 2020 Tuvalu Foreign Policy *Te Sikulagi*, where *kaitasi* is highlighted as a key Tuvaluan cultural concept guiding the policy. The title is also linked to the Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union Treaty which adopts the other guiding principle from Tuvalu’s foreign policy — *falepili*, or being a good neighbor — in its title. As described by Teo, the treaty with Taiwan introduces legal obligations as an extension of the existing Tuvalu-Taiwan relationship. Teo has also noted that the treaty confirms Taiwan’s recognition of Tuvalu’s permanent statehood and maritime boundaries despite the impacts of climate change; focuses specifically on fisheries and food security, health, education, and cultural development; and sets out guiding principles for a new funding mechanism for Taiwan’s aid to Tuvalu.

The treaty represents the first time that an overarching comprehensive agreement will **guide the functioning** of the Tuvalu-Taiwan relationship and delivers on one of the **21 priorities** for Teo's government: making Tuvalu-Taiwan relations more durable.

The treaty will raise Taiwan's profile on the global stage by demonstrating that, despite international isolation, Taiwan can still secure meaningful and strategic partnerships with sovereign nations. It could also reinforce Taiwan's alignment with countries facing shared challenges, such as climate change and security issues, and strengthen its position as a legitimate player with loyal international allies.

Treaties are **typically legally binding** and difficult to unilaterally terminate or withdraw from without significant prior notification. Consequently, the treaty potentially makes it more difficult for Tuvalu to break relations with Taiwan if it were to decide to do so while also providing stronger legal justifications for Tuvalu's support of Taiwan at PIF, the UN, and other venues.

Although **Taiwan's right of presence at the PIF was reaffirmed** during the 2025 PIF leaders meeting, this will not reduce the pressure on Taiwan's remaining Pacific allies to drop Taiwan for China. All PIF members should support the sovereign right of Taiwan's allies to recognise their partner of choice and emphasise that Pacific regional unity is as critical as bilateral relations with China, if not more so. For their part, Tuvalu, Marshall Islands and Palau can also take their own steps to fortify relations with Taiwan, using strategies like Tuvalu's legally binding treaty to strengthen resolve in the face of mounting external pressure.

Disclosures:

The authors are employed by the Tuvalu Government. The views expressed are those of the authors only.

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Link:

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