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**Western Involvement in the Pacific Islands Region:  
Security Concerns and Development Aid**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Philosophy in Development Studies  
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## Abstract

Security concerns and development aid are closely-linked issues in the Pacific island region. In the broadest sense, security needs - either economic, political or strategic- explain the involvement of external powers in the Pacific island countries and their aid policies in the region. As security is multi-faceted, there is a difference in the security priorities of Western donors and Pacific island recipients. Different perceptions and concerns led to global-oriented rather than regional-oriented policies for most of the donors, especially at the height of the Cold War. Pacific island countries' concerns have been subordinate to those of the Western donors because these island nations are heavily aid-dependent. Aid-giving is therefore an effective mechanism to help guarantee regional stability and thereby protect the security interests of donors; on a per capita basis, the aid given to the region is very high by Third World standards.

The trend of high levels of aid flows in the region has not been significantly affected by the end of the Cold War. Economic vulnerability and intra-regional political problems have been brought to the forefront as potential threats to regional stability, however, in place of wider East-West tensions. Continuing economic dependency means that the Western powers still hold a strong influence in the region.

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## Introduction

Among prominent elements in the relationship between the Western powers and the Pacific island countries is development aid. Pacific island countries' need of aid lies partly in their physical disadvantages such as smallness, isolated and remote location and scarcity of resources, but at least as important are their difficulties in dealing with economic dualism, large and burdensome bureaucracies, and consumer demand for a wide range of imported goods. Local revenue is far too meagre to fund projects and services which reflect post-colonial ambitions and expectations concerning the nature of government and individual living standards; external assistance has now become indispensable if modern lifestyles are to be maintained.

External assistance from Western powers involved in the region has grown dramatically since the Second World War with the US, Australia, New Zealand, Britain, France and Japan as major aid donors. A major reason for aid-giving and the involvement of these powers in the Pacific islands lies in their concerns over strategic, economic and political security which the region has significant implication for them. At the height of the Cold War, the fact that the Soviet Union had attempted on several occasions to establish its presence and influence in the region raised the strategic importance of the Pacific. Equally important are the economic security concerns of the island nations. Apart from valuable natural resources found in a few island countries, the 200 mile Exclusive Economic Zones are of major importance. Here the rights of the new sovereign states could have serious implications for the economic concerns of the developed nations with an interest

in the region and thus cannot be overlooked. The political interests of some powers are served by their presence in the region.

As the understanding of linkages between aid flows from the Western powers involved and their security concerns will help provide an overall insight into the region's past, present and future, I hope to contribute to the understanding of the Pacific island region with this work. The research attempts to study the policies, perspectives and involvement in the Pacific islands region of these western hegemonic countries in regard to their security concerns, to study the effects of their policies on the development aid given to the Pacific Island countries and also to detect possible change in relation to the security-aid linkages in the post Cold War era of the 1990's. Part One of the thesis traces the historical background of the region to provide an understanding of how and why so many Pacific island countries have come to a state of permanent dependency. The analysis of aid flows in the region, aid policies of the West, and the linkages between the two are discussed in Part Two of the thesis.

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