

ISLAND SECURITY POLICY INSTITUTE

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POLICY BRIEF

Hurricane Season in the Pacific

Emergency Management Policy Gaps for Tropical Cyclone Events in Hawaii and Pacific Island Communities

Research Pillar: Emergency Preparedness & Island Resilience

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Hawaii has not experienced a major hurricane landfall since Hurricane Iniki struck Kauai in 1992. Thirty years of non-event has produced planning gaps that ISPI's analysis identifies as consequential.**
- **A direct major hurricane strike on Oahu — with simultaneous airport closure, port disruption, power grid failure, and road network flooding — represents a compound emergency scenario that current mutual aid frameworks and supply chain continuity plans are not designed to manage.**
- **Pacific Island territories face regular typhoon exposure but with chronic underfunding of the infrastructure hardening that operational experience demonstrates is necessary.**

The 2023 Maui wildfire demonstrated what can happen when a low-probability, high-consequence event occurs in an emergency management environment that has not sustained active preparedness for it.¹ A direct major hurricane hit on Oahu — home to 70 percent of Hawaii's population, the vast majority of the state's critical infrastructure, and the only international airport serving the island chain — would represent a mass casualty and infrastructure disruption event of a scale that Hawaii's emergency management system has not been seriously stress-tested against.

Policy Recommendations

1. Commission a comprehensive hurricane preparedness gap analysis for Hawaii's emergency management system — specifically assessing the current state of preparedness for a direct major hurricane strike on Oahu.
2. Fund island-specific hurricane infrastructure hardening programs for Hawaii and Pacific territory critical infrastructure at investment levels commensurate with documented hurricane risk rather than recent-event experience.
3. Develop inter-island mutual aid frameworks for Hawaii that provide operational continuity options when Oahu's infrastructure is severely damaged.[FN]

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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The Island Security Policy Institute (ISPI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization based in Honolulu, Hawaii. ISPI produces practitioner-led research, policy analysis, training programs, and commissioned research on public safety, emergency preparedness, insider threat, and security policy for island and coastal communities worldwide. ISPI is registered as a federal contractor on SAM.gov under NAICS 541720. Warren Pulley, Founder & Executive Director.

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