CAPSTONE SPECIAL EDITION

Council For Strategic and Defense Research

How Large Ocean States Look at Security in the Indo-Pacific

Angshuman Choudhury

Abstract

As the Indo-Pacific discourse gains momentum in the global geostrategic discourse, "Large Ocean States" in the Indian and Pacific Oceans find themselves in the eye of the storm. Even as they reassert their unique island and maritime identities, the LOS are putting together a new discourse on security, at the centre of which are existential concerns about climate change and environmental degradation. This discursive recalibration of the fundamental concept of 'security' is playing a key role in shaping the relationship not just between various LOS (or LOS sub-regional communities), but also between LOS and great or large powers. It is also blurring the line between 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' security. However, not all LOS in the Indo-Pacific Region are equally invested in reasserting or redefining 'security'. At the very least, however, all of them recognise the flux in the global order and the need to renegotiate their terms of engagement with both their own immediate security communities and the larger Indo-Pacific geostrategic order. There is little doubt that LOS are poised to play a pivotal role in shaping the very future of 'Indo-Pacific security' and setting the terms for geopolitical engagement in the midst of intensifying great power competition.

Keywords: *Large Ocean States, Security, Indo-Pacific*

Angshuman Choudhury is a Joint PhD candidate in Comparative Asian Studies, National University of Singapore & King's College London.

Introduction

The reformulation of "small island states" (SIS) to "large ocean states" (LOS) includes both normative and material aspects across political, strategic and economic paradigms. A significant part of this process involves island states reasserting their authority over their respective maritime jurisdictions by exercising "positive sovereignty"[1] over them within the legal limits set by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (Chan, 2018). This then means that the very conceptual foundations of LOS is anchored in the exercise of sovereignty through control and assertion, which automatically centres the concept of "security" in the broader policy framework. Thus, as far as understanding the relationship between the Indo-Pacific construct and LOS is concerned, security becomes an important normative prism.

Yet, for LOS, "security" is not a traditional or unidimensional concept. They do not frame or understand security the way the great or rising powers, both continental and maritime, usually do. For LOS, security is multidimensional and largely "non-traditional", as in spilling beyond the narrow confines of military (or "hard") security. This ostensible deepening and broadening of the very concept of security by the LOS becomes a crucial mediating factor in the emerging relationship between them and the Indo-Pacific. In fact, if the Indo-Pacific community is to be truly inclusive, then it absolutely needs to adopt a *decentralised* conception of security, which in this context, means a composite security framework that is discursively and structurally non-hegemonic and non-hierarchical. It is only by doing so that the perceptions and interests of LOS would be valued at par with those of the bigger powers.

Over the last decade, the Indo-Pacific concept has slowly entered the geopolitical mainstream, with an increasing number of countries formally engaging with it. Many LOS, too, have dived in, either through formal collective manifestos or statements by individual leaders. Therefore, we do have some indication of how LOS perceive the construct as far as "security" is concerned. This article will use these iterations—formal, informal and quasi-formal—to unpack and analyse how they frame and exercise "security" within the Indo-Pacific context.

However, it is important to understand that not all LOS within the Indo-Pacific necessarily think alike on all agendas. Hence, they might frame and manifest "security" differently, depending on a range of factors, including but not limited to internal political narratives, immediate neighbourhood dynamics and leadership perceptions. Further, a group of LOS in a particular region or subregion, such as in the South Pacific or Micronesia, might disagree with how counterparts in another region, such as the Indian Ocean, frame "security". Such divergences are natural given divergences in the political and strategic environments across the vast expanse of the Indo-Pacific Region (IPR). At the same time, they indicate how difficult it could be for

[1] For a definition of "positive sovereignty", see Jackson, Robert Howard. "Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World." (1990); for UNCLOS maritime jurisdiction limits, refer to main convention here: https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf

the Indo-Pacific powers to build a consensus-based, transregional community of stakeholders potentially engaging in the exercise of upholding collective or shared security.

This chapter will first explore the key normative pillars of how LOS frame (or have previously framed) the concept of "security". This, needless to say, will entail understanding the very contours of "security" as a dynamic concept in the LOS mind, including inter- and intra-regional divergences. Then, it will explore the emerging trends in the security domain across various LOS (or LOS communities) using collective or individual statements made by regional groupings, national leaders and government officials, and provisions and narratives embedded in bilateral, minilateral or multilateral agreements. It will finally contextualise them in the Indo-Pacific framework to make some primary conclusions. This will specifically involve two things: juxtaposing individual LOS security conceptions with those of the bigger Indo-Pacific powers, as articulated in their respective policy documents (or white papers) on the Indo-Pacific; and analysing the engagements of the bigger powers with the LOS through specific national policies and routine diplomatic activities.

Island Security: Dominant Normative and Structural Framings

As stated earlier, different LOS, or communities of LOS, may perceive and frame security differently. Therefore, in order to understand the dominant normative framings of LOS on security, it would be prudent to consider specific examples from across the IPR. For the purpose of this chapter, we will consider two specific LOS clusters that indicate IPR-wide trends: Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), and Indian Ocean island states.

Conceptually, the manner in which the LOS frame their security interests, agendas and aspirations can be classified into two key politico-territorial categories: micro and macro. In this context, "micro" denotes immediate territorial security concerns relating to the protection of the near coastal waters, Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), Large Marine Protected Areas (LMPAs) and similar jurisdictional expanses. It would also include specific security concerns relating to climate change and natural disasters. "Macro" denotes larger security concerns and engagements relating to the position of LOS within the regional and global geopolitical landscapes. This includes inter-regional and intra-regional security cooperation to tackle both the 'micro' security agendas and larger geostrategic exigencies. It is crucial to understand both the micro and macro aspects of LOS security frameworks, and the critical link between them in the remit of our analysis.

Micro security

One of the most conspicuous ways in which the LOS have begun to iterate their security interests is through their heightened role and responsibility in protecting oceanic biodiversity. They have done this by asserting a sense of, as Chan notes, "ecological responsibility" that emphasises "not the rights to extract but a norm of stewardship and environmental protection" (Chan, 2018). The UNCLOS regime, which proffered large sovereignty rights to the island states, provided the first push towards this assertion. More recently, the creation of LMPAs by LOS, based on the 14th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), has created a fresh rationalisation for island powers to proactively protect marine assets under their extended sovereign jurisdictions (Chan,

2018). This process of sovereignty expansion and enforcement has been a central driving force behind LOS reframing (and rediscovering) their identities, which is part of a broader attempt to subvert the eponymous imposition of "smallness" and take on an expanded security-guaranteeing role.

A primary way in which LOS have sought to protect marine biodiversity and stop overexploitation of natural resources under their maritime jurisdictions is by aiming to check Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. Both the Indian Ocean and Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) regions have emerged as hotspots for IUU fishing, which severely affects the livelihood of LOS coastal fishing communities (Kumar, 2021; MRAG Asia Pacific, 2021: 125) However, IUU and broadly, marine rights enforcement and biodiversity protection, are no longer isolated security issues for the LOS. They are intertwined or overlap with other concerns that more and more LOS are now incorporating within their security frameworks. For starters, IUU fishing is often driven by transnational organised criminal networks that operate with impunity due to lack of coordinated responses by coastal states (UNODC, 2011). Thus, LOS have begun to frame transnational organised crime as a distinct security concern. IUU fishing is also linked to the larger issue of climate change, wherein rampant pillaging of oceanic ecosystems accelerates and aggravate the adverse effects of climate change (Voigt, 2020).

Climate change, at the same time, is a standalone concern for LOS, as it poses a core existential threat to island countries with limited land areas by triggering sea level rise and more frequent extreme weather events (PIF, 2022). In fact, more and more LOS are now foregrounding climate change and attendant phenomena as core security threats, both within their internal policy discourses and external engagements. The leaderships of some LOS, such as the Fijian Prime Minister, Frank Bainimarama, have also made it clear that climate change is a bigger concern for them than geopolitics (Reuters, 2022). Broadly, environmental security, normatively and structurally linked to larger climate change concerns, and other non-traditional security threats have become a core element of what LOS are now calling an "expanded concept of security" (PIF, 2018). They are increasingly also becoming a key aspect of the LOS regional security architecture, which remains fluid, region-specific and contingent on internal and external factors. There are numerous examples to show that LOS, across the IPR, have been aware of emerging non-traditional security threats of a multidimensional nature, and continue to upgrade their understanding and responses as those threats evolve.

The 2022-2023 Pacific Security Outlook Report (PSOR) of the PIF does a good job of capturing this evolving spectrum of threats by identifying six key security concerns flowing from the Boe Declaration 2018: climate change, natural disasters, IUU fishing, transnational organised crime, gender-based violence, and cybercrime (PIF, 2022). Notably, it also recognises the intersection of many of these issues with the COVID-19 pandemic, showing the dynamic and context-sensitive nature of LOS security frameworks. Many of these issues, including illegal migration and HIV/AIDS, are not new inclusions in the PIF security agenda, and began appearing from the 1990s (Wallis et al, 2023). Four multilateral agreements, beginning with the 1992 Honiara Declaration on Law Enforcement Cooperation, outline the complex security environment facing the PIF member states (PIF Website Page, 'Security'). The Mauritian leadership has shown that it is aware of linkages between climate change, food security, livelihood security, and in turn, socio-political stability—a chain of consequences that could foster conditions for violent conflict (Romano & Katja, 2021). Thus, there is a longstanding element of sophistication built into the security culture of many of the LOS who remain cognisant of emerging threats and the need to develop contextual responses to them. The specific basket of security issues that confront LOS may also differ from region to region. For instance, those in the PIF region share most of

the non-traditional security issues with counterparts in the South Western Indian Ocean (SWIO) region, but the latter also face unique threats such as piracy (Mishra, 2022).

The long-time inclusion of a broad spectrum of non-traditional security threats, and not just climate change or IUU fishing, in the security agendas of LOS is an indication of not just how they face threats that are common to a larger geopolitical community of modern nation-states, but also that they can (and should) be a part of the solution-building or response process. In that sense, the normative reframing of security, which necessarily includes a deepening and broadening of core issues, may be seen as a process of signalling by the LOS to the larger Indo-Pacific community, especially the bigger powers, about the terms of collective engagement. In fact, it is an overt message to the leading Indo-Pacific powers—the US, India, Japan, France, Australia, and New Zealand—to look beyond great power politics and traditional security issues in their respective foreign policy frameworks. At the same time, scholars have noted many of the 'micro' security agendas may confusingly overlap with what may be seen as 'development' issues (Wallis et al, 2015). For instance, Seychelles has placed climate change at the centre of its sustainable development agenda, rather than explicitly framing it under the security umbrella, but not without recognising its links with food and energy security (IMF, 2017). Such normative ambiguities aside, there is broad consensus amongst most LOS in the IPR about the uniqueness of their micro security threat spectrum.

Macro security

There is no universal way in which LOS frame or engage with 'macro' security agendas. How LOS perceive their position and significance within regional or global geopolitical orders and interact with each other along geostrategic lines depend on a variety of factors, ranging from geography to internal political narratives. While one group of LOS in a specific region, such as the South Pacific, may have proactively expressed their geostrategic concerns and collaborated to establish a shared security community, others in a different region, such as the SWIO, may have limited their efforts to bilateral diplomacy. At the same time, however, there is a growing sense amongst nearly every LOS in the IPR that their broader geopolitical environment is undergoing certain tectonic shifts that they can no longer ignore. Tied to this is the dawning realisation that they could become sites for heightened geopolitical confrontations that could then spawn unprecedented security challenges for them.

One of the best documents to understand how LOS are framing macro security concerns is the Boe Declaration 2018 of the PIF, a regional island body that has shown a profound sense of self-awareness in terms of its geopolitical position and significance. It also helps us ask if some LOS within the IPR have an autonomous regional security architecture or whether they even want to create such an order. Further, the PIF, broadly, becomes an effective prism to understand how larger Indo-Pacific powers might want to engage with LOS over security, and how the LOS perceive their keenness to do so. As mentioned earlier, the Declaration outlines the "expanded concept of security" covering, inter alia, human security, environmental security and humanitarian assistance and reaffirming that "climate change remains the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific" (PIF, 2018). It then goes on to recognise what it calls the "increasingly complex regional security environment driven by multifaceted security challenges , and a dynamic geopolitical environment leading to an increasingly crowded and complex region" (PIF, 2018).

This is a pinpoint recognition of the macro security challenges that emerging geopolitical confrontations and frictions in the IPR are creating for LOS in the PIF. Related to this is the 'Blue Pacific' narrative, also iterated in the Declaration, which underpins their desire to achieve strategic autonomy and pursue "collective security interests". The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent of the PIF further disaggregates the concept and commits to "have a more flexible and responsive regional security system that acknowledges the breadth of issues impacting peace and security in [the PIF] region, and the contribution the region makes in international fora to progressing global peace and security" (PIF Secretariat, 2022).

Thus, the PIF has a sophisticated sense of collective security that is manifested in its formal iterations and even institutions. It includes the 'Forum Officials Subcommittee on Regional Security (FSRS),' which operates under the Forum Officials Committee (FOC) and replaced the now-disbanded Forum Regional Security Committee (FRSC) (Wallis et al, 2021). It is primarily mandated to "discuss the security issues facing the region; coordinate and monitor the implementation of all PIF security declarations and commitments; prioritise regional security issues and formulate actions to manage the regional security environment; and keep the FOC apprised of regional security issues and initiatives" (Wallis et al, 2021). However, the FSRS is merely a technical coordination body and not a collective security pact like the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). In fact, the PIF region has no formal collective security agreement, and instead, has "a combination of bilateral arrangements both between Pacific Island states and their security partners, as well as multilateral forums" (McNeill, 2021). In that sense, the security architecture of the PIF region is less like a "regional security complex" and more like "a patchwork of agreements, arrangements and activities between Pacific Island states and territories and their security partners that reflects differing priorities and geopolitical dynamics" (Wallis et al, 2022).

Unlike those in the Pacific, the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) LOS do not have concrete formal articulations, normative or structural, of their macro security interests or concerns. This is despite the fact that the Indian Ocean has always been a theatre of heightened geopolitics and security engagements, right from the colonial period. This is even more so today with the rising prominence of the Indo-Pacific. As observed by scholars, "in most cases, decisions regarding security in the region have been taken by the influential, and larger powers without the SIDS" (Vartak, 2022). The lack of PIF-like regional bodies have further hindered the ability to harness their collective bargaining potential on regional and global security matters. Most of the IOR LOS are only members of either bigger bodies that are dominated by traditional powers, such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) or island organisations that cut across regions and do not represent unique regional interests, such as the Alliance of Small Island States (ASIS). This, however, does not mean the LOS in this region aren't aware of their geopolitical position, particularly in the context of growing rivalries between great powers. They remain cognisant of the fact that they sit on the frontlines of these renewed geopolitical confrontations within the Indo-Pacific context and are directly affected by them. Moreover, they recognize that their maritime identities provide unique tools to enhance their diplomatic capabilities in navigating the evolving geopolitical and geostrategic landscape effectively (Baruah, 2020).

A new Security order? The LOS within the Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific is still a relatively new geopolitical concept. It remains under construction as far as core concepts, practices, conditions, and terms of engagement are concerned. These include normative

conceptualisations and practical undertakings in the realm of 'security'. Both the major traditional powers, such as the Quad members, and the "smaller" stakeholders, like the LOS, have yet to fully comprehend the true meaning and implications of 'Indo-Pacific security.' Notwithstanding this, there is a general consensus amongst all the LOS in the IPR that they cannot ignore the rapidly evolving security environment that they are situated in and the complex challenges that come with it. From the Boe Declaration 2018 to the individual statements made by leaders of the IOR LOS, it becomes clear that the island states recognise the importance of the Indo-Pacific and the precarity that they could face on account of it. "We occupy a vitally significant place in global strategic terms. As a consequence, heightened geopolitical competition impacts our Member countries," notes the PIF's 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent (PIF Secretariat, 2022).

What stands out is the two-way nature of security engagement between the LOS and traditional Indo-Pacific powers, marked by mutual recognition of each other's importance and, at times, indispensability. However, the exact nature of this engagement remains undefined due to varying and often, asymmetric interests on both sides. For instance, as scholars have noted, Australia and New Zealand have tried to engage with and even claim the PIF's 'Blue Pacific' narrative, but it remains unclear how the island states, who might want to be more independent and assertive, view their participation (Wallis et al, 2022). This is generally true for even other leading Indo-Pacific powers, such as the US, Japan, India, the UK and France, who have ramped up cooperation with LOS across the IPR. Notably, we see that these powers have been conscious of their own dominant positions within the geopolitical order and thus, not coming across as unilateral forces in what is 'LOS territory'. Thus, they have tried to mediate their island diplomacy with mandatory riders by placing the interests and concerns of the LOS before their own. For instance, the 'Partners in the Blue Pacific (PBP)' initiative launched by the US, Australia, Japan, New Zealand and the UK in June 2022 characterises itself as "an inclusive, informal mechanism to support Pacific priorities more effectively and efficiently" and pledges to be guided by the PIF members (The White House, 2022). However, some scholars have argued that the PBP only co-opts the 'Blue Pacific' narrative to advance great power interests while diluting established structures of Pacific regionalism (Fry et al, 2022). This fundamental point of friction will play a decisive role in how the LOS perceive and practice security within the emerging Indo-Pacific order.

There is still a lack of consistent evidence that can indicate one or two predominant ways in which the element of 'security' will play out in the LOS' interaction with the Indo-Pacific construct. Yet, certain emerging trends and narratives are instructive in discerning some impulses that may indicate future patterns of engagement. In this context, three patterns of security practice are visible among various LOS in the IPR: strategic autonomy, active discourse-shaping, and alliance building.

Strategic Autonomy

"Security to me is an outside concept, created by people from outside our shores. Security for me is drought within the island; the problem is people from outside [who] come to our islands and turn our oceans and islands into battlegrounds," stated Teburoro Tito, permanent representative of Kiribati to the UN, during a September 2021 panel discussion hosted by the Carnegie Endowment (CEIP, 2021). His words reflect the growing frustration amongst more and more LOS in the IPR about the vagaries of intensifying geopolitical conflict and their inability to shape their own destinies in the face of such conflict. There is a sense amongst most, if not all, LOS that as far as the emerging Indo-Pacific security order is concerned, "strategic autonomy" is the most

optimal pathway. Different powers may have varying definitions of "strategic autonomy." In a paper on the European Union by SWP, Berlin, it is defined as "the ability to set priorities and make decisions in matters of foreign policy and security, together with the institutional, political and material wherewithal to carry these through – in cooperation with third parties, or if need be alone" (Lippert et al, 2019). S. Kalyaranam, while discussing it in India's context, defines it as "the ability of a state to pursue its national interests and adopt its preferred foreign policy without being constrained in any manner by other states (Kalyaranam, MP-IDSA, 2015)."

For LOS, who may not have the necessary diplomatic or material resources to influence regional or global orders, "strategic autonomy" might seem like a very ambitious mandate. However, in their context, it is more of a reactive, rather than proactive, strategy. It is primarily guided by a desire to avoid being boxed in by great power politics, which could limit their security choices, diminish their strategic legroom, and leash them to the interests of bigger powers. At the same time, most LOS would not want to draw the ire of any one large power by preferring to engage with another. Consequently, they are more likely to adopt what is known as "strategic hedging", which some scholars define as the "behaviour of a country pursuing the offsetting of risks by choosing multilateral policies with the intention of making mutually reactive effects" (Lee, 2017). It is a strategy that lies somewhere between "balancing" and "bandwagoning" and adopts "mixed elements of selective engagement, limited resistance, and partial deference" (Kuik, 2021). One of the ways in which some LOS could practise strategic autonomy is by reifying the sanctity of regional groupings, such as the PIF. This, in many ways, is similar to ASEAN's emphasis on "centrality" as a way of maintaining independence in strategic decision-making (The, 2022). This is, however, mostly true for LOS located in the PIF region and not those in the Indian Ocean who lack regional cohesion.

By the very nature of the strategy, which might appear deceptive or disingenuous to bigger powers, the LOS might not explicitly state their policy of strategic hedging. However, what many of them have very categorically done is articulated the subtext of their hedging strategies i.e., their discomfort with great power confrontations and its ramifications over their own security environment. This can be discerned from recent statements made by the leaders and ministers of certain LOS.

In May 2022, for instance, the Fijian Prime Minister, Frank Bainimarama, during a meeting with the Australian foreign minister, Penny Wong, said that "Fiji is not anyone's backyard — we are a part of a Pacific family" (Reuters, 2022). "And our greatest concern isn't geopolitics — it's climate change," he further noted. When Australia, the UK and the US announced the AUKUS partnership in 2021, several Pacific LOS expressed their discomfort. The Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, James Marape, said: "We have a very peaceful part of planet earth, we want to protect that peace and serenity. . . as far as securing peace is concerned, we've got no problem, but if such activities bring disharmony in the region then we have an issue" (Wallis et al, 2022). The opposition leader of Vanuatu, Ralph Regenvanu, similarly expressed his anxiety over the deal by saying that he was "disappointed" and "more fearful for [their] Pacific future" (Doherty, 2021). All of this was primarily driven by fears of renewed nuclearisation and nuclear waste-dumping in the blue waters of the Pacific, which was alluded to very clearly in statements made by Solomon Islands Prime Minister, Manasseh Damukana Sogavare, and President of Kiribati, Taneti Maamau (McIellan, 2021).

Similarly, the Indian Ocean LOS too have indicated their desire to maintain some distance from geopolitical rivalries. As far as security is concerned, those like Sri Lanka and the Maldives have traditionally occupied a space that was widely seen, perhaps to their own distaste, as "India's backyard" (Chellaney, 2023; PTI, 2024).

With the advent of the Indo-Pacific discourse, which allows them to cast their foreign policy net wider and reassert their oceanic identities, they seem to be actively adopting strategic choices that indicate a growing degree of autonomy. In 2020, now deposed Sri Lankan President, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, said that his country, which is in a "place of strategic importance", "has chosen neutrality as its foreign policy" (South Asia Monitor, 2021). This was subsequently framed as a "friendship with all" strategy (Daily News, 2021). The leadership of the Maldives, now a focal point of intensifying geopolitical confrontations, particularly between India and China, has strongly emphasized its purportedly neutral stance on security matters in its statements. In 2018, former Maldivian President, Abdullah Yameen, in response to India's demand for "greater transparency" on regional security, argued that his government "has made it very clear" that they are "not going to allow any kind of military establishments or military undertakings in the Maldives…Not for China, not for any other countries" (Rasheed, 2021).

Beyond these statements, specific actions and policy choices by LOS have shown their inclination towards achieving greater strategic autonomy. For example, successive governments in Sri Lanka and Maldives have consistently rebuffed attempts by the US to station troops in their countries (Samaranayake, 2021). Thus far, they have also refused their territory to be used by China to build overt military facilities, despite growing concerns about the same. Seychelles too has been playing a cautious balancing game on security by first agreeing to allow India to build a military base in Assumption Islands and then "quietly dropping" out following a public outcry and concerns that it could trigger geopolitical tensions (Hardy, 2022). Mauritius, while disputing British control over the Chagos Islands, has extended the American hold over Diego Garcia and ensured that no Chinese military facility is built on any of its other islands (Harris, 2022). At the same time, it signed a historic Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with China in 2021, the first such trade pact between Beijing and any African country (Johnston & Lanteigne, 2021). Mauritius has also teamed up with India to build an airstrip and jetty in the island of Agalega, a project that was initially reported to have been of a military nature (The Hindu, 2021).

In April 2022, the Solomon Islands, under the Prime Ministership of Manasseh Sogavare, created a major stir when it signed a security agreement with China, which could allow Chinese security forces to be stationed in the island country (Graham, 2022). Sogavare's decision was arguably linked to his 2019 decision to switch national allegiances from Taiwan to the People's Republic of China (PRC) after the latter offered "millions of dollars in development funds" (ABC News, 2019). However, three months after signing the security agreement, Sogavare told the media that China would not be allowed to build any military facility on the island and that Australia was their "security partner of choice" (Movono & Lyons, 2022). Interestingly, while he framed the agreement with China as a "sovereign issue of countries involved", he also asserted that the same will "not in any way undermine the security of the [Pacific] region." In February 2023, the US reopened its embassy in the island after thirty years, thus reminding the Sogavare government of the importance of creating a balance (Mao, 2023). But, five months later, Sogavare visited China and upgraded their relationship to a "strategic comprehensive partnership", signing a raft of deals, including a policing pact that allows China to expand its law enforcement presence in the Pacific Island country until at least 2025 (Brennan, 2023). All of this make the Solomon Islands a fascinating case study within the LOS "strategic autonomy" spectrum. It shows that LOS' security policies may often be contingent on internal debates and dynamics that may or may not be tied to external push factors. At the same time, it shows how they remain heavily cornered by large powers while making strategic choices and despite the occasional radical shifts in policies, cannot afford to take sides without jeopardising their diplomatic relations.

This then means that LOS, as of now, can only strive to secure the notional median of strategic autonomy, but would remain exposed to circumstantial tilts in practice. Yet, the very normative assertion of "strategic autonomy", even in subtextual terms, could allow LOS to inhabit a wider spectrum of geostrategic choices.

Active Discourse-shaping

"Strategic autonomy" is a mere foreign policy tool for LOS. It cannot operate in a vacuum and needs to be anchored in strong normative practices that can strengthen the distinctiveness of LOS foreign policies. An important way in which LOS are doing this is by partaking in active discourse-shaping of "Indo-Pacific security" and socialising the larger IPR community to their unique concerns. In essence, LOS are providing their own unique answers to the fundamental question: "what does security in the Indo-Pacific mean?"

In 2022, the Maldivian foreign minister, Abdulla Shahid, during a speech at the "Ocean Nations: An Indo-Pacific Islands Dialogue" argued that "the continued stability and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region is heavily influenced by the actions of small island states" and that an LOS like his own have "a responsibility and interest to take the lead in advancing safety, security, and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region" (Shahid, 2022). This framing is notable not just because it ties larger Indo-Pacific security to the actions and interests of LOS, but also because it frames the LOS as frontline security actors in the IPR. By doing this, the idea is to shift the fundamental discursive character of island countries as entities that have remit over a large politico-territorial spectrum and are active geopolitical players, rather than small and inert actors at the fringes of world politics.

As stated earlier, environmental security, located within the broader domain of climate change, has emerged as the focal point of the LOS lens on security. There is even a tacit attempt to blur the line between "traditional" and "nontraditional" security wherein more and more LOS are collapsing the first category into the second by constantly foregrounding "traditionally non-traditional" agendas like climate change in their bilateral and multilateral security practices. Thus, the bigger powers may now be compelled to change the way they frame and practice security in the IPR. There is little doubt that the overall security landscape continues to be dictated by "traditional" concerns of great powers, but as far as the Indo-Pacific narrative goes, LOS are actively trying to change that through repeated and forceful assertions at multiple levels. For instance, in June 2022, Fijian defence minister, Inia Seruiratu, during the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore said:

"Machine guns, fighter jets... are not our primary security concern. The single greatest threat to our very existence is climate change" (BBC News, 2022).

As is clear by now, Seruiratu's poignant assertion does not really stand out, given that other LOS leaders from the Pacific have expressed similar sentiments at various forums. What is particularly notable here is that a defence minister chose to shift the focus of the concept of 'security' from the traditional scope of their portfolio to a completely new paradigm that typically does not fall under the defence ministry. Thus, there is an active attempt in some cases to reformulate not just the popular or political, but also the core institutional discourse on security. In fact, some LOS are also leading the charge on introducing climate change into the mainstream framework of international law. Among them, the current endeavour by Vanuatu at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) is prominently extraordinary. The LOS is leading a delegation of states to the international court

for 'advisory opinion' on what the legal obligations of countries are under international law to undertake climate action (Client Earth, 2024).

While climate change and environmental concerns may be central to LOS security, they are not the only components of the new security framework that these countries are working to establish through iteration, reiteration, and practice. More 'traditional' security agendas also feature in their manifestos. For example, the LOS in the Indian Ocean region, such as Maldives, Mauritius and Seychelles, haven't yet been able to mobilise a collective framework that is potent enough to induce a discursive shift in the regional security order. These LOS still remain locked in a hard security-centric regime that is constantly fed by anxieties of larger powers, such as India and China. Take, for example, the joint statement released after the June 2023 bilateral meeting between the Presidents of The Maldives and Seychelles – it does not frame climate threats under the theme of 'security', which is reserved for traditional agendas like "maritime security, counterterrorism, Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, counter-piracy, and [...] drug trafficking" (President's Office, Republic of Maldives, 2023).

Furthermore, even the PIF's Boe Declaration 2018 includes transnational organised crime and cybersecurity within a so-called "expanded concept of security" alongside "human security" and "environmental and resource security". Additionally, the 'The Pacific Plan for Strengthening Regional Integration and Cooperation and Integration' mentions "maritime and aviation security and surveillance, border security, bio-security, and law enforcement" as key security issues facing the Pacific island countries (PIF Secretariat, 2007). Yet, the definition of 'security' that it lays down is reflective of the broader attempt of these countries to weave together a distinct regional security order that mandatorily goes beyond hard security: "[...] the stable and safe social (or human) and political conditions necessary for, and reflective of, good governance and sustainable development for the achievement of economic growth" (PIF Secretariat, 2007:20).

Once again, Solomon Islands is a peculiar case study in the context of security discourse-shaping. Its renewed closeness with Beijing, which for now appears to be centred around law enforcement, reflects that certain LOS may choose to focus on hard security issues to secure geopolitical bargains. This, as the Solomon Islands case shows, is dependent on specific political contexts and individual leaders. For example, Kiribati too has recently expanded its relationship with China, but has chosen to focus more on trade than security (Needham, 2022). Interestingly, while Sogavare's July 2023 trip to China was largely focused on traditional security issues, President Xi Jinping brought up climate-related challenges that the Solomon Island faces (MOFA, PRC, 2023). This shows that the LOS in the Pacific have been successful in decisively repositioning the discourse on security wherein even large powers that are otherwise preoccupied with traditional security agendas are now compelled to focus on non-traditional domains like climate change. In comparison, notwithstanding their emphasis on the serious climate-related threats confronting them, the LOS in the IOR are still lagging behind in the discourse-shaping arc.

In general, there is a movement towards a certain discursive shift among LOS in both the Pacific and Indian Oceans, wherein they actively project themselves as 'maritime powers' rather than countries with subregional identities to bolster their geopolitical leverage. As Darshana M. Baruah observes, for instance, most of the LOS in the IOR "are choosing to identify as maritime nations in the Indian Ocean, since that brings far more foreign policy options, than simply being a South Asian or African nation" (Baruah, 2020). She specifically notes that these island countries "see the potential of linking their security needs, economic growth, and their role in the world to their geography, at a time of significant focus on maritime partnerships in the Indo-Pacific

by traditional powers such as France, India, and the United States as well as new powers such as China" (Baruah, 2020). Therefore, as far as discourse-shaping by LOS is concerned, it operates along two vectors: substantive and structural. While the former relates to how they frame the core issues of engagement, the latter is to do with how they see themselves within the global security order.

Alliance-building

On an individual level, the LOS have little bargaining power to decisively shape the regional or subregional security orders. At most, they might be able to set their own national security policies. Therefore, several LOS in the IPR have traditionally relied on alliance-building to collectively assert their security interests. This, however, isn't a uniform phenomenon, in the sense that not every LOS or group of LOS across the IPR have formal alliances that cater to their own unique interests. Even in cases where an individual LOS is a part of a certain regional or subregional alliance, they might pursue their own autonomous security policies and set their own security posture within a certain geopolitical context.

The PIF's Boe Declaration 2018 is a pinpointed reflection of how strong alliance-building by LOS can support re-securitisation of their interests and aspirations. The core thrust behind this approach is that only by collectively asserting their vision of regional security can LOS exercise strong bargaining power in the broader Indo-Pacific discourse. Further, alliance-building helps LOS operationalise a wider mandate of activities through issue-based formations, such as in the case of the PIF that has sub-groups like the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), and the South Pacific Tourism Organization (SPTO) (Wallis et al, 2022). In the Pacific, alliance-building through regional organisation has also helped the LOS community strengthen their Disaster Risk Management (DRM) capacities (White, 2015).

However, regional coalitions may be plagued by serious intra-regional contradictions and differences. For example, Pacific LOS may be able to collectively hedge their bets through the PIF, but they are divided sub-regionally on several fronts, as evinced by the parallel existence of smaller formations like the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), Polynesian Leaders Group (PLG), and Micronesian Presidents' Summit (MPS). All of these sub-groups may have distinct security interests that may or may not correspond to those of the PIF. Furthermore, as scholars have observed, the Pacific Island states do not have regional mechanisms to engage in multilateral security cooperation with external actors, unlike the ASEAN that has the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) (Wallis et al, 2022). This is true for LOS in the Indian Ocean too, who do not even have a PIF-like regional organisation. In fact, the LOS in the IOR are part of only three regional organisations: the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). This is attributable to the fact that the IOR, broadly, doesn't have a strong regional identity. As Derek McDougall has argued, "the sense of "regionness" in the Indian Ocean is "weak" (McDougall, 2021). Since it includes large powers like India, the IORA may not be a suitable regional organisation for the LOS to express their own unique security concerns.

Nevertheless, the IORA, which had never really taken 'security' too seriously, is now not just moving towards regional cooperation on maritime security, but also foregrounding the LOS in the process. For instance, Sri Lanka, who has been made the coordinator of IORA's 'Working Group on Maritime Safety and Security',

"sees this as a valuable platform to advance an island-state perspective on regional security" (Bergin, 2019). On the other hand, the IOC only includes Mauritius, Seychelles, the Comoros, Madagascar and French Réunion, leaving out other major LOS in the IOR, such as Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Therefore, it isn't inclusive enough. Further, the IOC has done little to assert any significant security discourse, let alone reframe it.

In all, the disparate qualitative evidence so far suggests that alliance-building can help the LOS advance their strategic autonomy and process of discourse-shaping by maximising their collective geostrategic leverage and operational capacity within the evolving Indo-Pacific context. It can bolster both their individual and collective security by creating regional security complexes. However, at the moment, much needs to be done by the LOS community in the IPR to create effective and inclusive cross-ocean regional alliances. There doesn't seem to be any comprehensive regional security complex involving the LOS, either in the Indian or Pacific oceans. In the case of the Pacific LOS, Joanne Wallis and others have argued that "the region is neither a security complex nor a community, due to the extensive involvement of metropolitan powers and external partners" and that "security cooperation in the Pacific Islands is best described as a patchwork of bilateral, minilateral, and multilateral, formal and informal agencies, agreements, and arrangements, across local, national, regional, and international levels." For the LOS in the IOR, even this "patchwork", let alone any regional security complex or community, is highly dispersed and loosely organised. Yet, this might change in the future as LOS rediscover their unique island identities, recentre their distinct security concerns, and reassert their geopolitical might through group action.

Great and Large Power Engagements

Few can deny that despite the discursive churning that is underway in the Indo-Pacific region, including among a section of the LOS community, great and large powers still dominate the playing field. They command disproportionately high levels of bargaining power in the region—a reality that LOS are often uncomfortable with. This then means that the LOS' reformulation and reassertion of security interests and aspirations are, to a large extent, contingent on how the great and large powers (sometimes referred to as the 'metropolitan powers' in colonial historiography) in the IPR interact with them and with each other. In fact, in many ways, a significant chunk of the LOS community in the IPR has chosen to revisit their individual, subregional and regional security frameworks as a direct response to the renewed geopolitics of great powers (and aspiring great powers). One could argue that this is also a corrective response to the colonial memories of being cornered by the overwhelming security interests of metropolitan powers who often saw LOS as inert subjects of their hegemonic geopolitics.

The influence of great and large powers in shaping the LOS security orders can be seen across both the Indian and Pacific Oceans. In the Indian Ocean, LOS have become conscious of the stiffening geostrategic competition between the West and China. At the same time, they have responded variably to the securitisation of their immediate and extended maritime neighbourhoods by influential middle powers, or aspirational great powers, like India. LOS like Sri Lanka and the Maldives have traditionally been placed under the extrapolated security umbrella of India. This has changed over the last one decade or so, as a more assertive China makes significant strategic inroads into the southern and western Indian Ocean through naval patrols, bilateral strategic agreements, and dual-use ports. But, it isn't simply through military and material pathways that China

is trying to insert itself into the Indian Ocean LOR space. In November 2022, Beijing convened the first 'China-Indian Ocean Regional Forum', which had representatives from five IOR LOS—Maldives, Sri Lanka, Seychelles, Madagascar and Mauritius. Hosted by the newly-formed China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA), the forum covered a range of traditional and non-traditional security issues, including the establishment of a "marine disaster prevention and mitigation cooperation mechanism between China and countries in the Indian Ocean region" and "jointly address non-traditional security challenges" (Krishnan, 2022). Not just that, then Chinese foreign minister, Wang Yi, even suggested the creation of "another forum 'on the development of Indian Ocean island countries' to 'build consensus and synergy, and promote common development'" (Krishnan, 2022).

In the Pacific, too, the LOS find themselves lodged between the politico-security assertions of China and Western-aligned large powers, such as the US, Australia, New Zealand, France, the UK, Japan and India. Two examples are of salience in this context: one, China's security agreement with the Solomon Islands; and the AUKUS agreement between Australia, UK and the US. Both cases reflect how the security interests of great or large powers can create complex security dilemmas for LOS. Notably also, in both cases, the Western-aligned powers seem to be facing headwinds from one or more LOS in the Pacific. In the case of the Solomon Islands, Prime Minister Sogavare has strongly rebuffed Western rhetoric against its security pact with China, insisting on his country's sovereign right to take independent foreign policy decisions (The Guardian, 2021). He also insisted that the pact, which is only to do with "improvement of (Royal Solomon Islands Police Force) traffic control and management system in Honiara, provision of police equipment or the completion of the Forensic Autopsy Lab", is not "a threat to the Pacific region peace and security" (The Guardian, 2021). He had also separately criticised Australia for agreeing on the AUKUS treaty without consulting the Pacific LOS (Brennan, 2023). Leaders of other LOS, such as Marshall Islands, Palau, Tuvalu and Kiribati, have called out Australia for spending a massive amount of money on AUKUS when it should be financing measures to prevent climate change (Brennan, 2023). At the same time, however, other LOS, like Fiji, have asserted that Australia has a sovereign right to build up its defences and that AUKUS wouldn't violate the 1985 Treaty of Rarotonga, which establishes a nuclear-free zone in the Pacific (ABC, 2023). Another study by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) from July 2023 found that China had been trying to influence public opinion on AUKUS, against Australia, in LOS in the Pacific, but with the exception of the Solomon Islands and Samoa, failed to do so (Johnson & Gyhn, 2023).

In 2017, Canberra published a foreign policy White Paper, which pledged to "integrate Pacific countries into the Australian and New Zealand economies and [...] security institutions" (DFAT, 2017). Yet, since then, scholars have argued that there are "significant gaps exist between Australian and Pacific Islands' understandings of and approaches to security in the region" (Batley, 2021). Both Australia and New Zealand continue to expand their security depth into the Pacific LOS space through their 'step-up' strategies. The US too has begun to focus strongly on rebuilding relationships with the Pacific LOS in response to Chinese ingresses, especially with those from which it had withdrawn years ago, such as the Solomon Islands (Piringi, 2023). India, which had traditionally only focused on maintaining its security umbrella in the IOR, is now attempting to deepen its footprint in the Pacific LOS community through the Forum for India-Pacific Islands cooperation (FIPIC), which was established by the Modi government in 2014 (MEA website, Government of India). FIPIC currently remains preoccupied with trade, rather than security. However, geoeconomics is often a gateway agenda to security.

In all, the large or great power-led push to establish their own security orders amongst the LOS communities in the Indo-Pacific hasn't yet reached any logical conclusion. In fact, there is nothing to even suggest the Indian or Pacific LOS have chosen any new security order that is governed by a particular great power, large power or bloc. Most of them either rely on their existing regional and sub-regional security orders (or 'patchwork' as some scholars suggest) or continue to assert a loose normative framework of "strategic autonomy" to iterate their security concerns. However, large and great powers are expected to spotlight their own versions of LOS security orders as the Indo-Pacific push continues in the years to come. While they are unlikely to openly impose their own security regimes on LOS communities, some of them might introduce unilateral security orders across the region in an attempt to gain strategic advantage over competitors. This could destabilise and disrupt the nascent security orders that LOS across the Indo-Pacific might weave through practice and precedence.

Conclusion

Even as island states in the Indo-Pacific reassert their identities within a context of shifting geopolitical dynamics, 'security' has emerged as one of the most prominent pivots of the whole "LOS" discourse. There is emerging evidence, though not entirely conclusive or consistent, as demonstrated throughout this paper, that island states in the IPR are positioning themselves as LOR by recalibrating their security concerns and blurring the line between 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' security. There is also evidence to suggest that this is closely linked to an emerging assertion of what may be loosely defined as "strategic autonomy"—the ability to set an independent regional, sub-regional and individual security agenda. By doing this, the LOS are able to strengthen their discourse-shaping power within the Indo-Pacific framework in a way that their security concerns and aspirations socialise others—most prominently, great and large powers—to move beyond orthodox security regimes and reckon with a new reality. In that sense, the LOS are trying to set the terms of engagement for an emerging security order across the Indo-Pacific. Finally, LOS are attempting to undertake this discursive reassertion by way of building new alliances or strengthening existing ones. However, the evidence of this is highly disparate across the two main IPR subregions i.e., Indian Ocean and the Pacific.

The narratives explored and instances cited in this paper make one thing very clear: as far as 'Indo-Pacific security'—whatever that entails in the years to come—is concerned: LOS will play a central role. This is primarily because of two driving factors: one, standalone recognition amongst LOS of emerging non-traditional security threats, most prominently climate and environmental ones, as existential concerns; and two, renewed great power competition between the West and China, which has placed LOS in a unique position to secure better strategic bargains and build unprecedented relationships across multiple regional domains. Both these factors would ultimately shape the broader contours of the Indo-Pacific discourse for all stakeholders. In all, the world might be slipping into what some scholars have already flagged down as a "Cold War 2.0", but 'security' is no longer a function of hard military power or a parameter of conventional strategic depth (Foreign Policy, 2023). In this potentially new horizon of geopolitics in a region whose normative boundaries remain loosely defined, 'security' will be equally about, inter alia, rising sea levels and surface temperatures, degrading coral reefs, and depleting fish reserves. More importantly, it won't be the sole remit of traditionally powerful nation-states who command large militaries, but supposedly "small" island states who seem to finally recognise their true geostrategic significance in a tumultuous world.

WORKS CITED

"2017 Foreign Policy White Paper: Opportunity, Security, Strength." Australian Government, https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-foreign-policy-white-paper.pdf

"2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent." Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. 2022, Suva, Fiji. ISBN: 978-982-202-079-3. URL: https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/PIFS-2050-Strategy-Blue-Pacific-Continent-WEB-5Aug2022.pdf

Baruah, Darshana M. "Geopolitics of Indian Ocean Islands in 2019: Takeaways for Traditional Powers." *Carnegie India*, 9 Jan. 2020, https://carnegieindia.org/2020/01/09/geopolitics-of-indian-ocean-islands-in-2019-takeaways-for-traditional-powers-pub-80824

Batley, James. "Australia and security in the Pacific Islands." *Development Bulletin*, Development Studies Network, the Australia Pacific Security College, ANU, no. 82, 9 Mar. 2021. https://pacificsecurity.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/DB82_Part5.pdf

Bergin, Anthony, et al. "INDIAN OCEAN ISLAND STATES." *Ocean Horizons: Strengthening Maritime Security in Indo-Pacific Island States*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2019, pp. 29–39. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep23122.6. Accessed 2 April. 2023.

'Boe Declaration on Regional Security 2018.' Pacific Islands Forum. URL: https://www.forumsec.org/2018/09/05/boe-declaration-on-regional-security/

Brennan, Dechlan. "Can China Deliver What Solomon Islands Wants?" *The Diplomat*, 31 July 2023, https://thediplomat.com/2023/08/can-china-deliver-what-solomon-islands-wants/

Chan, Nicholas. "'Large Ocean States': Sovereignty, Small Islands, and Marine Protected Areas in Global Oceans Governance." *Global Governance*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2018, pp. 537–55. JSTOR, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26777591. Accessed 21 February, 2023

Chellaney, Brahma. "A Chinese Spy Station in India's Strategic Backyard?" *Stagecraft and Statecraft*, Republished from Nikkei Asia., 25 Apr. 2023, chellaney.net/2023/04/25/a-chinese-spy-station-in-indias-strategic-backyard/; India, Press Trust of. "'we Aren't in Anyone's Backyard': Maldives President Amid Row with India." *NDTV.Com*, 13 Jan. 2024, www.ndtv.com/world-news/india-maldives-row-maldives-may-be-small-but-president-mohamed-muizzu-amid-row-with-india-4856947

"Climate Change a Bigger Threat than War, Fiji Tells Security Summit." *BBC News*, 12 June 2022, www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-61774473.

Doherty, Ben. "Australian Nuclear Submarine Plan 'Wrong Direction at the Wrong Time', Nobel Prize-Winning Group Says." *The Guardian*, 16 Sept. 2021, www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/sep/16/australian-nuclear-submarine-plan-wrong-direction-at-the-wrong-time-nobel-prize-winning-group-says.

"Fiji PM calls meeting with new Australia foreign minister 'wonderful'." *Reuters*, 28 May 2022. https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/fiji-pm-calls-meeting-with-new-australia-foreign-minister-wonderful-2022-05-28/

Fry, Greg, et al. "'Partners in the Blue Pacific' Initiative Rides Roughshod Over Established Regional Processes." *Devpolicy Blog*, 5 July 2022, https://devpolicy.org/pbp-initiative-rides-roughshod-over-regional-processes-20220705/

"Full Interview: Fiji PM Sitiveni Rabuka on The Pacific". *ABC*, 11 April 2023, https://www.abc.net.au/pacific/full-interview-fiji-pm-sitveni-rabuka/102198168

Graham, Euan. "Assessing the Solomon Islands' New Security Agreement with China." *IISS*, 5 May 2022, www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2022/05/china-solomon-islands.

Hardy, Dennis. "Will India Try Again for a Military Base in Seychelles?" *The Diplomat*, 26 July 2022, https://thediplomat.com/2022/07/will-india-try-again-for-a-military-base-in-seychelles/

Harris, Peter. "No, Mauritius Will Not Give China a Military Base on the Chagos Islands." *The Diplomat*, 20 Dec. 2022, https://thediplomat.com/2022/12/no-mauritius-will-not-give-china-a-military-base-on-the-chagos-islands/

IMF Staff Country Report."Seychelles: Climate Change Policy Assessment." *International Monetary Fund.* 20 June 2017. ISBN/ISSN: 9781484304808/1934-7685, Stock No.: 1SYCEA2017004. URL: https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2017/06/20/Seychelles-Climate-Change-Policy-Assessment-44997#:~:text=Summary%3A,the%20plans'%20likelihood%20of%20success.

"Island Security and the Blue Economy." Interview with Teburoro Tito, Permanent Representative for the Republic of Kiribati. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 20 September 2021. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uozTXlXuVmw

"Is There Really a Cold War 2.0?" *Foreign Policy*, Multiple Contributors, 11 June 2023, https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/06/11/new-cold-war-2-us-china-russia-geopolitics/.

Johnson, Blake, and Luisa Gyhn. "Tracking the Evolution of Pacific Island Sentiment towards AUKUS." *The Strategist*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 28 July 2023, www.aspistrategist.org.au/tracking-the-evolution-of-pacific-island-sentiment-towards-aukus/.

Johnston, Lauren, and Marc Lanteigne. "Here's Why China's Trade Deal with Mauritius Matters." *World Economic Forum*, 15 Feb. 2021, www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/02/why-china-mauritius-trade-deal-matters/.

"Joint Communiqué between the Republic of Maldives and the Republic of Seychelles." The President's Office, Republic of Maldives, 12 June 2023, https://presidency.mv/Press/Article/28485.

Krishnan, Ananth. "India Is the Lone Absentee at China's Indian Ocean Forum of 19 Countries." *The Hindu*, 26 Nov. 2022, www.thehindu.com/news/international/china-convenes-an-indian-ocean-forum-without-india/article66187608.ece.

Kuik, Cheng-Chwee. "Getting Hedging Right: A Small-State Perspective." *China International Strategy Review*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2021, pp. 300–315, https://doi.org/10.1007/s42533-021-00089-5.

Kumar, Anand. "IUU Fishing in Western Indian Ocean." *RGNUL Student Research Review (RSRR),* 11 Sep, 2021. https://rsrr.in/2021/09/11/iuu-fishing-indian-ocean/; MRAG Asia Pacific. "The Quantification of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing in the Pacific Islands Region – a 2020 Update." October 2021. 125 p. https://mragasiapacific.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/ZN2869-FFA-IUU-2020-Update-final.pdf

Lee, J. Y., 2017. "Hedging Strategies of the Middle Powers in East Asian Security: the Cases of South Korea and Malaysia." *East Asia,* 32(1), pp. 23-37.

Lippert, Baraba et. al. "European Strategic Autonomy: Actors, Issues, Conflicts of Interests." *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik.* 21 March 2019. 39 Steiten. Research Paper. doi:10.18449/2019RP04 https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2019RP04/

Mao, Frances. "Solomon Islands: US Reopens Embassy in Push to Counter China." *BBC News*, BBC, 2 Feb. 2023, www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-64494244.

McDougall, Derek. "Regional organizations and geopolitics in the Indian Ocean." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.013.681.

McIellan, Nic. "AUKUS Disrupts 'a Very Peaceful Part of Planet Earth.'" *Inside Story*, 14 Oct. 2021, https://insidestory.org.au/aukus-disrupts-a-very-peaceful-part-of-planet-earth/

McNeill, Henrietta. "Mapping Pacific Regional Security Cooperation." *The Asia Pacific Policy Society Policy Forum*, 10 June 2021, www.policyforum.net/mapping-pacific-regional-security-cooperation/.

Mishra, Abhishek. "Maritime Security and Development in the South-West Indian Ocean Region: Harnessing India's Engagement with Small Island Developing States." *ORF*, 15 Apr. 2022, www.orfonline.org/research/maritime-security-and-development-in-the-south-west-indian-ocean-region/.

Movono, Lice, and Kate Lyons. "Solomon Islands PM Rules out China Military Base and Says Australia Is 'Security Partner of Choice.'" *The Guardian*, 14 July 2022, www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/14/solomon-islands-pm-rules-out-chinese-military-base-china-australia-security-partner-manasseh-sogavare.

Needham, Kirsty. "Kiribati Focuses on Trade Not Security for China Visit to Remote Pacific Island." *Reuters*, 27 May 2022, www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australia-warns-against-pacific-security-pact-china-says-interference-will-fail-2022-05-27/.

"No Plan to House Indian Military Base on Agalega Island: Mauritius." *The Hindu*, 6 Aug. 2021, www.thehindu.com/news/international/no-plan-to-house-indian-military-base-on-agalega-island-mauritius/article35755505.ece.

Pacific Islands Forum. "The Pacific Security Outlook Report 2022-23." Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2022. URL: https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Pacific-Security-Outlook-Report-2022-2023.pdf .

Piringi, Charley. "US Opens Embassy in Solomon Islands after 30-Year Absence to Counter China." *The Guardian*, 2 Feb. 2023, www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/02/us-opens-embassy-in-solomon-islands-to-counter-china.

Press Release. "Xi Jinping Meets with Prime Minister of Solomon Islands Manasseh Sogavare." Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 10 June 2023, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202307/t20230717_11114181.html .

Rasheed, Athaulla A. "The Role of the Maldives in the Indo-Pacific Security Space in South Asia." *E-International Relations*, 9 Feb. 2021, www.e-ir.info/2021/02/09/the-role-of-the-maldives-in-the-indo-pacific-security-space-in-south-asia/.

Romano, Kavydass and Katja Dombrowski. "Mauritian minister warns: "It is a matter of life and death"." *D&C.* 23 April 2021. https://www.dandc.eu/en/article/small-island-developing-states-are-hardly-responsible-climate-change-most-affected

Samaranayake, Nilanthi. "Quad Plus: A Role for Indian Ocean Island States?" *Quad Plus and Indo-Pacific: The Changing Profile of International Relations*, 1st ed., Routledge, 2021.

"Security". *Pacific Islands Forum* website. https://www.forumsec.org/security/ .

Shahid, Abdullah. "Why Small Island States Are Vulnerable but Not Powerless." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 27 Sept. 2022, https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/09/27/why-small-island-states-are-vulnerable-but-not-powerless-pub-88015 .

"Solomon Islands Denies Policing Deal with China Poses 'threat' to Pacific Security." *The Guardian*, 14 July 2023, www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jul/14/solomon-islands-china-policing-deal-pacific-security.

"Sri Lanka's Foreign Policy Based on Neutrality: President." *South Asia Monitor*, 1 Oct. 2020, www.southasiamonitor.org/index.php/sri-lanka/sri-lankas-foreign-policy-based-neutrality-president.

"Statement by Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States on the Establishment of the Partners in the Blue Pacific (PBP)". *The White House.* Joint Statement, 24 June 2022. URL: https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/06/24/statement-by-australia-japan-new-zealand-the-united-kingdom-and-the-united-states-on-the-establishment-of-the-partners-in-the-blue-pacific-pbp/

"Strategic Importance of a Neutral Foreign Policy | Daily News." *Daily News*, 27 Aug. 2021, archives1.dailynews.lk/2021/08/27/features/257719/strategic-importance-neutral-foreign-policy.

Teh, Benny. "What ASEAN Centrality?" *The ASEAN Post*, 1 Jan. 2022, https://theaseanpost.com/article/what-asean-centrality.

"'Termination with Immediate Effect': Solomon Islands Breaks Ties with Taiwan." *ABC News*, ABC News, 17 Sept. 2019, www.abc.net.au/news/2019-09-16/solomon-islands-cuts-taiwan-ties-after-china-dollar-diplomacy/11510898.

"The Pacific Plan for Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Integration." Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, November 2007, https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/linked-documents/robp-pac-2010-2013-oth01.pdf .

UNODC. "Fisheries Crime: Transnational Organized Criminal Activities in the Context of the Fisheries Sector." Focus Sheet. 2011. https://www.unodc.org/documents/about-unodc/Campaigns/Fisheries/focus_sheet_PRINT.pdf .

Vartak, Kaira. "The Small Island Developing States in IOR: Challenges and Opportunities." *ORF*, 15 Dec. 2022, www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-small-island-developing-states-in-ior/.

Voigt, Christina. "Oceans, IUU Fishing, and Climate Change: Implications for International Law". *International Community Law Review* 22.3-4 (2020): 377-388. https://doi.org/10.1163/18719732-12341436 Web.

Wallis, Joanne et al. "Mapping Security Cooperation in the Pacific Islands." *Department of Pacific Affairs, Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs, ANY College of Asia and the Pacific*. Research Report. 2021. URL: https://dpa.bellschool.anu.edu.au/experts-publications/publications/8060/mapping-security-cooperation-pacific-islands-research-report

Wallis, Joanne et al. "Security Cooperation in the Pacific Islands: Architecture, Complex, Community, or Something Else?". *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol 23, Issue 2, May 2023, pp 263–296, https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcac005

Website: "About FIPIC." Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, https://www.ficci-fipic.com/about.html.

"What is 'strategic autonomy'? How does it help India's security?". *Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses.* 'Ask an Expert', 20 Jan 2015. Response by S Kalyanaraman. URL: https://idsa.in/askanexpert/strategicautonomy_indiasecurity .

"What Is the Vanuatu ICJ Initiative?" *Client Earth*, 15 Mar. 2024, https://tinyurl.com/bdd7dpht .

White, Stacey. "No Room to Fake It: The Role of Regional Organizations in Building the DRM Capacities of Pacific Island Countries." *Brookings*, 6 Feb. 2015, www.brookings.edu/articles/no-room-to-fake-it-the-role-of-regional-organizations-in-building-the-drm-capacities-of-pacific-island-countries/.