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## Island States, Ocean Governance and Geopolitics in the Indian Ocean

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### *Abstract*

The governments of Mauritius and the Seychelles – both located in the western Indian Ocean have, like Sri Lanka, sought to re-imagine and revitalise their role within the emerging maritime order of the Indian Ocean by drawing on both their location and geographical vantage points. Three factors help us understand the return of geopolitics and its impact on the identity politics and international relations of island states: (1) the post-Cold War context; (2) the challenges of maritime governance today and, (3) the growing capacity and interest of China and India to play a greater role in the Indian Ocean.

### **Introduction**

The objective of this paper is to explore how island states have been and are tackling the challenges and opportunities arising from their strategic geography including their spatial, locational and geological features. Island states have a propensity to be insular but at the same time tend to host deeply composite societies and cultures that are the product of historical flows of commerce and conquest. They also face a whole range of idiosyncratic challenges arising for instance from their claims to vast swathes of water and the capacities that are needed to defend, protect and utilise valuable maritime resources. Furthermore, within the context of contemporary maritime geopolitics, island states may find insularity both an advantage as well as a constraint in the bid to manoeuvre great power geopolitics. This paper turns to examine

two of the smaller Indian Ocean island nations, Mauritius and Seychelles, as they have been particularly innovative in their strategies to overcome constraints of size and remoteness. Drawing on their experience, the paper draws out parallels with the case of Sri Lanka, a much bigger island state but one which has experienced a revival of its Indian Ocean identity and maritime economy<sup>1</sup>.

The paper begins by describing the southwestern Indian Ocean. It examines the deeply inter-locked history of Mauritius and the Seychelles; how this relationship shaped the territorial and political formation of the two modern micro nation-states and its translation, in recent times, into a more coordinated stance in dealing with common security and developmental challenges. In 2012 for example, Mauritius and Seychelles signed an innovative agreement to share management of the continental shelf of the Mascarene Plateau Region<sup>2</sup>. The Mascarene Plateau stretches across the Western Indian Ocean from the Seychelles down to Mauritius, with shallow waters that form a mid-oceanic ridge, supporting a wide diversity of ecosystems as well as potentially exploitable resources<sup>3</sup>. As a result, Seychelles and Mauritius have joint jurisdiction over an *additional* Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) area of 396,000 sq. kilometres. In 2018 the Joint Commission of the Mauritius-Seychelles Extended Continental Shelf, the Mascarene Plateau region opened the area for oil and gas exploration. Most recently, there have been discussions about how to incorporate a new fiscal and taxation regime for the Mascarene plateau.

Both countries have also been actively engaged in international fora on transnational issues of piracy and drug-trafficking, demonstrating that small states can play an important, leading role in shaping discussions about and the actions taken to address regional security. The paper goes on to consider the region's geopolitics, shaped by several ongoing developments. There are growing efforts by countries along the African coastline to develop their own ocean economies, reflecting a greater appreciation for, and interest, in the need to improve marine-related infrastructure. As a result, there is also much more involvement of external actors, including

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Wignaraja, Ganeshan. "Implications of a New "Normal" Indian Ocean Economy for Sri Lanka", *ISAS Working Paper*, No. 317 (8 March 2019).

<sup>2</sup> See the following website for a copy of the treaty:

<http://mdr.govmu.org/English/defence/Documents/treaties/Treaty%20Concerning%20the%20Joint%20Management%20of%20the%20Continental%20Shelf%20in%20the%20Mascarene%20Plateau%20Region.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> For details see Payet, Rolph. "Research, Assessment and Management on the Mascarene Plateau: A Large Marine Ecosystem Perspective." *Philosophical Transactions: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences* 363, no. 1826 (2005): 295-307.

European parties that have been present in the region since colonial times and which are part of security operations and infrastructure in the western Indian Ocean. Furthermore with the growing focus on the Indo-Pacific, some of the maritime exercises in the region have taken on renewed geopolitical significance. China has been expanding its role, presence and interests on the African continent with Japan and India belatedly seeking to engage more effectively with African partners. Meanwhile one of the largest American military bases, Diego Garcia is located on an atoll that sits in the middle of the Indian Ocean and is at the centre of a long-running territorial and maritime dispute between Mauritius and the United Kingdom.

In conclusion, the paper identifies the resilience of Indian Ocean island states; their strategies to cope with vulnerabilities as well as the opportunities arising from their unique environment and location. Furthermore, as in the case of Sri Lanka there are challenges that arise in the framing of relations with the mainland, or the larger continental country in the neighbourhood. Mauritius and Seychelles have long nurtured their creole culture<sup>4</sup> but also sought to cultivate and reinforce economic collaboration with Africa states by leveraging their geostrategic position. As ocean economies and geo-strategic players, islands offer a unique perspective into the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### Mauritius and Seychelles: history and geography

In tracking and describing strategic developments in the Indian Ocean, much contemporary analysis has focused on the Persian Gulf in the northwest, the Horn of Africa in the west and most recently on the Malacca Straits in the northeast sections of the ocean. The southwestern Indian Ocean however, has also been of great importance historically, thanks to the Cape of Good Hope, named in the 15<sup>th</sup> century by King John II of Portugal for the optimism it raised at finding a sea route connecting Europe to India. In fact, it is Cape Agulhus, at the tip of South Africa which officially marks the dividing line between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, according to the International Hydrographic Organization. For the first two hundred years following the “discovery” of the Cape route, sailors navigated close to the coastline of the African continent. As a result, historians and anthropologists have noted that it was only in the

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of this, see Lionnet, Françoise. "Cosmopolitan or Creole Lives? Globalized Oceans and Insular Identities." *Profession*, 2011, 23-43.

18<sup>th</sup> century that the islands of Reunion, Mauritius and the Seychelles were permanently settled, partly the result of the rivalry between Britain and France who were competing for pre-eminence in the Indian Ocean. Rather than colonisation that was experienced in the wider region, it was “*creolisation*” that has been used to describe the mixture between European, African and Asian populations that took place on these islands over time<sup>5</sup>.

The islands off the coast of Africa have played a crucial role in stimulating the study of creole culture and politics in the Indian Ocean<sup>6</sup>. As has been pointed out by researchers they have evinced less interest than the Caribbean which has traditionally been regarded as the site, par excellence, for the exploration of creolization, hybridity and liminality between worlds. Madagascar, Reunion, Mauritius, the Seychelles, and the Comoros are more isolated, located in less coherent a region than the Caribbean and situated in an ocean that was largely neglected by European scholars or studied by scholars who adopted a Eurocentric view. As a result, the gradual turn towards these islands raises fascinating academic and political questions: “Are the islands ‘margins of Africa,’ or do they belong to the Indian Ocean world? But, then, what is the place of the Indian Ocean in the imaginary of African studies?”<sup>7</sup>. Particularly at a time when global connectivity projects are being pursued, linking cultures, economies and politics across the world, it is useful to think about how small, yet highly diverse societies may be impacted<sup>8</sup>. The populations of the Indian Ocean islands “retrace their links to Pondichery, Calcutta, Beijing, Shanghai, Mombassa, Cape Town, Paris, London, Marseilles, Djibouti. Their cultures and populations emerged out of the diaspora-making machines of pre-European migrations, of slavery, imperialism, and current globalization”<sup>9</sup>.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century both Mauritius and Seychelles were under French control. In fact, Mauritius was called *Isle de France* and gradually emerged as a hub for France’s long-distance trade with Africa, Asia and America. Port Louis was developed during this time as an entrepot for trade, a naval base and a shipbuilding centre. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain had emerged victorious over France which ceded Mauritius including all its dependencies to the United Kingdom (UK) through the "Treaty of Paris signed on 30 May 1814. The British colony

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<sup>5</sup>Houbert, Jean. "The Indian Ocean Creole Islands: Geo-Politics and Decolonisation." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 30, no. 3 (1992): 465-84.

<sup>6</sup> Megan Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island. Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Mauritius*. (London: Duke University Press, 2005)

<sup>7</sup>Vergès, Françoise. "Positions: Looking East, Heading South." *African Studies Review* 44, no. 2 (2001): 141-49.

<sup>8</sup> For parallels with Sri Lanka’s geography and historical experience see Sujit Sivasundaram *Islanded: Britain, Sri Lanka, and the Bounds of an Indian Ocean Colony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013)

<sup>9</sup> Vergès, *Positions*, 145.

consisted of the main island of Mauritius along with Rodrigues, Agalega, St Brandon, Tromelin and the Chagos Archipelago, while the Seychelles became a separate colony in 1906.

When independence eventually came to Mauritius and Seychelles (in 1968 and 1976 respectively) this was accompanied by territorial dismemberment when the United Kingdom formed the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) in 1965 comprising the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius and the islands of Aldabra, Farquhar and Desroches (Des Roches) from the Seychelles. The latter were returned to Seychelles at independence in 1976 but Mauritius has, since the 1980s, sought to regain control over them, claiming that the acquisition by the UK was unlawful and illegitimate, a claim disputed by the British. Most recently, the International Court of Justice issued an advisory opinion stating the islands had been unlawfully separated from the former colony of Mauritius and that the UK was "under an obligation to bring an end to its administration of the Chagos Archipelago as rapidly as possible."<sup>10</sup> The territory consists of an archipelago of 55 islands, the largest being Diego Garcia which was handed over by the British to the Americans, the new post-war dominant maritime power, as a secure site for a naval base. The indigenous population, known as Chagossians, were forcibly removed and relocated to Mauritius and the Seychelles. Today, Diego Garcia continues to be the only inhabited island in the BIOT.

As has been noted by scholars, Seychelles in particular demonstrated a remarkable degree of pragmatism in its foreign policy as well as a capacity to carve out a niche for itself in international fora<sup>11</sup>. Both Mauritius and the Seychelles belong to the grouping of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) – which gained international recognition at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in June 1992, drawing attention to sustainable development challenges and their particularly fragile environments. However, in more recent times the islands have sought to raise their global profile as “*large* ocean states”, projecting themselves as hubs and gateways to the continental landmass of Africa. This strategic turn in policy-making and prioritisation is evident in innovative governance mechanisms that the two countries have designed to protect and utilise the precious maritime resources. It is also manifested in the growing importance that has been given to maritime security – an area where

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<sup>10</sup> For more details see Schottli, Jivanta “Chagos at the International Court of Justice – Implications for India and the International System”, *ISAS Brief*, No. 602 (4 September 2018).

<sup>11</sup> Bueger, Christian and Wivel, Anders “How do small island states maximize influence? Creole diplomacy and the smart state foreign policy of the Seychelles”, *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*, 14:2 (2018): 170-188.

the two countries are both in need of support but also have valuable expertise to offer the international community.

### **Ocean States and Maritime Governance: Sustainable Development and Security**

Island states do not make up a homogenous group given the vast variations in physical size, location and proximity to continents, degree of connectivity and levels of development. Nevertheless, they do fundamentally share the fact of being surrounded by large expanses of ocean as well as a peculiar combination of relative isolation combined with an openness, in terms of economic flows and migrations of people. Most of the island states have grouped together to form the Small Island Developing States<sup>12</sup>. Sri Lanka is not officially part of this group, though it has attended meetings as an observer. It is in fact, far too large in comparison in terms of population.

Two examples of how Mauritius and the Seychelles are collaborating and coordinating their policies, provide an insight into how small island states within the Indian Ocean are seeking to overcome the constraints of size and location. The Seychellois population is one of the smallest in the world, at approximately 87,400. Its total land area is just 451 km<sup>2</sup>, yet it is responsible for an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of approximately 1.3 million km<sup>2</sup>. Economically, the country is reliant on tourism with this industry's total contribution of 56.9% to the gross domestic product (GDP) in 2014. The Republic of Mauritius meanwhile has a population of approximately 1.3 million people and a total land area of 2040 km<sup>2</sup>. Its EEZ covers 1.9 million km<sup>2</sup> and has an additional 396,000 km<sup>2</sup> of extended continental shelf area co-managed with the Seychelles. In both countries the ocean economy is a crucial and growing sector. For Mauritius, the ocean economy represents over 10.5% of the country's national GDP, namely through three sectors of coastal tourism, seaport-related activities and seafood related activities<sup>13</sup>. In accordance with the country's Economic Mission Statement – Vision 2030, the ocean economy, smart cities, and developing into a maritime hub are all potential high investment and high-employment areas<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> For a detailed overview of Small Island Developing States and their discourse on sustainable development see, Grote, Jenny "The Changing Tides of Small Island States Discourse - A Historical Overview of the Appearance of Small Island States in the International Arena" *Verfassung und Recht in Übersee / Law and Politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (2010), pp. 164-191.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.edbmauritius.org/opportunities/ocean-economy/>

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.foreignaffairs.com/sites/default/files/mauritius\\_jan-feb\\_2017\\_reprint\\_compr.pdf](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/sites/default/files/mauritius_jan-feb_2017_reprint_compr.pdf)

The Seychelles has been at the forefront in innovations relating to supporting, projecting and financing of the blue economy. In October 2018, Seychelles launched the world's first sovereign "blue bond" – a pioneering financial instrument designed to support sustainable marine and fisheries. The bond raised US\$15 million from international investors and was hailed as an innovative approach to promote the islands' blue economy investment strategy. The World Bank assisted in developing the blue bond, reaching out to three investors: Calvert Impact Capital, Nuveen, and U.S. Headquartered Prudential Financial, Inc. Proceeds from the bond will include support for the expansion of marine protected areas, improved governance of priority fisheries and the development of the Seychelles' blue economy. Grants and loans will be provided through the Blue Grants Fund and Blue Investment Fund, managed respectively by the Seychelles' Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust (SeyCCAT) and the Development Bank of Seychelles (DBS). Since then, the international not-for-profit group, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has unveiled what it says is a pioneering US\$1.6 billion scheme to scale up global ocean conservation efforts through "blue bonds". Seychelles has worked with TNC to restructure part of its national debt<sup>15</sup>. As of 2018, the government has established two marine protected areas covering 210,000 square kilometres of ocean areas—taking the country over halfway to its goal of protecting 30 percent of its marine territory by 2020.

Aside from looking for ways to transform the marine industry and environmental conservation; moving from a land-based, mono-crop, inward-looking economy into an export-oriented, diversified economy, Mauritius and the Seychelles have also engaged in effective bilateral collaboration. In 2012 Mauritius and the Seychelles signed an agreement to share management of the continental shelf of the Mascarene Plateau Region. As a result, they gained joint jurisdiction over an additional area of 396,000 sq. kilometres. Discussions had started in April 2002 when delegations of the two countries began to talk about the delimitation of the Exclusive Economic Zones Boundary and the Continental Shelf beneath. This was concluded on 29th July 2008 when the Boundary Protocol was signed by the two countries here in Mauritius, following which the necessity to discuss our Extended Continental Shelf claim and boundary surfaced. Owing to the overlapping claims, Seychelles made an important historical resolve to delineate its extended continental shelf in the Mascarene Plateau Region jointly with the Republic of Mauritius. Since 2012, not much further development occurred but just

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/feb/22/debt-for-dolphins-seychelles-create-huge-new-marine-parks-in-world-first-finance-scheme>

recently, The Joint Commission of the Mauritius-Seychelles Extended Continental Shelf, Mascarene Plateau region has opened the two states' joint management area (JMA) for oil and gas exploration. As a result, this can be regarded as an example of successful inter-island collaboration, leading to a pooling of capabilities, generating greater benefits for all.

On Maritime Security, the two countries have played an active role in the areas of tackling piracy and drug-trafficking. Seychelles was an active contributor during the anti-piracy operations with a special elite unit created in 2009 that played an important role in engaging pirates and freeing hostages. Indeed, despite its limited means, the Seychelles' Coast Guard (SCG) has been involved in several counter piracy operations against Somali pirates. Seychelles played a vital role in ending impunity for piracy acts with other states such as Kenya and Mauritius also contributing to the task. With the support of international organizations like the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the European Union (EU) alongside, individual state partners (e.g. in terms of building new court facilities and jails), Seychelles accepted that responsibility and began to prosecute pirates in March 2010

Alongside interdiction at sea and the prosecution of suspected pirates, Seychelles has played a very active role in the 'Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia' (CGPCS). More than 80 countries, organisations and industry groups participated in operations in the Indian Ocean region under the auspices of the UN-mandated Contact Group on Piracy off the coast of Somalia, which Seychelles chaired for two years from 2016 to 2017. This governing instrument has played a central role in combating Somali piracy and is credited with considerable success in responding to the threat. It was created in New York in 2009 pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 1851 (December 2008). It called for the creation of: an international cooperation mechanism to act as a common point of contact between and among states, regional and international organizations on all aspects of combating piracy and armed robbery at sea off Somalia's coasts (UNSC, 2008).

#### **Global politics and regional dynamics**

Both Mauritius and Seychelles have been positioning themselves as "Gateways to Africa". Since 2010 onwards there has been a concerted drive to diversify economic relations through an "Africa strategy". This is a notable change given that relations, especially with South Africa, have been tense, historically and politically. With a number of Double Taxation Avoidance Treaties (DTAs) and Investment Promotion and Protection Agreements (IPPAs) already signed with African states, or in process of being ratified, Mauritius can offer investors a conducive



environment for doing business. The development of Special Economic Zones in Senegal, Ghana, Madagascar and Cote d'Ivoire to create a conducive environment for local operators to tap on business opportunities in these countries and develop business corridors. There is also the growing relevance of the Mauritius International Financial Centre (MIFC) in directing Private Equity funds onto the continent. For the year 2016, total inbound investments in Africa stood at USD 59 billion, out of which nearly 50% went through Mauritius.

These developments take on added significance due to China's growing interest and role in the region. Mauritius has had relations with China from independence in 1968 when it immediately subscribed to the 'One China' policy. A small but influential Chinese diaspora on the island also ensured close business links between the two countries. Over the last decade or so, however, the relationship has deepened with Mauritius looking east, as its preferential access to European markets has wound down. China financed the Bagatelle Dam, which was built by a subsidiary of the China Three Gorges Corporation and Beijing has offered considerable loans and support in the construction of a new airport terminal, roads and hospitals.

China is also Mauritius' main trading partner, accounting for 18% of imports, ahead of India's 16.5% and South Africa and France's 8%. Consolidating a free trade agreement could enhance these flows and open up Mauritian products to Chinese markets. At the moment, trade is highly skewed with the island importing \$825 million of goods from China while only exporting \$46 million.

In 2006 Mauritius became a surprise pick to be the host of one of China's Special Economic Zones (SEZ) in Africa, turning into *The Jinfei Smart City* project. Its original aim was to develop a 211 hectares plot to become a hub for light engineering, ICTs and services. Yet for almost a decade, the project stalled. Over this time, its focus shifted to the less ambitious aim of offering hospitality and business facilities. In 2015, the Mauritian government restructured the SEZ as a joint venture with Chinese developers, taking hold of 80% of shares in the process.

In the wake of Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit in July 2018, Prime Minister Jugnauth expressed his eagerness to deepen mutually-beneficial and friendly co-operation with China. He used the visit to announce that Mauritius would welcome the "Belt and Road" Initiative and continue to firmly uphold the "One China" policy. He emphasised that relations between Mauritius and China run deep and are underpinned by strong people-to-people links, drawing attention to the support that China has provided to Mauritius on important infrastructure projects. Jugnauth was hoping to use China's economic support to reinvent his country as an

active launch pad and investment hub for Chinese investors in Africa. Xi's visit also pushed forward the negotiations for a bilateral Free Trade Agreement. If successful, it would be the first FTA between China and an African state and provide further encouragement to Chinese investors to undertake projects on the island.

In the Seychelles too, China has been investing in multi-million prestige projects such as the new National Assembly Building inaugurated in 2009, a new *Palais de Justice* (judiciary building) in 2013 as well as a number of ongoing projects. Seychelles and China will also be cooperating in the marine sector through a 'Blue Partnership'. The agreement aims to establish closer relations between the ocean-related agencies in the two countries. It is also expected to improve the understanding of the ocean and climate change and strengthen marine environmental protection and integrated marine management.

Probably as a result of China's growing presence, India has also stepped up its relations with both Mauritius and Seychelles. In 2017 India and Mauritius signed a deal on maritime security. A decision to extend the operational life of Coast Guard ship Guardian, that was given by India to Mauritius under a grant assistance programme, was also taken. Following an official visit of Indian President Ramnath Kovind to Mauritius on 12 March 2018, it was announced that India would provide the island state with an extra \$100 million credit line toward military capability-building, as part of the Indian Ocean Region Outreach, which focuses on maritime security, amongst others. India is a critical supporter of the Mauritian security forces and coast guard. Not only does it play a central role in Mauritian capability-building – in 2015 it donated an offshore patrol vessel, the Barracuda, and provided it with two surveillance aircraft in 2012 - it's also directly involved in Mauritian defence: it provides military training to Mauritian forces, patrol services in Mauritian waters, and takes part in the command of Mauritian forces.

Beyond defence, the two states enjoy excellent overall relations. India plays a critical role in Mauritian development; for instance, it granted it a \$500 million credit line in May 2017, during a visit by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, toward development of civilian infrastructure. A similar \$500 million credit line had already been granted in 2015. The two states have bilateral agreements in many fields such air services, information and technology, anti-terrorism, exchange of intelligence related to money laundering, extraditions and several others. Commercial relations are healthy (though obviously unbalanced). However, India has lost out to China as Mauritius's largest trading partner. A proposed India-Mauritius free trade

agreement, continues to be in the making and was not concluded during Prime Minister Pravind Kumar Jugnauth's visit to India in January 2019.

Mauritius is interested in convincing India to eliminate or substantially reduce its tariffs on textiles and marine products as it sees a lot of scope for increase in market access in these two areas. However, as has been noted by observers there are differing opinions within the Government of India, with one official putting it in the following words, “The Textiles Ministry is opposed to offering zero or very low tariffs to Mauritius in textiles and garments. The Commerce Ministry is trying to convince it that the domestic sector will not be affected as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka already have zero duty access for many textile items in the Indian market”<sup>16</sup>. India’s exports to Mauritius increased 22 per cent in 2017-18 to cross \$ 1 billion while its imports from the island nation during the year increased 12 per cent to \$ 20.6 million. Apart from the economic gains, which could be limited for India, the free trade pact could help strengthen the cultural and historical ties between the two countries.

Deep connectivity has certainly served both India and Mauritius well in practical terms. It has provided India with a strategic foothold in the western Indian Ocean, an opportunity to extend, develop and test its maritime capacities, most notably in the science of hydrography. For Mauritius, the relationship has been beneficial in terms of providing a security umbrella, bolstering the Hindu-Indian-origin political establishment and providing the country with an important source of earnings through the recently amended India-Mauritius 1982 tax treaty.

#### Island States, Maritime Identity and Politics – the parallels with Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is clearly a far bigger country in terms of population, economy and territory compared with the islands of Seychelles and Mauritius. However, being island states each needs innovative strategies to leverage location and geography. Maritime identity is crucial to each of the states given their dependence on the ocean for jobs, food, income, trade and industry. As particularly small and vulnerable islands, the Seychelles and Mauritius have begun to reframe themselves as ‘large ocean states’<sup>17</sup> in the hope of drawing attention to, and mustering the resources to capitalise on their maritime expertise and resources. Furthermore,

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/india-mauritius-likely-to-sign-free-trade-pact-during-mauritian-pms-visit-in-jan/article25549292.ece>

<sup>17</sup> See the statement by Ronny Jumeau, Seychelles Ambassador for Climate Change and SIDS Issues at the United Nations headquarters in 2013  
[https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1772Ambassador%20Jumeau\\_EGM%20Oceans%20FINAL.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1772Ambassador%20Jumeau_EGM%20Oceans%20FINAL.pdf)

since the end of the 1990's and the beginning of the 2000's, maritime security has been much more of a global concern, pertaining to illegal activities at sea or from the sea (including the protection of shipping and ports). Terrorism (post 9/11) and piracy (especially after 2007 and the rise of attacks at the Horn of Africa) have attracted most of the media's attention. However, arms and drug trafficking, people smuggling, illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing (IUUF), and deliberate pollution still represent the bulk of illegal and disruptive activities at sea. For most of the countries located in the wider Indian Ocean region, these are the common challenges, compounded by limitations in resources and technology, human capacity, and port control infrastructures. As a result, the need to raise *maritime domain awareness* through information-sharing, the setting up of data fusion centres and enhancing maritime intelligence and surveillance capacities have become priorities.

One feature which stands out is the role that an inter-governmental organisation like the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) has played in promoting regional integration and in supporting countries like Mauritius and the Seychelles on a range of sustainable development and maritime issues. The Indian Ocean Commission helps facilitate funds from development cooperation partners such as the European Union; it represents island nations' interests in international fora as well as promoting maritime safety in the Eastern and Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean (ESA-IO) region. Currently, for example the Indian Ocean Commission is the Chair of The Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS), which acts as the nodal point for the international community and the various actors involved in the planning, coordination and management of counter-piracy action.

For Sri Lanka, a similar organisation does not exist in terms of a body that effectively draws upon members of the region and engages closely with major international players. Currently, there are hopes for The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation or BIMSTEC, of which Sri Lanka is a member, to develop into a more effective and powerful engine for cooperation in a number of priority sectors.

India and China, both big countries with large ethnic diasporas and historically endowed cultural spheres of influence, are also discovering the challenges that come with 'doing' great power politics. The development of island infrastructure has come to be seen as a euphemism for the development of 'strategic assets', even in the controversy for India over Assumption Island where, as it transpired, the aim of building residential barracks for the Seychelles coast guard, improving a jetty and an existing air strip appear rather innocuous. Especially as the two

major Asian powers extend their maritime capabilities, they will run the risk of getting embroiled in the domestic politics of island states. These islands, once upon a time vocal supporters of the Indian Ocean Zone of Peace idea, free of great power politics and extra-regional interference, have also developed ambitions and aspirations of their own, acting to capitalise upon old and new-found geostrategic importance. Devoid of a continental hinterland, island states are both especially vulnerable to and acutely aware of the need to make gains while placating and when needed, standing up to the big players.

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