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14. ABSTRACT
As one of the world's five oceans and third largest, the Indian Ocean stretches for more than 6,200 miles between the southern coasts of Africa and Australia, bordering over 24 countries and hundreds of millions living near its coasts. Sea lanes of communication and trade in the Indian Ocean are considered among the most strategically important in the world. More than 80 percent of the world's seaborne oil trade transits through the Indian Ocean and its choke points. The Indian Ocean is the focus of a strategic power competition and possible dominance of the sea lanes of communication in the region. Also, the Indian Ocean is home to one of the United States' most important bases, Diego Garcia. This base is located on the island of Diego Garcia in the United Kingdom-managed archipelago of British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), also known as the Chagos Archipelago. While France, the United States, and the United Kingdom have a presence in the Indian Ocean, China's increasing influence in the Indian Ocean sets up a sea-based sphere of competition with India, in addition to China's and India's land-based disputes. The United States presently remains largely absent from the Southwestern Indian Ocean, with the exception of the U.S. base on Diego Garcia, the occasional U.S. naval visit to Seychelles, and the small U.S. Embassy in Port Louis, Mauritius. With current-day minimal U.S. fleet presence, no U.S. Air Force presence, and minimal U.S. diplomatic presence in the Southern Indian Ocean, there is a void in U.S. military and diplomatic presence.

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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

COUNTERING CHINA'S RISE IN THE SOUTHERN INDIAN OCEAN

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

Jennifer A. Barr

AY 2019-2020

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Oral Defense Committee Member: LTC Paul Armstrong

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Date: 27 April 2020

Executive Summary

Title: Countering China's Rise in the Southern Indian Ocean

Author: Jennifer A. Barr

Thesis: With increasing Chinese interest in the Southwest Indian Ocean and a continued reliance on the U.S. military base on Diego Garcia, now is a time for a further U.S. pivot deep into the Indian Ocean. This paper will explore India and China's geopolitical strategies in the southwestern Indian Ocean, and why the competition for dominance in the southwest Indian Ocean should matter to the United States. It will also explore why the United States should build stronger ties with the islands of the Southwest Indian Ocean and should increase its soft power and military presence to better counter China's growing influence and to manage the balance of powers in the Indo-Pacific.

Discussion: As one of the world's five oceans and third largest, the Indian Ocean stretches for more than 6,200 miles between the southern coasts of Africa and Australia, bordering over 24 countries and hundreds of millions living near its coasts. Sea lanes of communication and trade in the Indian Ocean are considered among the most strategically important in the world. More than 80 percent of the world's seaborne oil trade transits through the Indian Ocean and its choke points. The Indian Ocean is the focus of a strategic power competition and possible dominance of the sea lanes of communication in the region. Also, the Indian Ocean is home to one of the United States' most important bases, Diego Garcia. This base is located on the island of Diego Garcia in the United Kingdom-managed archipelago of British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), also known as the Chagos Archipelago. While France, the United States, and the United Kingdom have a presence in the Indian Ocean, China's increasing influence in the Indian Ocean sets up a sea-based sphere of competition with India, in addition to China's and India's land-based disputes. The United States presently remains largely absent from the Southwestern Indian Ocean, with the exception of the U.S. base on Diego Garcia, the occasional U.S. naval visit to Seychelles, and the small U.S. Embassy in Port Louis, Mauritius. With current-day minimal U.S. fleet presence, no U.S. Air Force presence, and minimal U.S. diplomatic presence in the Southern Indian Ocean, there is a void in U.S. military and diplomatic presence.

Conclusion: By strengthening economic ties, improving the U.S. military bilateral relationship, creating a cohesive, long term interagency strategy, and involving multilateral partners will go far towards improving the bilateral relationships with Mauritius and with Seychelles. These actions will also counter Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean and help ensure that the military base on Diego Garcia remains protecting our interests. Especially due to the significance of the U.S. military base on Diego Garcia, the Indo-Pacific strategy must include the entire Southern Indian Ocean – including tiny Mauritius, Seychelles, and the disputed BIOT. And, most importantly, the United States needs to be an active participant in the Southern Indian Ocean to provide a more inclusive Indo-Pacific strategy that considers China's rise in the Southern Indian Ocean.

DISCLAIMER

THE OPINIONS AND CONCLUSIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF EITHER THE MARINE CORPS COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE OR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY. REFERENCES TO THIS STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOREGOING STATEMENT.

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“Whoever controls the Indian Ocean dominates Asia. In the 21st century, the destiny of the world will be decided on its [the Indian Ocean’s] waters.”

-Quote attributed to Alfred Thayer Mahan¹

As one of the world’s five oceans and third largest, the Indian Ocean stretches for more than 6,200 miles between the southern coasts of Africa and Australia, with an area of approximately 28,360,000 square miles.² The Indian Ocean borders four continents and over 24 countries and hundreds of millions living near its coasts. Sea lanes of communication and trade in the Indian Ocean are considered among the most strategically important in the world. More than 80 percent of the world’s seaborne oil trade transits through the Indian Ocean and its choke points.³

The Indian Ocean is the focus of a strategic power competition and possible dominance of the sea lanes of communication in the region. France, the United Kingdom, China, and India are all vying for power and influence in the region with various security installations and economic projects. Also, the Indian Ocean is home to one of the United States’ most important bases, Diego Garcia. This base is located on the island of Diego Garcia in the United Kingdom-managed archipelago of British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), also known as the Chagos Archipelago. While France, the United States, and the United Kingdom have a presence in the

¹ Mishra, Vivek. “Consolidating India's Indian Ocean Strategy.” – The Diplomat. for The Diplomat, June 7, 2019. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/consolidating-indias-indian-ocean-strategy/>.

² Kanayev, Viktor Filipovich, Philomene A. Verlaan, and Joseph R. Morgan. “Indian Ocean.” Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., January 14, 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Indian-Ocean>.

³ Mishra, Vivek. “Consolidating India's Indian Ocean Strategy.” – The Diplomat. for The Diplomat, June 7, 2019. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/consolidating-indias-indian-ocean-strategy/>.

Indian Ocean, China's increasing influence in the Indian Ocean sets up a sea-based sphere of competition with India, in addition to China's and India's land-based disputes.

The United States presently remains largely absent from the Southwestern Indian Ocean, with the exception of the U.S. base on Diego Garcia, the occasional U.S. naval visit to Seychelles, and the small U.S. Embassy in Port Louis, Mauritius.⁴ The United States maintained both a U.S. Air Force satellite tracking station from 1963 to 1996 and a U.S. Consulate in Seychelles from 1976 to 1996.⁵ With current-day minimal U.S. fleet presence, no U.S. Air Force presence, and minimal U.S. diplomatic presence in the Southwestern Indian Ocean, there is a void in U.S. military and diplomatic presence. Looking at the various U.S. government bureaus, geographic combatant commands (GCC), and U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy, a gap of U.S. presence forms in the Southwestern Indian Ocean. This author believes this is in part due to lack of resources and prioritization; however, it also could be a result of geography. Mauritius and Seychelles do not fit neatly into the pre-packaged geographical boundaries that the U.S. government has set for the GCCs and bureaus.

With increasing Chinese interest in the Southwest Indian Ocean and a continued reliance on the U.S. military base on Diego Garcia, now is a time for a further U.S. pivot deep into the Indian Ocean. This paper will explore India and China's geopolitical strategies in the southwestern Indian Ocean, and why the competition for dominance in the southwest Indian Ocean should matter to the United States. It will also explore why the United States should

⁴ Note. The U.S. Embassy in Port Louis, Mauritius houses less than fifteen U.S. foreign service officers, one of the smaller Embassies in the world.

⁵ "U.S. – Seychelles Relations." Background Notes on Countries of the World: Republic of Seychelles. Country Reports. January 2007. <https://web.archive.org/web/20160303213016/http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/country-reports/23799686/u-s-seychelles-relations>

build stronger ties with the islands of the Southwest Indian Ocean and should increase its soft power and military presence to better counter China's growing influence and to manage the balance of powers in the Indo-Pacific.

Seven hundred miles off the east coast of Madagascar and 3261 miles directly south of India lies the little-known island of Mauritius. Officially known as the Republic of Mauritius, Mauritius is approximately the size of one-half of the state of Rhode Island. Rarely does it factor into politics on the world stage. However, over the past three years, Mauritius and Seychelles lie at the heart of various rivalries, security issues, and power competitions in the Southern Indian Ocean. Due to lack of U.S. resources and relative economic and political stability in the region, the United States has largely ignored and avoided this struggle in the Southern Indian Ocean.

Mauritius, while geographically far from India, China, and the United States, is at the heart of a power competition in the Indian Ocean. India and China's rivalry continues to grow,⁶ and now it is spilling over into the Indian Ocean in a struggle for resources and a fight for dominance. Mauritius opens the door to both countries. India provides security and financial resources; these funds go towards the Mauritian Coast Guard and overall infrastructure, such as the new light-rail project "Metro Express" and hospitals.⁷ With Mauritius' desire to become the "Singapore of Africa" and the "Gateway to Asia," China offers technological, security, and economic assistance tied to high-end infrastructure, such as fiberoptic internet cabling, "Safe Cities" with advanced security camera network throughout the country, and "Smart City JinFei" a housing, entertainment, and cultural area.⁸

⁶ Paul, T.V. *The China-India Rivalry in the Globalization Era*. Georgetown University Press, 2018.

⁷ South China Morning Post. "A Simple Guide to the Chinese Government: SCMP." SCMP Chronicles. Accessed April 12, 2020. <https://multimedia.scmp.com/widgets/china/cpc-primer/>.

⁸ South China Morning Post. "A Simple Guide to the Chinese Government: SCMP." SCMP Chronicles. Accessed April 12, 2020. <https://multimedia.scmp.com/widgets/china/cpc-primer/>.

Why would both India and China invest in Mauritius? Presently, Mauritius is known as the “rainbow nation” with both religious and ethnic diversity, with approximately one-half of the population devoted to Hinduism and one-quarter to Catholicism and one-quarter to Islam. With a variety of countries ruling Mauritius for over 400 years, Mauritius is a mix of cultures and beliefs. Mauritius was first ruled by the Dutch (who killed off the famous Dodo bird) from 1638 to 1710, and then by the French from 1715 to 1810. The British ruled from 1810 until 1968, the time of independence. During those 150 years, although the British abolished slavery on February 1, 1835, the British also brought indentured servants from India and then Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) to work in the sugar cane fields and commerce.⁹ This indentured servitude brought Hinduism, Tamil people and religion, the idea of a caste system, as well a small Muslim population. Also, it brought strong political ties with India. A small Chinese contingent also arrived in Mauritius and became permanently established as shop owners across the island, bringing political ties with China to the island. During this colonial time, the remaining French elites ran the sugar cane plantations, the British ran the government, and the middle-class Creole population, the local population, became doctors, lawyers, and teachers.¹⁰

During British colonial rule, the British Territory of Mauritius consisted of the islands of Mauritius, St. Brandon, Rodrigues, Agalega, Tomelin, and, significantly, the Chagos Archipelago. However, two important, but separate, behind-the-scenes conversations and deals occurred right around the time of Mauritius’ independence. First, the United Kingdom and the

⁹ “History.” Republic of Mauritius- History. Accessed November 11, 2019. <http://www.govmu.org/English/ExploreMauritius/Pages/History.aspx>.

¹⁰ Ballhatchet, Kenneth. “The Structure of British Official Attitudes: Colonial Mauritius, 1883–1968.” *The Historical Journal*, vol. 38, no. 4, 1995, pp. 989–1011., doi:10.1017/s0018246x00020537. P. 990.

United States discussed security concerns and the possibility of a U.S. military base on the island of Diego Garcia. As a result, in November 1965, the United Kingdom removed the Chagos Archipelago, including the island of Diego Garcia, from the British Territory of Mauritius and renamed the Chagos Archipelago “British Indian Ocean Territory,” or BIOT.¹¹ Second, around the same time in Mauritius, in an “under-the-table” deal, the majority Indian-descendent population and the wealthy French-Mauritian elite came to a verbal arrangement. As a part of the deal, the wealthy French-Mauritians would retain and maintain their economic dominance, their business ventures, and their plantations, in return for both relinquishing interest in politics and allowing the predominately Hindu population to lead the soon-to-be-formed government.¹² In 1967-1968, Mauritius held general elections, electing Hindu Prime Minister Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam as the first-ever Prime Minister. The British formally granted independence to the island of Mauritius on 12 March 1968, with the British maintaining control over the formerly Mauritian islands of the Chagos Archipelago.¹³

Since independence, Mauritius developed a lucrative financial sector, including a significant off-shore financial industry as well as other industries, including textile, diamond-cutting, and telecommunications. Mauritius currently ranks as one of the wealthiest nations in

¹¹ International Court of Justice. *Legal Consequences of the Separation of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius in 1965*. The Hague, 2019. <https://www.icj-cij.org/files/case-related/169/169-20190225-01-00-EN.pdf>

¹² Barrett, Georgina, Shirley J. Brooks, Jenny Josefsson, and Nqobile Zulu. *The Changing Face of Land and Conservation in Post-Colonial Africa: Old Land, New Practices?* London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015.

¹³ Ballhatchet, Kenneth. “The Structure of British Official Attitudes: Colonial Mauritius, 1883–1968.” *The Historical Journal*, vol. 38, no. 4, 1995, pp. 989–1011., doi:10.1017/s0018246x00020537. P. 990.

Africa.¹⁴ However, Mauritius tends to look away from Africa and look instead to Asia, including South Asia, for business and role models.

Mauritius' strategic and economic importance includes an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of over 2.3 million square kilometers.¹⁵ Mauritius continues to develop its infrastructure, including the overhaul of the port, a light-rail system, new highways, a “smart city” concept, and new high-end cultural centers and entertainment centers. It is important to note that all this new infrastructure is being primarily funded by two countries – India and China.¹⁶

While Seychelles is Mauritius' northern neighbor, the two island nations are quite distinct in terms of social demographics, religion, history, and economy. French-speaking Mauritius is predominantly composed of decedents of India and France, the English-speaking Republic of Seychelles is ninety-two percent Creole, the majority of whom are Catholic.¹⁷ The French first colonized the Seychelles in 1770; the French ceded the islands to the British in 1811.¹⁸

¹⁴ GDP Per Capita. International Monetary Fund. Accessed April 10, 2020. <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2017/02/weodata/weorept.aspx?sy=2017&ey=2017&scsm=1&ssd=1&sor t=country&ds=.&br=1&pr1.x=55&pr1.y=9&c=512,946,914,137,612,546,614,962,311,674,213,676,911,548,193,55 6,122,678,912,181,313,867,419,682,513,684,316,273,913,868,124,921,339,948,638,943,514,686,218,688,963,518,6 16,728,223,836,516,558,918,138,748,196,618,278,624,692,522,694,622,142,156,449,626,564,628,565,228,283,924, 853,233,288,632,293,636,566,634,964,238,182,662,359,960,453,423,968,935,922,128,714,611,862,321,135,243,71 6,248,456,469,722,253,942,642,718,643,724,939,576,644,936,819,961,172,813,132,726,646,199,648,733,915,184,1 34,524,652,361,174,362,328,364,258,732,656,366,654,734,336,144,263,146,268,463,532,528,944,923,176,738,534, 578,536,537,429,742,433,866,178,369,436,744,136,186,343,925,158,869,439,746,916,926,664,466,826,112,542,11 1,967,298,443,927,917,846,544,299,941,582,446,474,666,754,668,698,672&s=PPPPC&grp=0&a=>

¹⁵ “Mauritius Exclusive Economic Zone.” Intercontinental Trust. Accessed April 11, 2020. <https://intercontinentaltrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/ITL-Newsletter-Vol-6-Issue-11-Mauritius-Exclusive-Economic-Zone.pdf>

¹⁶ Mauritius Ministry of Finance. Budget for the Republic of Mauritius 2019. Appendix A. Accessed April 10, 2020. http://budget.mof.govmu.org/budget2019-20/V_A2019_20AppendixA.pdf

¹⁷ Sparks, Donald Lee. “Seychelles.” Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., October 4, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Seychelles>.

¹⁸ Sparks, Donald Lee. “Seychelles.” Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., October 4, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Seychelles>.

However, the political, legal and education systems are all modeled on the British. The United Kingdom granted Seychelles independence in 1976.¹⁹ The Republic of Seychelles is spread across 115 islands throughout the Southwestern Indian Ocean with its capitol, Mahé, located seven degrees south of the equator. With a small population of approximately 95,000 inhabitants, Seychelles boasts a per person GDP of \$ 27,000 USD per year, the highest in Africa in 2018.²⁰

With its beautiful beaches and its Exclusive Economic Zone of 530,000 square miles, it is not surprising that the two main industries in Seychelles are “the two T’s:” Tourism and Tuna.²¹ Starting in the 1980s, Seychelles began a high-end tourism marketing campaign bringing in the wealthiest travelers to enjoy Seychellois beaches. One resort, located exclusively on North Island, offers rooms starting at \$9000 USD per night. Tuna swims in the Seychelles EEZ and is highly valued in the United States, Spain, France, Japan, and China. It is Seychelles’ largest export,²² and Seychelles contributes nine percent of the global tuna market.²³ The challenge with such a large EEZ is the ability, or lack of ability, to patrol it. Since the 1990s, pirates (mostly Somali) and illegal, unregulated, and underreported (IUU) fishing vessels present

¹⁹ Sparks, Donald Lee. “Seychelles.” Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., October 4, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Seychelles>.

²⁰ International Monetary Fund. Datamapper. Accessed April 11, 2020. <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDPDPC@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEOWORLD>

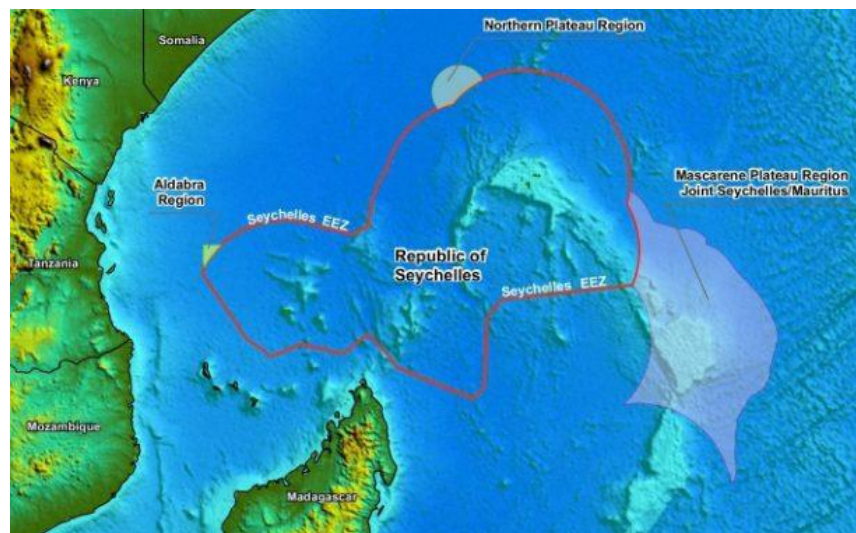
²¹ “Fish Exports Rise in Seychelles, Giving Boost to Economy.” Seychelles News Agency. Accessed April 12, 2020. [http://www.seychellesnewsagency.com/articles/9914/Fish exports rise in Seychelles, giving boost to economy](http://www.seychellesnewsagency.com/articles/9914/Fish%20exports%20rise%20in%20Seychelles,%20giving%20boost%20to%20economy).

²² “Fish Exports Rise in Seychelles, Giving Boost to Economy.” Seychelles News Agency. Accessed April 12, 2020. [http://www.seychellesnewsagency.com/articles/9914/Fish exports rise in Seychelles, giving boost to economy](http://www.seychellesnewsagency.com/articles/9914/Fish%20exports%20rise%20in%20Seychelles,%20giving%20boost%20to%20economy).

²³ “Tuna Global Export and Top Exporting Countries.” Tridge. Accessed April 12, 2020. <https://www.tridge.com/intelligences/atlantic-bluefin-tuna/export>.

challenges to safe passage through the EEZ. This dilemma allows for countries like the United States, India, and China to help meet those challenges.

Why are Mauritius and Seychelles appealing to India and China? First, it is all about location. Mauritius and Seychelles have a combined EEZ of 1.4 million miles squared.²⁴ India and China see Mauritius' and Seychelles' locations as ideal for potential military presence away from the conflict-prone Strait of Hormuz. India has set up bases on Assumption Island in the Seychelles as well as Agalega Island in Mauritius. China already constructed a dual-use logistics facility in Djibouti and has limited presence in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

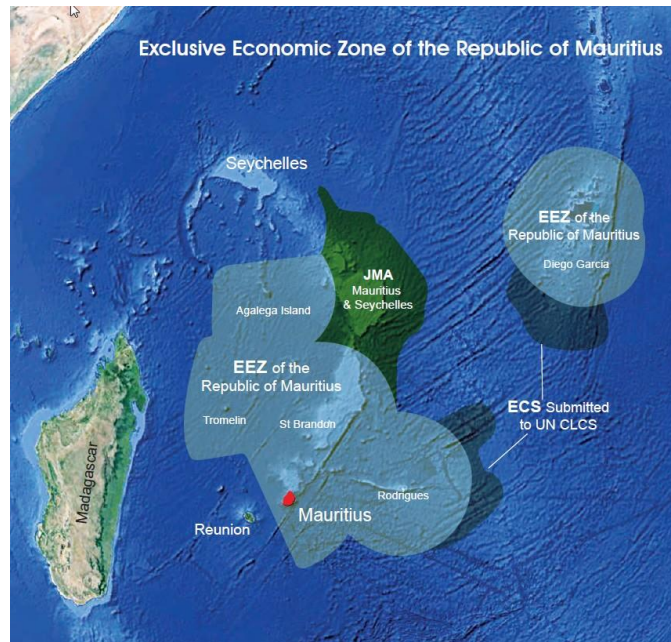


Exclusive Economic Zone of the Republic of Seychelles

Source: <https://www.mast-security.com/blog/maritime-security-news/seychelles-approves-expansion-of-ttw/>

²⁴ Mauritius has an EEZ of 2.3 million kilometres squared with Seychelles EEZ equalling 1.3 million kilometres squared. They share a joint EEZ of 400,000 square kilometres. See: <http://www.seychellesnewsagency.com/articles/702/Seychelles+taking+steps+to+protect+more+marine+areas+of+its+oceanic+zone> and

<http://police.govmu.org/English/Organisation/Branches/Pages/National-Coast-Guard.aspx>
<https://intercontinentaltrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/ITL-Newsletter-Vol-6-Issue-11-Mauritius-Exclusive-Economic-Zone.pdf>



Exclusive Economic Zone of the Republic of Mauritius

Source: National Geographic. <https://blog.nationalgeographic.org/2014/03/08/mauritius-charting-the-future-of-an-african-outlier/>

Second, Mauritius and Seychelles provide proximity to sea lines of communication for commerce and for patrolling the region. Approximately two-thirds of the world’s commerce passes through Mauritius and Seychelles’ EEZ. Also, in the waters of their EEZs tuna and other high-end fish, pirates, and traffickers of all kinds can be found. Both countries want to ensure that their goods can pass from Africa to their destinations undisturbed. The third reason for India and China’s interest in the southern Indian Ocean relates to Seychelles’ and Mauritius’ overall wealth, strong job sector, high-level infrastructure, and political stability. Seychelles and Mauritius provide strong economies in which to invest, and, as a result, India and China want to invest.²⁵

²⁵ 2018 GDP per capita data per The World Bank lists Seychelles as first in sub-Saharan Africa and Mauritius number two. Arouff, Jean Paul. “India in Pacts to Develop Infrastructure in Mauritius, Seychelles.” Reuters. Thomson Reuters, March 12, 2015. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-islands/india-in-pacts-to-develop->

INDIA's Strategy in Southern Indian Ocean

India has traditionally thought of the Indian Ocean as their backyard. Their historically close relationship with the island of Mauritius is, in part, evidence of this. The first Indian nationals came to Mauritius from India in 1835 as indentured servants to work in the sugar cane fields.²⁶ Now, Mauritians of ethnic Indian origin make up 65% of the population.²⁷ India and Mauritius' close ties include shared ethnic, economic, political, and military links, including an Indian Naval Captain heading the Mauritian Coast Guard as Commandant.²⁸ While India does not have as well-defined of a regional and/or external strategy as China does, India's foreign policy and external security reach has expanded under Prime Minister Modi since he came to power in 2015.²⁹ No Indian foreign policy or defense white papers have been published yet, unlike China. However, speeches have been made by high-level officials, including one by Prime Minister Modi in Mauritius, and actions, such as high-level visits in the region and financial donations, have been taken. Prime Minister Modi gave a speech in Mauritius regarding

[infrastructure-in-mauritius-seychelles-idUSKBN0M81AZ20150312](#). And "GDP per Capita (Current US\$) - Sub-Saharan Africa." Data. Accessed April 12, 2020. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=ZG>.

²⁶ "History." Republic of Mauritius- History. Accessed November 11, 2019. <http://www.govmu.org/English/ExploreMauritius/Pages/History.aspx>.

²⁷ "The World Factbook: Mauritius." Central Intelligence Agency. Central Intelligence Agency. Accessed April 12, 2020. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print_mp.html.

²⁸ "National Coast Guard." The Mauritius Police Force - National Coast Guard. Accessed April 12, 2020. <http://police.govmu.org/English/Organisation/Branches/Pages/National-Coast-Guard.aspx>.

²⁹ Mishra, Vivek. "Consolidating India's Indian Ocean Strategy." – The Diplomat. for The Diplomat, June 7, 2019. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/consolidating-indias-indian-ocean-strategy/>.

regional security³⁰ and the Indian Foreign Minister gave another one in October of 2019 at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C.³¹

Often actions speak louder than words, especially in the realm of geopolitics. Since Prime Minister Modi took office in 2015, he visited Mauritius, Seychelles, and Sri Lanka, followed by visits to Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, and Kenya in 2016. He continues to actively visit the region. Once the previous pro-China government of Abdulla Yameen lost the election in the Maldives, immediately following Prime Minister Modi's reelection, Modi quickly made his first stop the Maldives in hopes to align the Maldivian vision with the Indian one.³² Why the relatively sudden uptick in visits to island nations in the region? One word – China.

During his visit to the Mauritius in 2015, Prime Minister Modi went public with his SAGAR (Security And Growth for All in the Region) strategy, making it the cornerstone of his interaction with the Indian Ocean region.³³ In his remarks in Mauritius on the occasion of the \$ 50 million USD Indian donation of the 243 foot offshore patrol vessel called “Barracuda,”³⁴ Prime Minister Modi laid out why the Indian Ocean, and Mauritius, are so important to India.

³⁰ Onsiong, David. “India's Foray into the Indian Ocean. The Only Way out?” *lexpress.mu*, March 13, 2019. <https://www.lexpress.mu/article/349173/indias-foray-indian-ocean-only-way-out>.

³¹ “Indian Foreign Policy: Preparing for a Different Era.” *Indian Foreign Policy: Preparing for a Different Era* | Center for Strategic and International Studies. Accessed November 10, 2019. <http://csis.org/analysis/indian-foreign-policy-preparing-different-era>.

³² Mishra, Vivek. “Consolidating India's Indian Ocean Strategy.” – *The Diplomat*. for *The Diplomat*, June 7, 2019. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/consolidating-indias-indian-ocean-strategy/>.

³³ Kapur, Lalit, Lalit Kapur, Commodore Lalit Kapur, and Indian Navy. “An Indian Ocean Agenda for Modi 2.0.” *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*, June 3, 2019. <https://amti.csis.org/an-indian-ocean-agenda-for-modi-2-0/>.

³⁴ Press Trust of India. “GRSE Launches Mauritius Offshore Patrol Vessel.” *Business Standard*. *Business-Standard*, August 2, 2013. https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/grse-launches-mauritius-offshore-patrol-vessel-113080200761_1.html.

“[...] the Indian Ocean is critical to the future of the world. This Ocean bears two-thirds of the world’s oil shipments, one-third of its bulk cargo; and half of its container traffic. Over three-fourths of its traffic goes to other regions of the world. The vast Indian Ocean Region hosts over 40 states and nearly 40% of the world’s population. It touches Australia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, West Asia and the eastern seaboard of Africa. It sparkles with the gems of island states. [...] This is why Indian Ocean is at the centre of global attention more than ever before. [...]

India is at the crossroads of Indian Ocean. [...] We must also assume our responsibility to shape its future. So, Indian Ocean Region is at the top of our policy priorities. [...] We seek a future for Indian Ocean that lives up to the name of SAGAR – Security and Growth for All in the Region. It is no coincidence that I speak of our hopes for the Indian Ocean Region in Mauritius. Our partnership with Mauritius is among our strongest maritime relationships in this world. Our partnership will grow. We will together build our capabilities. We will also train and patrol the seas together.”³⁵

Prime Minister Modi describes the five pillars of SAGAR in the Indian Ocean: 1) safety and security, 2) economic and security cooperation, 3) collective action and cooperation 4) sustainable development 5) those who live in the Indian Ocean have primary responsibility for its safety and security. Number five alludes to China and the United States and emphasizes India’s belief that the Indian Ocean is India’s.³⁶ Prime Minister Modi still believes in the power of the Indian Ocean in 2019. During a speech in Vishakhapatnam, India in 2019, Prime Minister Modi stated “The Indian Ocean Region is one of my foremost policy priorities. Our approach is

³⁵ “Text of the PMs Remarks on the Commissioning of Coast Ship Barracuda.” Narendra Modi Website. <https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-the-pms-remarks-on-the-commissioning-of-coast-ship-barracuda-2954>

³⁶ “Text of the PMs Remarks on the Commissioning of Coast Ship Barracuda.” Narendra Modi Website. <https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-the-pms-remarks-on-the-commissioning-of-coast-ship-barracuda-2954>

evident in our vision of “Sagar”, which means “Ocean” and stands for – Security And Growth for All in the Region.”³⁷

Besides political visits, India is pouring more and more money into various countries in the Indian Ocean region for economic and security development. Some of that money includes millions of dollars in funding for hospitals and infrastructure, as in the case of Mauritius, but some of it includes millions for security port access in Duqm, Oman for military use and for developing a deep-sea port in Indonesia’s Sabang.³⁸ However, it is India’s military outreach in the Southern Indian Ocean that is striking. In 2018, India and Seychelles agreed to build a joint base on one of Seychelles 115 islands, Seychelles’ Assomption (or Assumption) Island; the countries signed a twenty-year agreement, with a likely renewal every 10 years. Mauritius, a frequent ally of India, has partnered with India since 2015 to improve sea and air infrastructure on Mauritius’ remote Agalega Island. While India is not officially building a base on Agalega, India is funding airport and port infrastructure, which then Indian defense can utilize.³⁹

When French President Macron visited India in 2019, he signed an agreement with India, allowing India to use French bases in the Indian Ocean, including those bases on France’s *d’outre-mer* islands of Reunion and Mayotte.⁴⁰ During the signing, Macron declared that “the

³⁷ “PM Modi at the International Fleet Review 2016 in Visakhapatnam Andhra Pradesh.” Narendra Modi Website. <https://www.narendramodi.in/pm-modi-at-the-international-fleet-review-2016-in-visakhapatnam-andhra-pradesh-413019>

³⁸ Mishra, Vivek. “Consolidating India’s Indian Ocean Strategy.” – The Diplomat. for The Diplomat, June 7, 2019. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/consolidating-indias-indian-ocean-strategy/>.

³⁹ Arouff, Jean Paul. “India in Pacts to Develop Infrastructure in Mauritius, Seychelles.” Reuters. Thomson Reuters, March 12, 2015. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-islands/india-in-pacts-to-develop-infrastructure-in-mauritius-seychelles-idUSKBN0M81AZ20150312>.

⁴⁰ Onsiang, David. “India’s Foray into the Indian Ocean. The Only Way out?” *lexpress.mu*, March 13, 2019. <https://www.lexpress.mu/article/349173/indias-foray-indian-ocean-only-way-out>.

Indian Ocean, like the Pacific Ocean, cannot be a place of hegemony,”⁴¹ leading many to speculate that he was referring to China’s influence in the region. At the same conference, Indian Prime Minister Modi added that the Indian Ocean region would play a “very significant role” to India.⁴² India, like China, is also now looking towards the long view, per the most recent remarks by the Indian Foreign Minister, where he stated:

“Preparing for a more competitive and complex era will require obviously* different mindsets. For a nation like India, this would be in addition to the changes induced by its climb up the global power hierarchy. As a broad approach, it’ll be reflected in the primacy of long-term thinking over short-term calculations.”⁴³

It is unclear if India wants to be a hegemon. However, India’s goals are two-fold: keeping China out of the Indian Ocean region and climbing the global power hierarchy ladder. While India tends to shy away from formal alliances, India under Prime Minister Modi has moved towards bilateral agreements and multilateral fora, such as Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), which includes Bangladesh, India, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).⁴⁴ These two multinational fora allow India to discuss issues with regional neighbors,

⁴¹ France-Presse, Agence. “India and France Sign Indian Ocean Security Accord.” The National. The National, March 10, 2018. <https://www.thenational.ae/world/asia/india-and-france-sign-indian-ocean-security-accord-1.711817>.

⁴² Onsiong, David. “India's Foray into the Indian Ocean. The Only Way out?” *lexpress.mu*, March 13, 2019. <https://www.lexpress.mu/article/349173/indias-foray-indian-ocean-only-way-out>.

⁴³ “Indian Foreign Policy: Preparing for a Different Era.” Indian Foreign Policy: Preparing for a Different Era | Center for Strategic and International Studies. Accessed November 10, 2019. <http://csis.org/analysis/indian-foreign-policy-preparing-different-era>.

⁴⁴ Mishra, Vivek. “Consolidating India's Indian Ocean Strategy.” – The Diplomat. for The Diplomat, June 7, 2019. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/consolidating-indias-indian-ocean-strategy/>.

without necessarily having China at the table as a member.⁴⁵ While BIMSTEC focuses on economic cooperation, IORA and its 21 member states focus on maritime safety and security, trade and investment, fisheries management, disaster risk, tourism and cultural exchanges, and economic cooperation.⁴⁶

INDIA's Projects in the Southern Indian Ocean

Besides military interests in the region, India provides significant resources and assistance to both Mauritius and Seychelles. Mauritius' budget is supported in great part by both India and China. In 2018 India provided funds for new hospitals, a light-rail system, and increased military aid.⁴⁷ In 2017-2018, India allocated approximately \$50 million USD to Mauritius for projects and in 2019-2020, India allocated approximately \$11 billion USD to Mauritius.⁴⁸ Still-in-the-works projects or recently completed projects funded by India include: new hospitals and clinics, a light rail system connecting the population center to the capital, a new Supreme Court building, and 1000 units of housing. For Seychelles, India has traditionally invested less, in part due to the sense of Seychellois independence and due to an effort to distinguish itself from the predominately Indian-heritage Mauritian population. However, as

⁴⁵ China is a dialogue partner in IORA, just like the United States. During an interview in Mauritius in 2018 between the author and IORA's Australian representative, IORA's Australian officer stated that China is IORA's most active dialogue partner.

⁴⁶ Iora.net. "About IORA." IORA. Accessed April 12, 2020. <https://www.iora.int/en/about/about-iora>.

⁴⁷ Mauritius Ministry of Finance. Budget for the Republic of Mauritius 2019. Appendix A. Accessed April 10, 2020. http://budget.mof.govmu.org/budget2019-20/V_A2019_20AppendixA.pdf

⁴⁸ Saroha, Sakshi. "India's Aid to Foreign Countries in 2019." Jagranjosh.com, January 9, 2020. <https://www.jagranjosh.com/general-knowledge/india-s-aid-to-foreign-countries-in-2019-1578309723-1>.

China steps up its donations in Seychelles, India has taken notice and now invests regularly in Seychelles. In 2019-2020, India allocated \$ 13.5 million USD for various projects⁴⁹ across the islands as well as a \$ 100 million USD grant for defense infrastructure.⁵⁰ India's funding continues to increase in Mauritius and Seychelles, spurred on by the increasing presence of China, and China's wealth in the region.

CHINA's Strategy in Southern Indian Ocean

Since 1993, China's president holds the title of president, general secretary of the Communist Party of China, and chairman of the Central Military Commission.⁵¹ Since 1993, previous Chinese presidents have led for approximately ten years each.⁵² This consolidation of power at the top of the government's hierarchy and longevity in office may allow for a more streamlined approach to strategy that looks at the longer term. Part of the reason for this streamlined approach to strategy also lies in the ever-present role of the Communist Party at all levels and aspects of the government and military in China.⁵³ Chinese culture also plays a role. In China, patience is valued when working towards one's goals versus the American value in

⁴⁹ Shukla, Ajai. "Budget 2019: India Redirects Foreign Aid to Indian Ocean Countries." Business Standard. Business-Standard, July 7, 2019. https://www.business-standard.com/budget/article/budget-2019-india-redirects-foreign-aid-to-indian-ocean-countries-119070800030_1.html.

⁵⁰ "India Offers Seychelles \$ 100 Million Line of Credit for Defence, Infrastructure." Seychelles News Agency. Accessed April 12, 2020. <http://www.seychellesnewsagency.com/articles/9350/India-offers-Seychelles-million-line-of-credit-for-defence-infrastructure>.

⁵¹ South China Morning Post. "A Simple Guide to the Chinese Government: SCMP." SCMP Chronicles. Accessed April 12, 2020. <https://multimedia.scmp.com/widgets/china/cpc-primer/>.

⁵² Jiang Zemin led from 1993-2003 and Hu Jintao from 2003-2013. The current President, Xi Jinping has led since 2013. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-13017882>

⁵³ South China Morning Post. "A Simple Guide to the Chinese Government: SCMP." SCMP Chronicles. Accessed April 12, 2020. <https://multimedia.scmp.com/widgets/china/cpc-primer/>.

acting immediately and receiving instant gratification. Defense scholar Thomas Mahnken attributes it to the Chinese belief that China is, with its long history, superior. Further, Mahnken adds that the idea of China's external strategies stem from the knowledge that they are the "middle kingdom."⁵⁴ When looking at the global map from a Chinese perspective, China is the centerpiece, or the middle, of the world map. Traditionally, China subscribed to the tributary system, emphasizing China as the center and other countries in the region paying subservience to China.⁵⁵ This hierarchical system allowed China to see itself as the center, or middle of its region. During the mid-19th Century to the mid-20th Century, China suffered from what is referred to as the "Century of Humiliation."⁵⁶ This "Century of Humiliation" began with the Opium Wars and ended when Chairman Mao Zedong proclaimed the People's Republic of China in 1949. Since 1949, by growing and strengthening its economy and by increasing its regional influence through Belt-and-Road Initiatives, China and its leaders pursue international economic and strategic competition to ensure a position of regional and global strength. The white paper published in September of 2019 entitled "China and the World in the New Era" supports this narrative. The white paper states:

"In modern times, China was reduced to poverty and weakness, threatened by domestic strife and foreign aggression, and even confronted with complete demise. Through unrelenting struggle, the Chinese dream of prosperity and rejuvenation for their country, and happiness for the people. In 1949, under the CPC's leadership, they founded the PRC, turning a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society into a completely new one, and achieving national independence

⁵⁴ Mahnken, Thomas G. *Secrecy and Stratagem: Understanding Chinese Strategic Culture*. Woollahra, N.S.W.: Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2011.

⁵⁵ Christopher P. Twomey, *Chinese Strategic Culture: Survey and Critique*, prepared for Defense Threat Reduction Agency, Advanced Systems and Concepts Office (Washington, DC, October 31, 2006)

⁵⁶ Schiavenza, Matt. "How Humiliation Drove Modern Chinese History." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, February 16, 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/10/how-humiliation-drove-modern-chinese-history/280878/>.

and the liberation of the people. China then entered a new epoch of development. Over the past 70 years it has been moving forward against all odds, and exploring its path to development.”⁵⁷

With this historical background and view towards the future, the Chinese government has published various white papers, including “China’s Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation” in 2017, the aforementioned 2019 “China and the World in the New Era” white paper, and the July 2019 white paper entitled “China’s National Defense in a New Era.” While there have been previous versions of “China’s National Defense in a New Era,” such as the ones published in 2013 and 2015,” the most recent Chinese government version is distinctly different, responding to and matching the tone towards China in the United States’ National Security Strategy. The 2019 China’s National Defense in a New Era white papers states:

“International strategic competition is on the rise. The US has adjusted its national security and defense strategies, and adopted unilateral policies. It has provoked and intensified competition among major countries, significantly increased its defense expenditure, pushed for additional capacity in nuclear, outer space, cyber and missile defense, and undermined global strategic stability.”⁵⁸

This 2019 white paper further specifies that China’s focus is on the defensive, “resolutely safeguarding China’s sovereignty, security and development interests. This is the fundamental goal of China’s national defense in the new era.”⁵⁹

As it states above, China’s concept of defense includes its development interests. In the “China and the World in a New Era” white paper under Section IV, “China Contributes to the

⁵⁷ PRC State Council Information Office. “White Paper on China and the World in the New Era” Beijing Xinhua in English. September 2019. http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201909/27/content_WS5d8d80f9c6d0bcf8c4c142ef.html.

⁵⁸ PRC State Council Information Office. “White Paper on China National Defense in the New Era.” Beijing Xinhua in English. July 2019. http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2019-07/24/content_4846443.htm

⁵⁹ China’s National Defense in a New Era, 2019, page 6.

World,” the Chinese government explains the importance of its Belt-and-Road Initiatives acts as a “boat” and a “bridge” between nations for economic cooperation and a “shared future.”⁶⁰ The Chinese concept of defense is tied to its development and economic interests, including the Belt-and-Road Initiatives. These development interests, including the Belt-and-Road Initiatives, provide allies and supporters across the globe, or, at a minimum, passively neutral countries to China’s influence in the region. This development interests take many forms, including economic aid, extensive scholarships for higher education in China, commercial/dual-use military infrastructure, and technical and security infrastructure. While none of the white papers focus on the Indian Ocean per se, Belt-and-Road Initiatives, as well as other economic and dual-use ventures in the Indian Ocean region suggest that China continues to influence the region. China has many, many projects in the Indian Ocean as a whole: a few include the dual-use base in Djibouti, the development of the port in Sri Lanka, the developments in Pakistan and another in Bangladesh, bridges and housing in Mozambique,⁶¹ and satellite dishes and televisions in Madagascar.⁶² These are but a few of the economic projects in the Indian Ocean as a whole. Since 2017, China’s President Xi has visited several of the islands of the Indian Ocean, like Mauritius and Seychelles, ensuring China’s political presence is also seen.

⁶⁰ PRC State Council Information Office. “White Paper on China National Defense in the New Era.” Beijing Xinhua in English. July 2019. http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2019-07/24/content_4846443.htm

⁶¹ “Backgrounder: Mozambique's Chinese-Built Maputo Bridge and Link Roads.” Xinhua. Accessed April 12, 2020. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-05/13/c_137175965.htm

⁶² Tirvengadam, Priscilla. “StarTimes Embarks on DTT Project in Madagascar.” NexTV News Africa, January 20, 2016. <https://nextvafrica.com/startimes-embarks-on-dtt-project-in-madagascar/>.

CHINA’S Projects in Southern Indian Ocean

As Mauritius strives to be the next Singapore and the “Gateway to Asia,” Mauritius benefits from significant Chinese technological, security, and economic assistance. In 2018 China funded several major multi-million dollar projects in Mauritius: JinFei, an entertainment and housing village called a “Smart City,” costing approximately \$400 million USD.⁶³ China also funded and provided technological assistance for a country-wide “Safe City” CCTV project aimed at reducing crime costing approximately \$500 million USD,⁶⁴ in which installed 4000 CCTV cameras in 2000 locations throughout the tiny island. China’s Huawei also installed submarine fiberoptic telecommunication cable, connecting Mauritius to its sister island, Rodrigues.⁶⁵ In 2019, China forgave approximately \$13 million USD in Mauritian debt to China, and provided additional resources.⁶⁶ The Mauritian Prime Minister, Pravind Jugnauth, thanked China for its investments, especially the modern sports stadium and infrastructure for the Indian Ocean Games. Prime Minister Jugnauth also noted in a speech given in Beijing the eight laudable initiatives helping Mauritius, including industrial promotion, connectivity of infrastructures, exchange facilitation, ecological development, capacity building, health services,

⁶³ “Jin Fei Smart City : Investissements Privés De Rs 15 Mds Provenant De La Chine.” Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, January 31, 2019. <https://mbradio.tv/article/vidéo-jin-fei-smart-city-investissements-privés-de-rs-15-mds-provenant-de-la-chine>.

⁶⁴ Pierre, Patrick St. “Projet Safe City: 4 000 Smart Caméras Pour Nous Surveiller.” *lexpress.mu*. *L'express Maurice*, June 4, 2018. <https://www.lexpress.mu/article/332700/projet-safe-city-4-000-smart-cameras-pour-nous-surveiller>.

⁶⁵ “Huawei Marine's MARS Cable Finally Reaches Rodrigues Island.” *huawei*, November 19, 2018. <https://learning.huawei.com/us/press-events/news/2018/11/huawei-marine-mars-cable-rodriques-island>.

⁶⁶ Prime Minister's Office - Mauritius-China: Signing of grant agreement and protocol for partial annulation of debt. Accessed April 12, 2020. <http://pmo.govmu.org/English/News/Pages/Mauritius-China-Signing-of-grant-agreement-and-protocol-for-partial-annulation-of-debt.aspx>.

exchange among people, peace, and security.⁶⁷ In October of 2019, China and Mauritius signed its first Free Trade Agreement (FTA). This is China's first FTA with any African nation.⁶⁸

China increasingly invests in Seychelles, including constructing the National Assembly Building, the Palais de Justice, more than three schools, and the Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation building. It has also supplied broadcasting equipment. In 2014, China gifted Seychelles a Type 62 Class Gunboat to better patrol the maritime area,⁶⁹ which was the first of its kind in Seychelles. On the education front, as Seychelles offers students limited options for higher education, Seychelles welcomes much needed Chinese grants and exchanges. In 2017, China offered Seychellois \$ 7.3 million USD in educational grants to complete degrees in China. China also funded a hospital in Anse Royale and a housing project in Mont Fleuri area.⁷⁰

Since Mauritius' independence in 1968, India has maintained strong cultural, political, economic and military ties to Mauritius, with India providing Mauritius with frequent grants and funding for infrastructure and cultural projects. This funding continues to increase as China's influence in Mauritius continues to rise. In 2018, China donated over \$ 1 billion USD to Mauritius for various infrastructure related projects. Presently, China accounts for 18% of the imports to Mauritius, compared to 16.5% from India, 8% for each France and South Africa.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Prime Minister's Office - Mauritius-China: Signing of grant agreement and protocol for partial annulation of debt. Accessed April 12, 2020. <http://pmo.govmu.org/English/News/Pages/Mauritius-China-Signing-of-grant-agreement-and-protocol-for-partial-annulation-of-debt.aspx>.

⁶⁸ "China, Mauritius Sign Free Trade Agreement." Xinhua. Accessed April 12, 2020. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-10/17/c_138480183.htm.

⁶⁹ "China Gifts Maritime Patrol Ship to Seychelles." Seychelles News Agency. Accessed April 12, 2020. <http://www.seychellesnewsagency.com/articles/357/China-gifts-maritime-patrol-ship-to-seychelles>.

⁷⁰ Lawrence, Susan. "China's Political Institutions and Leaders in Charts." Congressional Research Service. November 12, 2013. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R43303.pdf>

⁷¹ "China in Mauritius: Gateway to Africa or Forgotten Friend?" African Arguments, September 6, 2018. <https://africanarguments.org/2018/08/30/china-in-mauritius-gateway-to-africa-or-forgotten-friend/>.

With a newly signed FTA, trade with China will only increase. In tiny, wealthy Seychelles, India and China's donations increase, especially in regards to security and financial resources, as both compete in the region. Both India and China are looking towards the Southern Indian Ocean nations as a part of their larger regional development strategies, creating an arena of competition.

Should the Southern Indian Ocean Matter to the United States?

India's rise and efforts in the Indian Ocean mean that strategic competition in the Indian Ocean will continue to increase as China invests more money for projects in the Indian Ocean. With increasing strategic emphasis by China and India in the Southern Indian Ocean, now is a time to ensure U.S. strategy includes Mauritius and Seychelles and the Southern Indian Ocean into its broader Indo-Pacific strategy.

If India and China's strategic interest in the region is the first and second reasons that the United States should include Mauritius and Seychelles in the Indo-Pacific strategy, the third reason relates to the separation of the Chagos Archipelago from the Mauritius Territory around the time of independence from the United Kingdom. In 1961, per rare footage in the video "Stealing an Island," Rear Admiral Grantham of the U.S. Navy visited Diego Garcia in the Chagos Archipelago to survey the island for potential U.S. military facilities, during the height of the Cold War. By February of 1964, in discussions with the United Kingdom, the United States formally expressed interest in establishing military facilities on Diego Garcia. In 1965, the United Kingdom detached the Chagos Archipelago from the previous British Territory of

Mauritius and renamed the Chagos Archipelago the “British Indian Ocean Territory” (BIOT). In 1966, the United Kingdom and the United States formalized the agreement allowing the United States to build a military base on Diego Garcia for an unspecified time. The agreement was called “Agreement concerning the Availability for Defence Purposes of the British Indian Ocean Territory.”⁷² Shortly thereafter, between 1967 and 1973, the approximately 2000-3000 BIOT inhabitants were removed from the island by the United Kingdom and were relocated to other countries, primarily Mauritius, while the U.S. military base was being built.⁷³ The U.S. military base has been in use since 1971. Presently, the U.S. military base on Diego Garcia is home to 1000 U.S. troops and supports the U.S. Navy, Air Force, and various U.S. interagency parties, such as NASA. The base has been utilized during the two invasions of Iraq and for missions in Asia and the Middle East.⁷⁴

More recently, the fight for BIOT has arrived on the world stage. On January 30, 2017, the Assembly of the African Union adopted resolution AU/Res.1 (XXXVIII) on the Chagos Archipelago, which vowed to support Mauritius, ensuring “the complete decolonization of the Republic of Mauritius.”⁷⁵ By June of 2017, Mauritius took the issue to the United Nations. The results overwhelmingly favored requesting an International Court of Justice (ICJ) advisory opinion ruling regarding BIOT. The vote turned out to be 94 in support – 15 against – and 65

⁷² Treaty Between the United Kingdom and the United States Regarding the British Indian Ocean Territory. United Nations. Accessed April 11, 2020. <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20603/volume-603-I-8737-English.pdf>

⁷³ Vine, David. *Island of Shame the Secret History of the U.S. Military Base on Diego Garcia*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011.

⁷⁴ Marsh, Jenni. “How the US Stole an Island to Build a Secretive Military Base.” CNN. Cable News Network, March 11, 2019. <https://www.cnn.com/2019/03/09/asia/chagos-islands-feature-intl/index.html>.

⁷⁵ African Union. “Decisions, Declarations, Resolution, and Motion for January 2017,” https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/32520-sc19553_e_original_-_assembly_decisions_621-641_-_xxviii.pdf

abstentions (mostly European countries allies to the United Kingdom). This year, in February of 2019, the ICJ published the non-binding advisory opinion finding in favor of Mauritius – that the United Kingdom should relinquish control of BIOT, and Diego Garcia, to Mauritius.⁷⁶ Most recently, in May of 2019, the United Nations recognized the ICJ’s advisory opinion supporting Mauritius’ claim. One hundred sixteen countries voted in support of the resolution, while 56 abstained. Only the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, Hungary, Israel, and the Maldives voted against it.⁷⁷

Why does all this matter? First of all, Mauritius sees the Chagos Archipelago as a part of its territory. They are well-aware of the priority of the United States to keep the U.S. military base on Diego Garcia. The fight for the Chagos will always be popular with the majority of Mauritians as it has that “David versus Goliath” appeal. Moreover, most Mauritians think poorly upon the British colonial period, compared to the French colonial period. Mauritians believe that the British granted Mauritian independence on the condition that the Chagos Archipelago stay with the United Kingdom. Chagos Archipelago is a topic that matters to Mauritians, especially to Mauritian politicians. Second, the advisory opinion and potential decolonization also benefits Mauritius politically and, just as significantly, economically. Prime Minister Jugnauth recently won re-election on November 7, 2019, in part due to his efforts to reclaim BIOT for Mauritian territory. Also, over the past three years, the Mauritian Minister of Ocean Economy Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping, Minister Premdut Koonjoo, has given numerous speeches

⁷⁶ International Court of Justice. *Legal Consequences of the Separation of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius in 1965*. The Hague, 2019. <https://www.icj-cij.org/files/case-related/169/169-20190225-01-00-EN.pdf>

⁷⁷ Nichols, Michelle. “U.N. Deals Diplomatic Blow to Britain and U.S. over Indian Ocean Islands.” Reuters. Thomson Reuters, May 22, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-mauritius-un-idUSKCN1SS2CR>.

discussing the economic and commercial impact of growing Mauritius' EEZ by adding the millions of square kilometers of Chagos/BIOT territory.⁷⁸

However, most important of all, BIOT's strategic location housing one of the United States' most essential military bases is key. This paper will not discuss specific details of the base as almost all information about the base is above this paper's classification level. The U.S. military base of Diego Garcia was born out of the fears of the Cold War, but today, it stands as one of our most strategically located bases – isolated yet near the Middle East and Asia. Currently, the lease that the United States has on Diego Garcia continues through 2036. Is the United States willing to allow Mauritius to take control of Diego Garcia? Mauritius has stated publicly that they are willing to allow the United States to stay on Diego Garcia. However, what would be the cost financially, and what would be the cost militarily? Would the expectation be that we would defend Mauritius from outsiders? Or would the expectation be that we would remove the base from Diego Garcia and allow the Chagossians to resettle there? No matter what, the United States must realize that Mauritius holds the majority world support, as seen in the United Nations votes. Whether or not that matters to the United States is a different matter.

So, How Can the United States Best Move Forward?

The United States should build stronger ties with Mauritius and Seychelles and should increase soft power and military presence to better counter China's growing influence in the Indian Ocean and to strengthen our strategic vision for the region. The United States can meet this challenge in four ways: first, by strengthening economic ties; second, by improving the U.S.

⁷⁸ Koonjoo, Premdut. Our Ocean 2017 Speech. Our Ocean 2017. Accessed April 11, 2020. <https://ourocean2017.org/sites/default/files/premdut-koonjoo-our-ocean-2017-speech.pdf>

military bilateral relationship; by working on a cohesive, long term interagency strategy, and, fourth, by involving multilateral partners. As Ambassador Eikenberry most recently said in his lecture at Marine Corps University, “The best war fought is the one fought on cultural terms using soft power.”⁷⁹ Soft power is just as important, if not more so, than hard power. As any good diplomat knows, the key is to find common ground and start there. So, how can the United States use soft power for our gain?

The bilateral United States-Mauritius relationship is not what it used to be, primarily due to the incoming amounts of money from India and China and due to the complicated relationship between the United Kingdom and Mauritius involving BIOT and Diego Garcia. While this should have happened years ago before the presence of China in Mauritius and before Mauritius first took the issue to the United Nations, it is now time for the United States to act. Those actions should involve four different components. First, the United States, via diplomatic channels and through various types of foreign aid, should support Mauritius and Seychelles on the economic side. In Mauritius, due to the rapid growth of the financial sector, money laundering is also on the rise. Mauritius needs and has requested support for anti-money laundering assistance for the writing of laws and providing guidance on the prosecution of money laundering. Seychelles has no anti-money-laundering laws. Providing assistance and training is something that the United States government can do through its Embassies. China excels at using soft power, and the United States offers many tools in the soft power toolbox, such as diplomacy, scholarships, grants, exchanges, and military security and humanitarian assistance. Each U.S. Embassy and Consulate / Consular Agency offers various scholarships,

⁷⁹ Eikenberry, Ambassador Karl. “The Geopolitical Implications of China’s Belt-Road Initiative.” *Lecture at Marine Corps University*. October 31, 2019.

many surrounding economic and/or STEM opportunities, offered to the best and brightest of each country. The U.S. State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Exchanges offers over \$159 million USD in scholarships per year.⁸⁰ Over 50 current and 250 world-wide heads of state have participated in these programs.⁸¹ These generous scholarships which include the Fulbright Program as well as International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), help to ensure that each recipient will become a goodwill ambassador for the United States in their home country. They are an excellent pay-it-forward tool for the U.S. government.

Increased trade and bilateral commerce would also be beneficial; economic support comes in many forms. Currently, the United States does minimal trade with Mauritius, but that could easily change. One of the fastest growing sectors, besides the financial sector, is the filmmaking industry. Bollywood films many movies in Mauritius; in 2018, the first Hollywood movie, *Serenity*, was filmed in Mauritius. It is a rapidly growing industry, and one in which the United States could benefit, thanks to the various public diplomacy grants and scholarships through the U.S. Embassy. Soft power will bring goodwill.

The second action to take is to improve the United States – Mauritius bilateral military relationship. While Mauritius does not have a military per se, they do have a Coast Guard, a police helicopter unit. This author believes that U.S.-sponsored training would be welcomed. Already one Mauritian Coast Guard recruit per year is awarded a full ride scholarship to West Point, and there should be one awarded to the Naval Academy. Additional trainings and

⁸⁰ Congressional Budget Justification for the Department of State, Foreign Operations, Fiscal Year 2019. Department of State.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20180212212753/https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/277155.pdf>.

⁸¹ "IVLP Fact Sheet." U.S. Department of State.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20130525094452/http://eca.state.gov/files/bureau/ivlp-fact-sheet.pdf>

scholarships would continue to improve the bilateral relationship. In addition, a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) does not exist with Mauritius⁸². U.S. Navy ships do not come to Mauritius. A SOFA with Mauritius would be an excellent opportunity and should be rectified. Yearly, there is an extensive U.S. Navy exercise in the Indo-Pacific called “Cutlass Express,” often held in Seychelles. With improvement of the bilateral relationship, why couldn’t the yearly AFRICOM naval exercise “Cutlass Express” be held in Mauritius? Why not have the U.S. naval vessels stop for shore leave in Mauritius, where there will soon be a newer and expanded port? Allowing military vessels to dock in Port Louis would also benefit Mauritius economically, as most U.S. Navy ships on shore leave spend two to five times more in port than the average day-tripping cruise passenger. Showing Mauritians the value of the United States military in the region would go a long way to rebuilding the relationship and to solidifying the United States’ role in the region.

Each year, the U.S. naval exercise “Cutlass Express” is held in the AFRICOM region, often in Seychelles, Djibouti, and Mozambique. This anti-piracy, anti-trafficking exercise combines joint training with regional partners and regional military participants. This successful yearly exercise benefits each host nation and the regional participants with U.S.-led training. Increased bilateral and multilateral trainings such as these would be beneficial in the Southwest Indian Ocean. The Department of Defense, through the Embassy in Mauritius, also offers

⁸² Status of Forces Agreement, or SOFA, sets guidelines for U.S. military presence in a partner nation. A SOFA itself does not necessarily constitute a security arrangement. However, it establishes the rights and privileges of U.S. personnel present in a country in support of the larger security arrangement. In this case, Seychelles does have a SOFA agreement signed in 2009 with the U.S. government. As a result, U.S. military ships and submarines frequently have a port of call in Seychelles while on deployment. While docked in the port in Victoria, the U.S. sailors will participate in various community relations activities (COMREL) in partnership with the host nation government and the U.S. Embassy. The United States does not have a SOFA with Mauritius. For additional information regarding the SOFA between Seychelles and the United States, please see: <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/246859.pdf>

workshops and train-the-trainer events in Seychelles with a variety of African nations participating. Naval Criminal Investigative Services (NCIS) sponsors interdiction and anti-money laundering trainings with the Mauritian and Seychellois Coast Guard. However, it would also be beneficial to allow Mauritius and Seychelles to participate in ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) multilateral exercises such as CARAT (Cooperation Readiness and Afloat) and SEACAT (Southeast Asia Cooperation Training).⁸³ Or perhaps a joint African Union multilateral exercise combined with an ASEAN multilateral exercise could be done to enhance cooperation across the region. These bilateral and multilateral operations provide opportunities for the U.S. military to work with partner nations, leading to improved flow of information, stronger bilateral relationships, and enhanced cooperation.

The third action involves playing the strategic long game. Sometimes problems cannot be resolved in minutes, hours, or days. Sometimes it takes years; one must look at the long-term strategic vision. Due to its power structure, China tends to excel in the strategic long game, unlike the United States. For the United States, this translates into thinking about areas of the globe where we have not focused and building alliances, or even non-alliances. For example, the United States for the past several years “pivoted to Asia” and the Indo-Pacific. However, upon analyzing the map of the countries bordering the Indo-Pacific, one realizes that there are over 24 countries that share a coastline along the Indo-Pacific. The most recent U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS), published in 2017, highlights the lack of focus on the Indian Ocean by defining the Indo-Pacific geography as “the west coast of India to the western shores of the United

⁸³ Parameswaran, Prashanth. “What’s in the New US-ASEAN Maritime Exercise?” – The Diplomat. for The Diplomat, October 24, 2018. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/10/whats-in-the-new-us-asean-maritime-exercise/>.

States.”⁸⁴ While PACOM has now rebranded itself as INDOPACOM, many countries bordering the Indian Ocean are still left out of the INDOPACOM geographic combatant command. What about the Indian east coast as well as the entire east coasts of the Middle East and Africa?

In addition, one of the United States’ challenges in discussing and thinking strategically about the southwestern Indian Ocean is the problematic division of the U.S. military’s geographic combatant commands. INDOPACOM covers the entirety of the Pacific Ocean but stops at India in covering the Indian Ocean. In fact, the Indian Ocean is divided between INDOPACOM, CENTCOM, and AFRICOM. And, if one were to discuss British Indian Ocean Territory, also known as the Chagos Archipelago, and the small but mighty island of Diego Garcia, technically, since BIOT is officially administered by the United Kingdom, it should, theoretically, fall under EUCOM. It currently falls under both CENTCOM and AFRICOM. Worse still, other U.S. government agencies such as the U.S. Department of State and USAID divide up the world in different areas of interest. For example, in the Department of State, China falls under the East Asia Bureau, and India and Pakistan, as well as Bhutan and Bangladesh, make up part of the South Central Asia Bureau. The Middle East falls under the Near East Asia Bureau. In addition, the DOD and Department of State/USAID divide the Africa area of operation differently, too. If the U.S. government cannot agree on the countries that should be a part of various strategic geographic bureaus/commands, how can we possibly create a coherent, cohesive, and long-term strategy to deal with the challenges? The U.S. government agencies have legacy geographic divisions of the world. The whole of government, ideally the National Security Council (NSC), should come together to discuss whether these geographic divisions are

⁸⁴ The White House. The National Security Strategy of the United States of America. Washington, DC, 2017. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

beneficial to U.S. strategy and, if they decide that they are, the NSC should ensure that each agency divides its geographic bureaus the same way and including the same countries. This would significantly enhance the flow of information across the interagency and across the geographic combatant commands.

The United States is missing a golden opportunity to expand their sphere of influence by not participating more in multilateral organizations. The United States and the Department of State in particular must participate in multilateral organizations, such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) that is based in Mauritius. IORA engages 21 partner countries (all but Afghanistan and Myanmar), with nine dialogue partners on a wide variety of issues, including commerce, security, disaster management, science. China, not surprisingly, is IORA's most active dialogue partner. IORA's most inactive dialogue partner? The United States. Strategically thinking, IORA offers the opportunity to dialogue and collaborate with countries with whom the United States does not have the best relationship, such as Yemen, as well as others that need strengthening, like Mauritius and India. It also offers a forum in which to counter China's financial donations and powerful belt-and-road initiative. The United States, and the United Kingdom for that matter, need to repair and build relationships through these multilateral institutions and organizations to strengthen its security strategy.

By strengthening economic ties, improving the U.S. military bilateral relationship, creating a cohesive, long term interagency strategy, and involving multilateral partners will go far towards improving the bilateral relationships with Mauritius and with Seychelles. They will also counter Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean and help ensure that the military base on Diego Garcia remains protecting our interests. Unlike what the NSS states, the Indo-Pacific cannot be defined as more Pacific Ocean than Indian Ocean; it must be equal parts both.

Especially due to the significance of the U.S. military base on Diego Garcia, the Indo-Pacific strategy must include the entire Southern Indian Ocean – including tiny Mauritius, Seychelles, and the disputed BIOT. And, most importantly, the United States needs to be an active participant in the Southern Indian Ocean to provide a more inclusive Indo-Pacific strategy that considers China’s rise in the Southern Indian Ocean.

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