



THE OCEAN-CLIMATE-
SECURITY NEXUS
IN THE INDO-PACIFIC
ISLAND NATIONS:
BROADENING THE
MEANING OF SECURITY

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South Asia Scan

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The Ocean-Climate-Security Nexus in the Indo-Pacific Island Nations: Broadening the Meaning of Security

Athaula A Rasheed

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Executive Summary

National policymakers and international development partners have coordinated development and security issues faced by island nations. It has become crucial for regional security actors to navigate the security interests of their regional island states. Island nations have become an essential component of regional security communities, particularly in the Indo-Pacific maritime sphere. The most common narrative for development and security cooperation in island nations has been influenced by climate change and how its impacts threaten their communities' livelihood, well-being and security. On the other hand, island nations, particularly the small archipelagic states, have integral connections to the ocean they occupy. These connections are built on cultures, socio-economic activity, political status, territorial integrity and sovereign rights they hold within their marine boundaries.

The ocean is part of the island life. This also creates further challenges, with climate change acting as a threat multiplier that exacerbates ocean-based challenges encountered by island life and infrastructure. The ocean and its links to climate change are key drivers of their development and security interests. This means that defining security in the Indo-Pacific context must consider the ocean-climate-security nexus in island nations. This is particularly in the interest of understanding broader meanings of security adopted by island nations undergoing multifaceted challenges in the face of climate change.

The connection between the ocean, climate and security aspects in island nations has been made at multiple forums. The purpose of this South Asia Scan is to emphasise the construction of this connection by island nations at international forums, including the ocean, climate and security platforms. This Scan also discusses how island nations have recently navigated their international engagements to promote multilateralism and integrated approaches to address their multidimensional security concerns.

Using a cross-disciplinary discourse analysis, which includes a rapid appraisal of island nations' statements in the recent ocean, climate and security forums, this Scan explores the island policy narratives

at the recent United Nations (UN) Ocean Conferences, the 2021 Conference of Parties meeting and the 2019 UN Security Council (UNSC) debate on the maintenance of international peace and security related to climate change. It shows how the policy issues raised in these different forums have intersected, creating clear ties between island nations' security, climate change and ocean interests. By declaring themselves as 'large ocean states', island nations have expressed multifaceted challenges and opportunities associated with the ocean-climate connections. The complex threat environment demands an integrated and multisectoral problem-solving agenda, supported by effective ocean governance and climate-based conservation for their long-term sustainability, development and security. Understanding what security means to island nations, in terms of ocean-climate-security nexus, is necessary to explain how island governments navigate their security interests at the national and international levels. This will also help development and security partners to establish mutual relationships with island nations and navigate security cooperation.

Introduction

The ocean-climate nexus and the security implications of climate-induced activities have been recognised by the international community.¹ The focus of this South Asia Scan is to emphasise the construction of the ocean-climate-security nexus. The connection between these three elements has been made at multiple forums, including the ocean, climate and security platforms. The purpose of this Scan is not to reiterate the general connection, but to emphasise the construction of this connection by island nations at the international level. This is particularly in the interest of understanding broader meanings of security adopted by island nations undergoing multifaceted challenges in the face of climate change. Understanding what security means to island nations is necessary to explain how island governments navigate their security interests at the national and international levels to address climate-related threats and challenges.

As stewards of the ocean, island nations inherit a strategic responsibility in the Indo-Pacific.² The ocean largely contributes to the livelihood and well-being of islanders by providing economic, environmental and infrastructural benefits that support development, sustainability and security. Island nations are commonly, and more often internationally, characterised as low-lying, small in both size and population, and vulnerable to environmental challenges.³ This

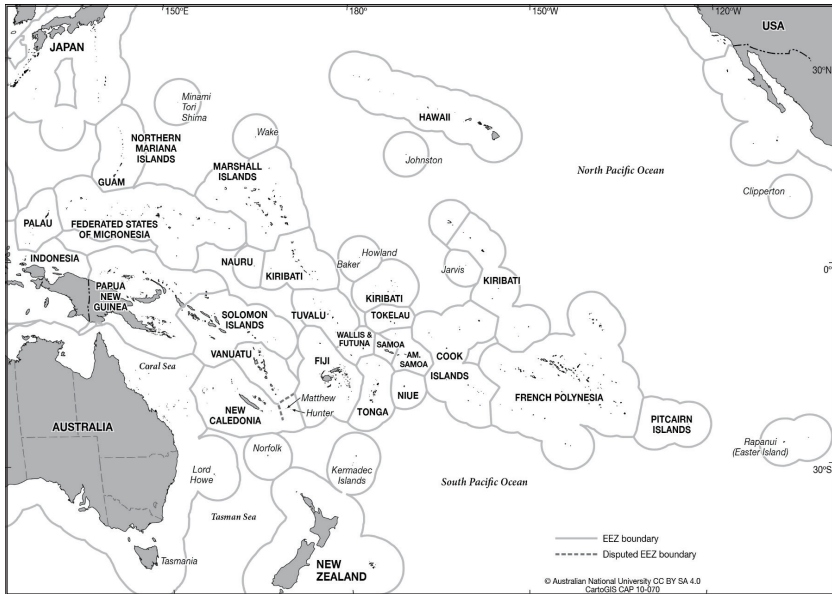
1 International Institute for Sustainable Development, “UN Ocean Conference highlights”, *Earth Negotiations Bulletin*, Vol. 32, no. 34 (June 2022), pp. 1-2, <https://enb.iisd.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/enb3234e.pdf>.

2 For the purposes of this Scan, the Indo-Pacific is defined as the geographical region that “stretches from the west coast of India to the western shores of the United States” or “ranging from the eastern Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean connected by Southeast Asia, including India, North Asia and the United States”. See Wada Haruko, “The ‘Indo-Pacific’ Concept: Geographical Adjustment and Their Implications”, RSIS Working Paper, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 16 March 2020, <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/WP326.pdf>.

3 Lalit Kumar, Tharani Gopalakrishnan and Sadeeka Jayasinghe, “Impacts of climate change on coastal infrastructure in the Pacific”, in Lalit Kumar (ed.), *Climate Change and Impacts in the Pacific* (Springer International Publishing, 2020); Michael Oppenheimer et al., “Sea Level Rise and Implications for Low-Lying Islands, Coasts and Communities”, in H. O. Pörtner et al., (eds.), *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate* (Cambridge, UK and New York, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 321-445, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009157964.006>; Stacyann Robinson, “Climate change adaptation in SIDS: A systematic review of the literature pre and post the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report”, *WIREs Climate Change*, Vol. 11, no. 4 (May 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.653>, and Nemat Sadat, “Small Islands, Rising Seas”, *UN Chronicles*, Vol. 46, no. 4 (April 2012), pp. 10-15. <https://doi.org/10.18356/9a777bb2-en>.

assessment fails to recognise the fact that island nations occupy a significant space and larger identity through their ocean territory, where they are closely connected to the many economic and environmental activities that affect the peace and security of the Indo-Pacific region.⁴

Map 1: Pacific Island exclusive economic zones



Source: Australian National University CartoGIS Services

The Indo-Pacific region encompasses both major and small states in the Pacific and Indian Ocean regions, with island nations’ exclusive economic zones (EEZs) accounting for a significant proportion of the ocean (See Map 1).⁵ Many Indo-Pacific island nations are self-

⁴ Janot Mandler de Suarez et al., “Ensuring survival: Oceans, climate and security”, *Ocean & Coastal Management*, Vol. 90 (March 2014), pp. 27-37, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ocecoaman.2013.08.007>; and Wesley Morgan, “Large Ocean States: Pacific Regionalism and Climate Security in a New Era of Geostategic Competition”, *East Asia*, Vol. 39, no. 1, 4 (2021), pp. 5-62, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12140-021-09377-8>.
⁵ The White House, “Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States”, February 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>, and Pacific Islands Forum, “Keynote Address by Secretary General Meg Taylor to the 2018 State of the Pacific Conference”, 8 September 2018, <https://www.forumsec.org/2018/09/10/keynote-address-by-secretary-general-meg-taylor-to-the-2018-state-of-the-pacific-conference/>.

identifying as ‘large ocean states’ to include the vast oceans in their jurisdictions.⁶ On a global scale, the small island developing states (SIDS), for example, occupies about 30 per cent of the world’s oceans,⁷ making them materially prominent in their regional maritime space, through which they claim ownership of resources. With oceans making up over 96 per cent of SIDS’ jurisdictions, oceans are an integral feature of the Indo-Pacific’s security architecture.⁸

Occupying a large ocean area also expands the threat factors for island nations. Island nations are demanding the international community to recognise the multifaceted challenges they face as a result of climate-induced threats generated by the ocean, including sea level rise engendering protentional loss of land and displacement of people. Such multidimensional threats with security implications come from the diverse experiences of seemingly similar but, at the same time, very different island nations.⁹ With distinct physical, social and economic characteristics, they are facing unique, numerous and life-threatening challenges linked to ocean-based occurrences in the face of climate change.

With climate as a central driver of negative change, climate security is the primary security concern for most low-lying island nations.¹⁰ Climate security here is defined in terms of the demand for urgent and extraordinary measures to address the existential threat posed by multiple threat factors associated with climate change. As a result, rather than relying just on military measures, climate security is achieved through integrated and multisectoral approaches at the national, regional and international levels. Investing in climate security provides protection from climate-induced threats to water

⁶ Nicholas Chan, “Large Ocean States: Sovereignty, Small Islands, and Marine Protected Areas in Global Oceans Governance”, *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations*, Vol. 24, no. 4 (December 2018), pp. 537-555, <https://doi.org/10.1163/19426720-02404005>; and Andrew Hume et al., “Towards an Ocean-based Large Ocean States Country Classification”, *Marine Policy*, Vol. 134 (December 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2021.104766>.

⁷ Leila Mead, “Small Islands, Large Oceans: Voices on the Frontlines of Climate Change”, *International Institute for Sustainable Development*, 29 March 2021, <https://www.iisd.org/articles/deep-dive/small-islands-large-oceans-voices-frontlines-climate-change>.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Jon Barnett and John Campbell, *Climate Change and Small Island States: Power, Knowledge and the South Pacific* (London: Earthscan, 2010).

¹⁰ Athaulla A Rasheed, “Island Nations Demand Climate Security”, *In Brief*, 19 November 2021, <https://doi.org/10.25911/9009-XB48>.

and food security, socio-economic infrastructure and livelihoods that could otherwise lead to population displacement, government failure and risk of intra- and inter-state conflict.¹¹

The ocean-climate nexus (see Box 1) explains the connection between the ocean and the implications of climate-induced challenges in the SIDS. This publication argues that the ocean-climate nexus concept can be extended to become the ocean-climate-security nexus for island nations of the Indo-Pacific.

The factors forming the security interests of island nations in the Indo-Pacific move across the ocean, climate and security areas. Security in island nations entails more than just adhering to the established Indo-Pacific security agenda, upholding rules-based cooperation and preventing single powers from expanding in their regional constellations. Security in island nations involves addressing immediate and long-term threats to their sustainability and survival as posed by manifestations of climate change, which are closely linked to the ocean. For island nations, climate security essentially revolves around the impact of large oceans, particularly in terms of sea level rise. With limited and low-lying land surface, an island nation's national sovereignty and territorial integrity are entwined with its EEZ, illustrating the clear link between the challenges relating to today's oceans (see Box 2) and objectives to achieve climate security against those challenges. For example, the ocean is the largest natural buffer against the myriad challenges confronting island nations in the face of climate change and plays a critical role in their understanding of security.

¹¹ Devin C. Bowles, Colin D. Butler and Neil Morisetti, "Climate Change, Conflict and Health", *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, Vol. 108, no. 10 (October 2015), pp. 390-395, <https://doi.org/10.1177/01410768156032>. Climate Security Expert Network, "Climate Security at the UNSC – A Short History", <https://climate-security-expert-network.org/unsc-engagement>; and Matt McDonald, *Ecological Security: Climate Change And The Construction of Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

Box 1: The ocean-climate nexus

UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean, Peter Thomson, used the term 'ocean-climate nexus' in a letter to Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), in the lead-up to COP26 in 2021 to explain the link between the challenges posed by the ocean and climate change. He highlighted that "solutions to the great 21st century challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss will become clearer if we view them through the ocean's blue lens."^a

The term 'ocean-climate nexus' has been used in recent scientific publications to explain the link between and implications of greenhouse gas emissions and ocean acidification.^b During the 2018 COP24, the Marrakech Partnership Ocean and Coastal Zones Action Event highlighted issues related to ocean and coastal zones and their consideration in the UNFCCC process. Several meetings and actions were undertaken in the event to "develop a vision and agenda for concrete action related to the oceans and climate nexus for the period 2019–2021".^c

The ocean and climate have been linked in the recent UNFCCC process when the Ocean and Climate Change Dialogue was initiated and mandated by the 2020 COP24. The 2022 dialogue highlights its role as a "stepping stone to greater ambition and action for ocean-climate action at national and international level" and notes that "the ocean, coastlines and coastal communities are being disproportionately impacted by increasing carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions from human activities".^d Island nations, including the Pacific Islands, have linked climate action to the ocean, particularly in the context of the Blue Pacific.^e

- Sources: a) Peter Thomson, "COP26 and the ocean-climate nexus: An open letter by Peter Thomson, UN Special Envoy for the Ocean, to Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC", 27 April 2021, <https://ocean.economist.com/governance/articles/cop26-and-the-ocean-climate-nexus>;
- b) Stephen Minas, "The Ocean-Climate Nexus in the Unfolding Anthropocene: Addressing Environmental Challenges Through International Law and Cooperation," in Michelle Lim (ed.), *Charting Environmental Law Futures in the Anthropocene* (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2019), pp. 83-94;
- c) Marrakech Partnership, "Outcome Document, Action Event: Oceans, Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action", December 2018, <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/MPGCA%20Action%20Event%20outcome%20document%20Oceans.pdf>;
- d) United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, "Bonn Dialogue Urges Ocean-Based Climate Action", 22 June 2022, <https://unfccc.int/news/bonn-dialogue-urges-ocean-based-climate-action>;
- e) Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, "Blue Pacific proposal for the UNFCCC Dialogue on Oceans and Climate Change", April 2020, <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/SubmissionsStaging/Documents/202004031643--SPREP%20Ocean%20Climate%20Dialogue.pdf>.

Box 2: Main climate-related problems in today's oceans

Ocean Warming:

Heat stored in the ocean has increased since the 1950s. Increased heat affects sea level and currents.

Surface Temperature:

The last three decades have seen a higher surface temperature than any seen since the 1880s.

Sea Level:

Sea level has risen at a rate of roughly six-tenths of an inch per decade since 1880.

Ocean Acidity:

Higher acidity affects the balance of minerals in the water. It causes coral bleaching and affects the protective skeletons or shells of marine animals.

Coastal Flooding:

With sea level rise, extreme weather also aggravates coastal flooding, which can affect land loss.

Source: Environmental Protection Agency, "Climate Change Indicators: Oceans", <https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators/oceans>.

Global warming and the impact of climate change have resulted in the ocean's diminished capacity to function as a "global carbon cycle, regulate climate and temperature, provide food security and support the livelihoods of billions of people around the globe".¹² This affects the capacity of ocean-occupying island nations to sustain their territorial integrity and development potential. While climate manifestations – like rising global temperatures and greenhouse gases melting of ice, warming of the ocean and loss of marine life – threaten the livelihood of citizens in these nations, rising sea levels can ultimately lead to potential inundation of their land surfaces and challenge island's capacity to sustain livelihood. Referring to islands' natural capacity to cope with environmental changes, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) *Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate* noted that

¹² Mendler de Suarez et al., "Ensuring survival: Oceans, climate and security", op. cit., p. 27.

“this capacity could be reduced in the coming decades, due to the combination of higher rates of SLR [sea level rise], increased wave energy, changes in run-up and storm wave direction.”¹³

In the context of the ocean-climate-security nexus, this Scan discusses how island nations have recently navigated their international engagements to promote multilateralism and integrated approaches to address their multidimensional security concerns. Climate change is an issue that transcends the disciplines of the ocean and security.

The discussion is built on a cross-disciplinary discourse analysis,¹⁴ which includes a rapid appraisal of island nations’ statements in the recent ocean, climate, and security forums. The study is based on island policy narratives at the recent UN Ocean Conferences, the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) and the 2019 UNSC debate on the maintenance of international peace and security related to climate change. The ensuing discourse analysis shows how multifaceted threat factors have driven island nations’ policy narratives and interests to incorporate climate-induced threat factors, including those produced by the ocean, into the security sphere. The multifaceted nature of threats and opportunities is a compelling reason to consider a broader meaning of security, one that demands an integrated and multisectoral problem-solving agenda. This discourse analysis explores how island nations can seek effective ocean governance and climate-based conservation for long-term sustainability, development and security.

The Scan proceeds as follows. The next section explains the relationship between the ocean and security aspects of island nations as large ocean states of the Indo-Pacific security sphere. This is then followed by the cross-disciplinary discourse analysis of island nations’ engagements in the ocean, climate and security forums. This section investigates the ocean-climate-security nexus in the Indo-Pacific islands context. The conclusion reasserts the multifaceted

¹³ Oppenheimer et al., “Sea Level Rise and Implications for Low-Lying Islands, Coasts and Communities”, op. cit.

¹⁴ Cross-disciplinary collaborations involve the integration of diverse perspectives and multifaceted solutions when dealing with societal problems. For more information, see Wendy S Hesford, “Cross-disciplinary Impact and Influence”, *Global Arts + Humanities*, 29 April 2021, <https://globalartsandhumanities.osu.edu/news/impact-and-influence>.

factors associated with security construction in such states shaped by broader meanings of security.

Large Ocean States and Island Security

The socio-economic infrastructure and environmental changes in island nations are significantly influenced by the resources of the ocean they occupy. The ocean plays an important part in determining its role in their regional constellations. The idea of ‘large ocean states’ explains this intrinsic relationship between the ocean and socio-economic, physical, environmental and geopolitical characteristics that support island life and security.

In September 2016, speaking at the World Conservation Congress of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, Tommy E Remengesau Jr, President of Palau, reminded his audience of the importance of the ocean to island nations by highlighting his signing into law, the Palau National Marine Sanctuary, “one of the largest marine protected areas in the world”.¹⁵ He referred to Palau as a ‘Large Ocean State’ because a large ocean area is encompassed in its jurisdiction. This statement resonates with the sentiments of the Pacific Islands, drawing on their economic and cultural connections with the ocean as expressed by the Blue Pacific narrative.¹⁶

Traditionally, the Pacific Island members of the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) had been unable to influence regional security formation in the Pacific.¹⁷ The regional security architecture, shaped by the PIF, a key regional decision-making body, has not always reflected the individual and collective interests of the Pacific Island countries. As part of the PIF and a primary aid partner donor for the Pacific Island countries, Australia has stepped up in building this islands’ constellation as part of its ‘sphere of influence’.¹⁸ As many Pacific countries are small

¹⁵ World Conservation Congress, “Keynote speech at the opening ceremony of the IUCN World Conservation Congress by President of the Republic of Palau H. E. Tommy E. Remengesau, Jr.”, 1 September 2016, <https://2016congress.iucn.org/news/20160901/article/our-joint-battle-has-just-begun.html>.

¹⁶ Pacific Islands Forum, “Keynote Address by Secretary General Meg Taylor to the 2018 State of the Pacific Conference”, op. cit.

¹⁷ The Pacific Island members of the Pacific Islands Forum – excluding Australia and New Zealand – include Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. See Pacific Islands Forum, “The Pacific Islands Forum”, <https://www.forumsec.org/who-we-arepacific-islands-forum/>.

¹⁸ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Opportunity, Security, Strength: The 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper, 23 November 2017, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-foreign-policy-white-paper.pdf>.

and developing states, they have historically been expected to form regional security arrangements based on Australian economic and security institutions.¹⁹ This framing has also often implied that the Pacific Islands are small and materially weak actors in the Pacific security sphere. However, recent work recognises their efforts in framing and forming the regional security architecture supporting the multiple challenges they encounter at national and regional levels, such as the pandemic, climate change and transnational crime.²⁰ According to Joanne Wallis et al:

“The region-wide consultations for the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific continent, to which the PIF member states invited academic and civil society organisations to contribute, were an attempt to diversify voices within the regional security debate.”²¹

Notably, the contemporary security dialogue of the Pacific Islands is built on the Blue Pacific identity, which embraces cultural, economic and political connections within the ocean.

The concept of large ocean states is not new to Pacific Islands. The concept is drawn from the identity-based framing and construction of nationality, sovereignty and territorial integrity to determine Pacific regionalism in the island nation context.²² Using reference to Epeli Hau’ofa’s seminal work, Wesley Morgan explains how Pacific islanders declared their own place in the ocean. Pacific islanders are referred to as ‘Oceanic People’ because their identities and place on earth are built on ‘pan-oceanic cultures’ developed over years of isolation from ‘continental culture’ that are mostly defined by “neo-colonial

¹⁹ Greg Fry, *Framing the Islands: Power and Diplomatic Agency in Pacific Regionalism* (Australia: Australian National University Press, 2019).

²⁰ Joanne Wallis et al, “Mapping Security Cooperation in the Pacific Islands”, Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs, https://dpa.bellschool.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/2021-06/mapping_security_cooperation_in_pacific_islands_dpa_research_report_2021_joanne_wallis_henrietta_mcnNeill_james_batley_anna_powles_updated.pdf.

²¹ Joanne Wallis, “Security Cooperation in the Pacific Islands: Architecture, Complex, Community, or Something Else?”, *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* (June 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcac005>.

²² Epeli Hau’ofa, “Our Sea of Islands”, *The Contemporary Pacific*, Vol. 6, no. 1 (Spring 1994), pp. 147–161, <https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/77265cd6-ddfd-469d-a96b-04ace31ea67c/content>.

relationships of dependency”.²³ This deep connection to the ocean is built on plans for the present and long-term future survival using ocean-based resources that have been part of their cultural and economic system for centuries.

While smallness usually defines their geopolitical place in contemporary international relations, the idea of large ocean states can project island nations’ self-declared cultural and economic resourcefulness and influence in determining regionalism and security interests in their continental spheres.²⁴ For example, major international and regional shipping lanes traverse the ocean space that Indo-Pacific island nations occupy. On the Indian Ocean side, the Maldives sits on five major international shipping lanes and influences regional maritime security formation.²⁵ Map 2 illustrates international shipping lanes crossing the Maldives in the Indian Ocean. The two mainstays of the Maldivian economy are tourism and fisheries, and the continued survival of both industries is directly dependent on the Indian Ocean remaining conflict-free and safe.²⁶ The safety and security of the Indian Ocean are also linked to the political stability, sustainability and security of nations occupying it, including the Maldives. The way security is demanded and formed by the Maldives determines its role in the Indo-Pacific.

Neo-colonial institutions still influence the architecture of contemporary Indo-Pacific security. For example, in the Pacific region, Australia’s role in regional security formation has not always aligned with the security interests of all member states of the PIF.²⁷ Island nations are often expected by Indo-Pacific partners, including Australia, India and the United States (US), to fit into a strategic plan that directly or indirectly aims to share and promote democratic values and curb the expansion of a single power, predominantly China.

²³ Ibid., p. 159.

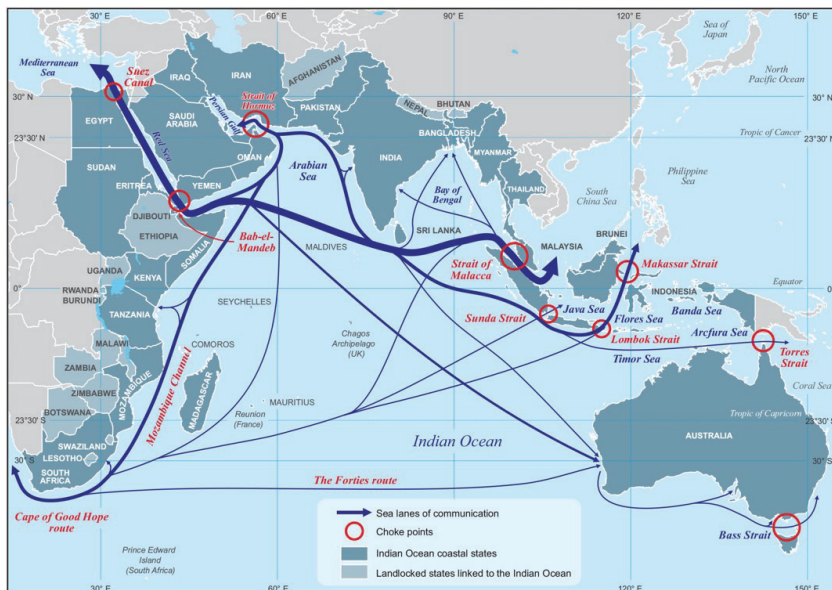
²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Maldives National Defence Force, “Capstone Doctrine”, April 2019, <https://mndf.gov.mv/mndf/downloads/mndf-capstone-doctrine-Eng.pdf>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

Map 2: International shipping lanes crossing the Maldives in the Indian Ocean



Source: Denis Venter, "India and Africa: Maritime Security and India's Strategic Interests in the Western Indian Ocean", in Iain Walker, Manuel João Ramos and Preben Kaarsholm (eds.), *Fluid Networks and Hegemonic Powers in the Western Indian Ocean* (Portugal: Centro de Estudos Internacionais do Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, 2017). [ISL crossing the Maldives added by author]

Historically, an island sitting in the vast ocean has been seen as small and weak; its place in regional institution formation has been overshadowed by continental powers like Australia or the US. However, the resource potential of their ocean territory, including fisheries, deep-sea minerals, beaches and reefs, allows island nations to change and challenge the neo-colonial and more contemporary portrayal as being small waystations or a backdrop to a grand strategy.²⁸ The alternative narrative of the Blue Pacific, which connects the islands to ocean-based resources, empowers their individual and collective roles as ocean states in the Pacific regionalism and the formation of regional security agenda.

²⁸ Ibid.

While islanders are empowered by ocean-based resources, they are more vulnerable to shifting climate conditions due to their naturally small and archipelagic forms. This inevitably threatens their sustainability and survival. Ocean-based resources are a constitutive part of the socio-economic identities and political territories of island nations. Therefore, the sustainability or security of their ocean territory is crucial for their stability and development. In coordination with many other coastal states, Pacific Island nations claimed their large EEZs in the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).²⁹ Occupying a fixed ocean territory tagged to their changing land base, island nations have been claiming oceanic resources that can benefit peoples' livelihoods and support foreign investment. For example, the Western and Central Pacific Ocean, including the Pacific Islands, New Zealand and the Bering Sea, collectively forms one of the world's largest and most valuable fisheries accounting for roughly 60 per cent of the world's tuna stocks.³⁰ However, as primarily low-lying islands, they face devastating impacts of climate change. In fact, as echoed by many island nations, members of the PIF have declared climate change as "the single greatest to the livelihoods, security and well-being of the peoples of the Pacific".³¹ As climate science and policy studies confirm,³² many climate manifestations are associated with changes in the ocean.³³

While the ocean plays a vital role in managing the global carbon cycle, the changes to the global environment, including global warming and

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Pacific Islands Forum, "Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the Face of Climate Change-related Sea-Level Rise", 6 August 2021, <https://www.forumsec.org/2021/08/11/declaration-on-preserving-maritime-zones-in-the-face-of-climate-change-related-sea-level-rise/>.

³⁰ World Bank and Nicholas Institute, "Tuna Fisheries: Pacific Possible Background Paper No.3", 2016, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/28412/119107-WP-PUBLIC-P154324-133p-PPTunafisheriesbackgroundfinal.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

³¹ Pacific Islands Forum, "Boe Declaration on Regional Security", 5 September 2018, <https://www.forumsec.org/2018/09/05/boe-declaration-on-regional-security/>.

³² Jon Barnett and John Campbell, "Climate Change and Small Island States: Power, Knowledge and the South Pacific"; Luitzen Bijlsma, "Coastal Zones and Small Islands", in M. C. Zinyowera, R. H. Moss, & R. T. Watson (eds), *Climate Change 1995: Impacts, Adaptations and Mitigation of Climate Change: Scientific-technical Analyses* (Cambridge: New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.289–324; and Christian Bouchard, "Climate Change, Sea Level Rise, and Development in Small Island States and Territories of the Indian Ocean", in Timothy Doyle and Melissa Risely (eds), *Crucible For Survival* (Ithaca, NY: Rutgers University Press, 2019), pp. 258–272.

³³ Stockholm Climate Security Hub, "Climate, ocean, and security: Response to ocean-driven security challenges", November 2020, <https://siwi.org/publications/climate-ocean-and-security-response-to-ocean-driven-security-challenges/>.

sea level rise, can intrinsically affect the ocean's capacity to support human activities, livelihoods and security. For example, 98 per cent of the planet's area occupied by Pacific Island countries and territories is the ocean.³⁴ The Pacific Islands' EEZs occupy about 20 per cent of the world's oceans³⁵ and 25 per cent of the world's coral reefs³⁶ – island nations demand greater ocean security to address their development and sustainability.³⁷

The primary concerns driving the national and foreign policy interests of island nations are protecting, restoring and leveraging the 'climate-regulating functions' of the oceans. The interconnectedness of the ocean- and climate-induced challenges for island nations is emphasised in ocean climate literature.³⁸ For instance, the consequences of sea level rise on coastal landscapes and communities, and the consequences of sea-level rise and warming temperatures on marine territorial delimitations and resource security have been widely debated in policy and research circles as fundamental factors defining this interconnectedness.³⁹

While the devastating implications of sea level rise are yet to be fully determined, it is reasonable to expect that the majority of sea

³¹ Pacific Islands Forum, "Boe Declaration on Regional Security", 5 September 2018, <https://www.forumsec.org/2018/09/05/boe-declaration-on-regional-security/>.

³² Jon Barnett and John Campbell, *Climate Change and Small Island States: Power, Knowledge and the South Pacific*; Luitzen Bijlsma, "Coastal Zones and Small Islands", in M. C. Zinyowera, R. H. Moss, & R. T. Watson (eds), *Climate Change 1995: Impacts, Adaptations and Mitigation of Climate Change: Scientific-technical Analyses* (Cambridge: New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.289–324; and Christian Bouchard, "Climate Change, Sea Level Rise, and Development in Small Island States and Territories of the Indian Ocean", in Timothy Doyle and Melissa Risely (eds), *Crucible For Survival* (Ithaca, NY: Rutgers University Press, 2019), pp. 258–272.

³³ Stockholm Climate Security Hub, "Climate, ocean, and security: Response to ocean-driven security challenges", November 2020, <https://siwi.org/publications/climate-ocean-and-security-response-to-ocean-driven-security-challenges/>.

³⁴ Dame Meg Taylor, "A sea of islands: How a regional group of Pacific states is working to achieve SDG 14", *UN Chronicles*, Vol. LIV, no. 1 & 2 (May 2017), <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/sea-islands-how-regional-group-pacific-states-working-achieve-sdg-14>.

³⁵ The ocean covers 70 per cent of the Earth's surface and is home to up to 80 per cent of all life in the world. As the largest and deepest part of the Ocean, the Pacific Ocean covers around one-third of the Earth's surface. For many Pacific Islanders the Ocean is Pacific life.

³⁶ Hugh Govan, "Ocean Governance - Our Sea of Islands", in R. Katafono (ed.), *A Sustainable Future for Small States: Pacific 2050* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 2017).

³⁷ *Ibid.*; and Mendler de Suarez, et al., "Ensuring survival".

³⁸ See Nicholas Chan, "Large Ocean States"; Stockholm Climate Security Hub, "Climate, ocean, and security"; Hugh Govan, "Ocean Governance - Our Sea of Islands", *op. cit.*; and Stacy-Ann Robinson, "Climate change adaptation in SIDS".

³⁹ *Ibid.*

level rise-related suffering will occur this century, with island nations bearing the brunt of it.⁴⁰ The large ocean states characterisation covers the losses associated with land inundation caused by sea level rise by allowing the oceanic jurisdictional area to compensate for land losses. For example, the fixed EEZ can create a bounded sovereign territory that can sustain the economy's existence with the ocean's resources. However, due to the close links between various types of marine resources and oceanic conditions that support islanders' infrastructure and livelihoods, such large ocean state frameworks are unable to alleviate all of the damages and burdens people face as a result of changing oceanic conditions caused by climate change.

Sea level rise is closely connected to the multifaceted challenges experienced by island nations. Low-lying island archipelagos such as the Maldives, Federated States of Micronesia and parts of the Solomon Islands and Tuvalu portray sea level rise as the primary concern. Events such as soil erosion, coastal flooding, swells and tidal waves and loss of coastal land surfaces are key manifestations of sea level rise experienced by the Pacific Islands.⁴¹ In most island nations, various economic activities are located in the coastal zones, and ocean-based climate change manifestations are destroying the basic coastal infrastructure supporting the economic activities. Dealing with the damages comes at a high cost. For example, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) reported that "loss of beaches, coastal inundation, degradation of coastal ecosystems, saline intrusion, damage to critical infrastructure, and bleaching of coral reefs" can threaten tourism activities.⁴² The World Bank reports that sea level rise has affected about 45 per cent of resorts in the Maldives, affecting a key source of income.⁴³

Coastal aquifers are an important source of freshwater, water security and food security for islanders. Sea level rise and associated coastal

⁴⁰ Kevin Jaschik, "Small states and international politics: Climate change, the Maldives and Tuvalu", *International Politics*, Vol. 51, no. 2 (March 2014), pp. 272-293, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/ip.2014.5>.

⁴¹ Adelle Thomas et al., "Climate Change and Small Island Developing States", *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, Vol. 45, no. 1 (2020), pp. 1-27, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-environ-012320-083355>.

⁴² United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, "Climate Change: Small Island Developing States" January 2005, p.23, https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/publications/cc_sids.pdf.

⁴³ World Bank, "Climate Risk Country Profile: Maldives", 24 September 2021, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/36373>.

flooding have damaged water sources in the Indian and Pacific Ocean islands. Ninety inhabited islands in the Maldives experienced flooding caused by swell and tidal waves causing saltwater intrusion to the groundwater aquifer.⁴⁴ The indirect damages are felt when land surfaces are affected by saltwater intrusions where main agricultural production happens.⁴⁵ The effect of sea level rise is aggravated by further ocean-based climate manifestations such as cyclones, hurricanes and strong weather events. In Fiji, Cyclone Ami in 2003 cost over US\$35 million (S\$50.4 million) in terms of lost crops⁴⁶ and Cyclone Winston in February 2016 caused an estimated US\$1 billion (S\$1.44 billion) in damage.⁴⁷ People in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Fiji lost their lives to the 2019 Tropical Cyclone Harold, where Fiji's reported agricultural damage was about US\$12.6 million (S\$18.1 million) and infrastructure damage was US\$31 million (S\$44.6 million).⁴⁸

While warming of the environment affects the ocean, the temperature rise also threatens marine animals, plants, microbes and resources, including reef coral that supports life on land surfaces. Corals damaged by bleaching take about 10 to 15 years to recover.⁴⁹ Since the 1990s, recurrent coral bleaching episodes have resulted in the loss of nearly 90 per cent of the coral cover on Seychelles reefs.⁵⁰ Coral bleaching can diminish fish stock, affecting local food security and socio-economy activities.⁵¹ For instance, about 90 per cent of people working in the fishing sector of SIDS are subsistence fishers, making them significantly reliant on fish for food security. Furthermore, 56 per cent of small-scale fishing in the Pacific is carried

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, "Small Island Developing States in numbers", 2015, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2189SIDS-IN-NUMBERS-CLIMATE-CHANGE-EDITION_2015.pdf.

⁴⁶ Jon Barnett, "Titanic states? Impacts and responses to climate change in the Pacific Islands", *Journal of International Affairs* (New York), Vol. 59, no. 1 (Fall 2005), pp. 203-219.

⁴⁷ "Cyclone Winston: Damage bill reaches \$650 million, Fiji Government says", ABC, 26 February 2016, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-02-26/cyclone-winston-damage-bill-reaches-650-million-dollars/7201846>.

⁴⁸ Australian Government, "Tropical Cyclone Harold", <https://www.dfat.gov.au/crisis-hub/tropical-cyclone-harold>.

⁴⁹ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, "FAQ5.1: How is Life in the Sea Affected by Climate Change?" 2022, <https://www.ipcc.ch/srocc/about/faq/faq-chapter-5/>.

⁵⁰ World Bank, "Coastal Resilience in Seychelles: Charting a Path Forward", 18 July 2019, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2019/07/18/coastal-resilience-in-seychelles-charting-a-path-forward>.

⁵¹ Ibid.

out by women.⁵² Changing conditions in the ocean can affect the life cycle of marine creatures, including the fish stock that supports the life on the land.⁵³ This, in turn, affects the capacity of communities to adapt to changes.

The capacity of ocean-based islands to adapt to changes and achieve development and sustainability is jeopardised by the climate crisis, thus having the ocean-climate nexus at the front of mind can engender effective multisectoral government policy initiatives. Governments can take a multisectoral approach to protect ocean-based resources through ocean-related and climate adaptation activities. For example, in 2021, the Maldives launched a water security project to build community resilience against challenges caused by climate change. Production and supply of freshwater undergo an inter-sectoral and agency coordination process as it gets harvested at the roofs of public institutions and communal water treatment plants, then through the filtration process to public taps.⁵⁴ As the climate has been declared a key security concern, ocean management is a key policy priority. Island nations suffering from diminished capacity due to climate-induced activities such as sea level rise remain keen to coordinate and cooperate with international and regional development partners.⁵⁵ Over three decades of climate negotiations have demonstrated SIDS' agency in identifying their vulnerabilities and coordinating their needs for international cooperation for climate action.⁵⁶

52 Robert Gillett, "Fisheries in the Economies of Pacific Island Countries and Territories" (2016), https://www.spc.int/sites/default/files/wordpresscontent/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Gillett_16_Benefish-fisheries-in-economies-of-pacific-countries.pdf.

53 Ministry of Fisheries Marine Resources and Agriculture, Project Name: Maldives Sustainable Fisheries Resources Development Project, last updated 7 February 2022, <https://www.gov.mv/en/projects/maldives-sustainable-fisheries-resources-development-project-ongoing>.

54 United Nations Development Programme, "Improving Water Security in Maldives through Rainwater Harvesting", 10 March 2021, <https://www.undp.org/maldives/press-releases/improving-water-security-maldives-through-rainwater-harvesting>.

55 Walter Leal Filho et al., "Climate Change Adaptation on Small Island States: An Assessment of Limits and Constraints", *Journal of Marine Science and Engineering*, Vol. 9, n. 6 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.3390/jmse9060602>.

56 John W. Ashe, Robert Van Lierop and Anilla Cherian, "The role of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) in the negotiation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)", *Natural resources forum*, Vol23, no.3 (August 1999), pp.209–220, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-8947.1999.tb00910.x>. Jon Barnett and John Campbell, *Climate Change and Small Island States: Power, Knowledge and the South Pacific*; and Athaulla A Rasheed, "The Early Development of the Small Island Developing States Climate Governance: A Disproportionate Impact on UN Climate Negotiations", in Stefano Moncada et al., (eds), *Small Island Developing States: Vulnerability and Resilience under Climate Change* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), pp. 159-184.

By incorporating the Blue Pacific identity into the Boe Declaration on regional security, the Pacific Islands have demonstrated how they see climate action as being linked to ocean governance at the regional level. They seek collective action and stress the urgent need to address the security threats posed by climate change.⁵⁷ The climate-based security narrative also shapes their relationships with foreign aid partners. For instance, China's involvement with island nations throughout the Indo-Pacific, notably its mid-2022 security accord with the Solomon Islands, has its roots in the island nation's climate-focussed foreign policy.⁵⁸ Such engagements have created tension among traditional regional partners – Australia, India and the US – and recently resulted in renewed commitments by Indo-Pacific security partners.⁵⁹ However, geopolitical competition between the major powers in the region could undermine and be counterproductive to the climate-focussed security narrative promoted by ocean-based island nations.⁶⁰ Incorporating island interests into the traditional security sphere of the Indo-Pacific presents a challenge. By using the lens of the ocean-climate-security nexus in their engagements, island nations can effectively coordinate ocean and climate governance with their Indo-Pacific development partners. This will enable development partners to consider island nations' broader security interests.

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- ⁵⁶ John W. Ashe, Robert Van Lierop and Anilla Cherian, "The role of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) in the negotiation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)", *Natural resources forum*, Vol. 23, no. 3 (August 1999), pp.209–220, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-8947.1999.tb00910.x>. Jon Barnett and John Campbell, *Climate Change and Small Island States: Power, Knowledge and the South Pacific*; and Athaula A Rasheed, "The Early Development of the Small Island Developing States Climate Governance: A Disproportionate Impact on UN Climate Negotiations", in Stefano Moncada et al., (eds), *Small Island Developing States: Vulnerability and Resilience under Climate Change* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), pp. 159-184.
- ⁵⁷ Pacific Islands Forum, "Boe Declaration on Regional Security", op. cit.
- ⁵⁸ Peter Hooton, "Solomons Security Pact: Sogavare, China, and Australia", *The Interpreter*, 21 April 2022, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/solomons-security-pact-sogavare-china-and-australia>.
- ⁵⁹ Anthony Bergin, David Brewster and Aakriti Bachhawat, "Indo-Pacific island states face increasing maritime security threats", *The Strategist*, 5 December 2019, <https://www.aspirategist.org.au/indo-pacific-island-states-face-increasing-maritime-security-threats/>. Melissa Conley Tyler, "The Indo-Pacific is the New Asia", *The Interpreter*, 28 June 2019, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/indo-pacific-new-asia>.
- ⁶⁰ Sandra Tarte, "Regionalism and Changing Regional Order in the Pacific Islands", *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies*, Vol. 1, no. 2, (2014), pp. 312-324, <https://doi.org/10.1002/app5.27>.

Constructing the Ocean-Climate-Security Nexus

Island nations continue to promote and maintain their strategic positions as a collective of small powers in the ocean and maritime security spheres, especially to influence international collective thinking about their unique experiences encountered by climate change. The Pacific Islands' regional security approach also supports this argument. This section explores the ocean-climate-security narrative, encompassing the idea of the strong need for island nations to protect themselves from the inevitable threats to their security and survival in the face of climate change. The ocean is important, but also a great concern when it has been threatened by climate manifestations. This part presents the cross-disciplinary discourse analysis. It analyses island nations' narratives at the ocean, climate and security forums and explains their construction of the ocean-climate-security nexus. This is explained in three subsections. They are socio-economic connections in the ocean sphere; security implications; and institutions for governance and finance.

Perceptions of states negotiating international policy play an instrumental part in determining policy objectives. This includes small and large states. How states (as represented by state authorities) present their issues in an inter-agency or inter-state platform matters greatly. This aligns with a social constructivist framing of policy, where perceptions are embedded in policy narratives or statements, which are constituted by national identities and interests about the issues discussed.⁶¹ In inter-state engagements, states can be present on multiple platforms and create individual and shared discourses and associated identities regarding the issues they experience. By experiencing similar things, island nations can exchange similar narratives and create collective discourses and identities.⁶² This concept of a collective of small powers is demonstrated by SIDS'

⁶¹ Trine Flockhart, "Constructivism and Foreign Policy", in S. Smith, A. Hadfield and T. Dunne (eds), *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Alexander Wendt, "Constructing international politics", *International Security*, Vol. 20, no. 1 (Summer 1995), pp. 71-81. doi:10.2307/2539217; and Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Vol. 67.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁶² Ibid.

UNFCCC negotiations, where they have played a central role in raising international awareness about the multidimensional nature of climate impacts that span multiple societal sectors and environmental spaces.⁶³

Island nations' engagements in the ocean and security fields are influenced by their policy narratives about climate-related issues. An analysis of island nations' narratives from the ocean, climate and security platforms can help to identify the shared and collective discourses driving their interests in national, regional and international policymaking. The physical formation of island nations, their links to the ocean, their (mostly) tiny size, various socio-economic infrastructures, environmental circumstances, management, governance and protection mechanisms have been mentioned at various levels in all narrative platforms. The following sections contain discourse analysis for socio-economic connections to the ocean, security implications, governance and finance.

⁶³ George Carter, "Establishing a Pacific Voice in the Climate Change Negotiations", in Greg Fry and Sandra Tarte (eds), *The New Pacific Diplomacy* (Australian National University Press, 2015); and Athaulla A Rasheed, "Role of Small Islands in UN Climate Negotiations: a Constructivist Viewpoint", *International Studies*, Vol. 56, no. 4 (September 2019), pp.215–235, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020881719861503>.

Socio-Economic Connections in the Ocean Sphere

Island nations are heavily reliant on the ocean, particularly in sustaining local, commercial and subsistence socio-economic activities, livelihoods and people's well-being. Dependence on marine resources is expressly mentioned here to highlight the importance of the connection between ocean and island life. For example, fisheries and fishing activities are vital for food security in island communities. In 2022, the Nauru Government declared itself a 'big ocean state' and explained that high priority is given to ocean issues and means to build capacity as its people are "highly dependent on marine resources for our sustenance and economic development".⁶⁴ Similarly, at the 2019 UNSC debate, Sri Lanka highlighted the vulnerabilities associated with the "impact of ocean environments and climate change" on their local communities. "Sri Lanka has been devastated by nature-driven tragedies such as floods, landslides, the massive tsunami of 2004 and other disasters".⁶⁵ At the UN Ocean Conference in 2020, Fiji informed that "fisheries in Fiji consists of coastal commercial and artisanal fisheries, offshore-locally based fisheries and aquaculture and is a key driver for our economy".⁶⁶

Moreover, the capacity of the ocean to "provide sustainable food security, including resilient fisheries, is linked to climate impacts and how they are coordinated through governance arrangements. The impact of greenhouse gas emissions has been highlighted as a critical factor that links oceanic changes with climate-induced activities in communities. This includes an impact on food security and island communities' survival against land loss caused by sea level rise. In the interventions for the Preparatory Meeting for the 2020 UN Ocean Conference, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) stressed the "impacts of rampant greenhouse gas emissions on the ocean, including rise in temperatures, ocean acidification, reduced fish

⁶⁴ Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, "COVID Pandemic Compounds Climate and Ocean Challenges, Nauru Reminds," 2 July 2022, <https://www.sprep.org/news/covid-pandemic-compounds-climate-and-ocean-challenges-nauru-reminds>.

⁶⁵ United Nations Security Council, "8451st Meeting", UN Doc S/PV. 8451, 25 January 2019, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_pv_8451.pdf.

⁶⁶ Fiji Government, "Statement delivered by Ambassador Satyendra Prasad, Permanent Representative of Fiji to the United Nations 2020 UN Ocean Conference - Preparatory Meeting", 4-5 February 2020, https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2020/02/fiji_statement_-_unoc_prep_meeting_2020.pdf.

stocks, coral bleaching events and rise in sea levels”.⁶⁷ Impacts from “plastic pollution, overfishing, overheating and acidification from climate change” were highlighted by Fiji, speaking on behalf of Pacific SIDS.⁶⁸ Small island states agree that there is a growing need for a “more integrated and holistic approach to the use of data in ocean management and governance”.⁶⁹ In the following section, integrated governance in both climate and ocean narrative platforms is examined, especially in terms of addressing the potential implications of climate-induced oceanic changes for national and regional security.

⁶⁷ Alliance of Small Island States, “AOSIS Interventions for the Preparatory Meeting for the 2020 UN Ocean Conference”, 4-5 February 2020, https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2020/02/final_-_aosis_statement_for_oceans_conference_prep_meetings.pdf.

⁶⁸ “Statement delivered by Fiji on behalf of the Pacific Small Island Developing States at 2020 UN Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development”, United Nations, 4-5 February 2020, https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2020/02/statement_pacific_small_island_developing_states.pdf.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Security Implications

Socio-economic challenges are multiplied in island contexts because of their 'large ocean state' character. Although the claim for the large ocean state characterisation reveals interest in building their national and regional status, as has been done in the Pacific Islands, the strong connection with the ocean also creates the problem, particularly considering natural vulnerabilities intrinsic to islands. In this respect, climate security comes to play significantly. The AOSIS' statement at the 2019 UNSC debate highlighted that "we [as states] must also acknowledge that climate change has multidimensional implications, even outside the purview of the UNFCCC".⁷⁰ Additionally, they stressed the importance of "relevant frameworks, mechanisms and United Nations bodies...to identify the security threats arising from climate change impacts, prepare for them and harness complementary roles in order to prevent escalation of those threats to the level where international peace and security is at risk".⁷¹ Speaking of how islanders depend on the ocean for their survival, the AOSIS stated:

"...pressing urgency for action on [the] ocean given the far-reaching deleterious impacts that the decades of inaction to mitigate greenhouse gases, the failed effectiveness of fisheries regimes, and the fragmented nature of ocean governance."⁷²

Climate-related impacts are multifaceted and thus require multisectoral lenses to address them. For example, sea level rise has been identified as a primary impact of climate-based oceanic change on land and socio-economic infrastructure. The surviving populations in coastal areas impacted by sea-level rise continue to face further challenges for their survival, particularly when climate impacts deplete the resources they depend on in the ocean.

As discussed above, island nations have the ocean as part of their territory and low-lying coastal land surfaces, making them particularly

⁷⁰ United Nations Security Council, "8451st Meeting", op. cit., p. 79.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Alliance of Small Island States, "AOSIS Interventions for the Preparatory Meeting for the 2020 UN Ocean Conference", op. cit.

vulnerable to flooding and resource depletion. Speaking at the 2019 UNSC debate, the Maldives described how climate-based events are “eroding our beaches, killing the coral reefs that protect our islands and contaminating our fresh water with seawater, and we losing our fish stock. But, most importantly, climate change is going to take our home away from us”.⁷³ This narrative reveals a strong connection between sustainability and climate challenges. At COP26, Seychelles explained the importance of building ocean-based resilience in the face of climate change; the island nation states its commitment to:

“protect at least 50 [per cent] of [its] seagrass and mangrove ecosystems by 2025 and 100 [per cent] by 2030 as nature-based blue carbon ocean climate action” and “regulate coastal planning and infrastructure at the national and local level to prioritise ‘blue’ nature-based solutions.”⁷⁴

Additionally, Samoa stated in the agreement that:

“the climate-ocean nexus is clear; thus, oceans need to feature more in the work of the UNFCCC. This is an important priority for the Blue Pacific. [And] slow and onset events such as sea level rise due to climate change threatens the security of our maritime zones.”⁷⁵

On the other hand, as large ocean states, the impact of sea level rise is inevitable in island nations, even with the marine resource management activities in place.⁷⁶ The Maldives warned that “sea-level rise of two

⁷³ United Nations Security Council, “8451st Meeting”, op. cit., p. 28.

⁷⁴ Seychelles Government, “National Statement by Mr. Wavel John Charles Ramkalawan President of the Republic of Seychelles on the occasion of COP26/CMP16/CMA3.0 – World Leaders” Summit (WLS), HighLevel Segment: 1-2 November 2021 Glasgow, UK”, 1-2 November 2021, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/SEYCHELLES_cop26cmp16cma3_HLS_EN.pdf.

⁷⁵ Samoa Government, “Statement by Honourable Fiamē Naomi Mataafa Prime Minister of the Independent State of Samoa”, 1-2 November 2021, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/SAMOA_cop26cmp16cma3_HLS_EN.pdf.

⁷⁶ For example, the government of the Maldives launched a Sustainable Fisheries Resources Development Project to improve the management of selected priority fisheries and enhance the government’s capacity to manage and govern the fisheries sector. For more information, see Government of Maldives, “Maldives - Sustainable Fisheries Resources Development Project - Ongoing”. The Asian Development Bank implemented a programme to strengthen the management of coastal and marine resources in the coral triangle region including Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste, as well as Fiji and Vanuatu in addressing issues on coral reefs, fisheries and food security that continuously threaten coastal communities, see Asian Development Bank, “Regional: Strengthening Coastal and Marine Resources Management in the Coral Triangle of the Pacific (Phase 2)”, August 2019, <https://www.adb.org/projects/43427-012/main>.

metres would suffice to virtually submerge the entire Maldives under water”.⁷⁷ The existential framing and the idea of inundation linked to sea level rise are critical in framing climate security in island nations. At COP26, Vanuatu portrayed the climate crisis as “taking with it our livelihoods, our natural resources, territorial integrity, our cultural identities, our human rights, and even our lives”.⁷⁸ In most low-lying island nations, sea level rise and its resulting loss of land threaten their sovereignty and territorial integrity. For instance, while some states warn about their territories submerging, others in the Pacific, including Fiji, highlight the potential for hosting neighbours who might lose land due to sea level rise. Warnings about the continued impact of sea level rise and resulting climate-induced oceanic changes causing forced migration and potential conflict are prominent in policy narratives. At the 2019 UNSC debate, Fiji warned that:

“Climate change is leading to the loss of arable land and the relocation of people, which will increase and lead to desertification, food and health insecurity and the depletion of our fish stocks and marine resources. It will lead to conflicts.”⁷⁹

Policy narratives at the UNSC, such as that of Fiji, relating climate change to potential conflicts have also created room to expand the definition of security issues in the context of islands. The Pacific SIDS have reaffirmed their 2018 Boe Declaration that “climate change was [and still is] the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and well-being of Pacific people”.⁸⁰ This threat is strongly connected to multifaceted problems facing island nations, including “severe water stress, more prolonged droughts, more frequent floods, and more severe and intense cyclones”, conditions that affect the Pacific Islands “on a daily basis”.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Government of Vanuatu, “Statement delivered by Ambassador Antas Sumbue, Vanuatu’s Embassy in Switzerland Republic of Vanuatu High Level Segment of the 26th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 10 November 2021, Glasgow, United Kingdom”, 10 November 2021, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/VANUATU_cop26cmp16cma3_HLS_EN.pdf.

⁷⁹ United Nations Security Council, “8451st Meeting”, op. cit., p.31.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 42.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 80.

Island narratives stress that the development and security frameworks, including governance mechanisms and international policy processes, should adhere to a strong understanding of the ocean-climate nexus. In 2022, Tonga reiterated the “importance of ensuring maritime boundaries [is] not eroded by the onset of sea level rise nor the rights and entitlements that flow from them, resulting from the negative effects of the climate-ocean nexus”.⁸² The importance of the ocean-climate nexus to sustainability and security efforts is particularly enforced and stressed by Pacific Island countries in their commitment to ocean-based climate security. Tonga further explained the relevance of endorsing the Declaration of Preserving Maritime Zones in the Face of Climate-Change Related Sea-Level, a declaration by the PIF. The country recognised:

“the principles of legal stability, security, certainty and predictability that underpin UNCLOS and the relevance of these principles to the interpretation and application of the Convention in the context of sea level rise and climate change.”⁸³

According to the declaration, the Pacific Islands intend to maintain their maritime zones “as established and notified to the Secretary-General of the United Nations in accordance with UNCLOS” without reduction, “notwithstanding any physical changes connected to climate change-related sea-level rise”.⁸⁴ This regional declaration commits the states to recognise the connection and ownership they have with the ocean, and that the management and governance of the oceans are intrinsically connected to threats they face due to climate change. Protection of maritime territory from climate impact is an essential security priority.⁸⁵ The development of Palau National Marine Sanctuary in 2015 was reiterated at the COP26 to implicate the role of the Pacific Islands as “protectorates of the world’s largest ocean and carbon sink”.⁸⁶ These

⁸² Tonga Government, “Statement delivered by His Excellency Mr. Viliami Va’inga Tōnē, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Tonga to the United Nations, at Intergovernmental Consultations on the Declaration for the 2022 UN Conference, entitled “Our ocean, our future, our responsibility”, to support the implementation of SDG14”, 1 February 2022, https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/FINAL_Tonga%27s_Statement_re_SDG14_Oceans_Political_Declaration_1Feb2022.pdf.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Pacific Islands Forum, “Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the Face of Climate Change-related Sea-Level Rise”, op. cit., p. 3.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Palau Government, “Statement by His Excellency Surangel S. Whipps, Jr. President of the Republic of Palau”, 1 November 2021, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/PALAU_cop26cmp16cma3_HLS_EN.pdf.

efforts underscored the need for marine protection to achieve climate security, which is strongly linked to the sustainability and security of island nations.

Institutions for Governance and Finance

Efforts have been made to link the ocean to sustainable development efforts. Notably, the climate security narrative produced by the 2019 UNSC debate emphasises the multidimensional nature of climate change that aligns with island nations' ocean-based changes and vulnerabilities. This process calls for institutional coordination that supports effective governance and financial mechanisms that can work across multisectoral problem-solving activities. The Maldives discussed sustainability against climate change at the debate:

“The solutions we seek should narrow the gap between adaptation and mitigation. A large share of funds must be reserved for adaptation. That will enable countries to build infrastructure to reduce the risks of climate-induced disasters, as envisaged in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”⁸⁷

Speaking on the importance of the ocean, the AOSIS welcomed “the new dialogue on interlinkages with the other SDGs [sustainable development goals], which provides us with the opportunity to leverage actions in SDG 14 to enhance implementation of the 2030 Agenda as a whole”.⁸⁸ The SDG 14 is about the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources. Significantly, living marine resources are a primary source of food and protection in island communities. For example, “the physical features on the seabed as coral reefs and sea grass are a natural defence against the destructive powers of waves and storm surge”.⁸⁹

Understanding the island's connections with the ocean also demands a high priority to protect and ensure ocean security by connecting it with climate action plans. Consistent with other island narratives,⁹⁰ Tonga highlighted the significance of “science-based and innovative

⁸⁷ United Nations Security Council, “8451st Meeting”, op. cit., p. 28.

⁸⁸ AOSIS, “AOSIS Interventions for the Preparatory Meeting for the 2020 UN Ocean Conference”, op. cit.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

solutions” that need alignment with efforts of “sustainable recovery, particularly in the context of augmenting the blue economy and advancing nature-based solutions for oceans”.⁹¹ Concerning the ocean, Pacific SIDS also stressed the importance of incorporating traditional knowledge into science-innovation frameworks across negotiating platforms in ocean debates:

“We also note that several recent major reports and processes reflect the relevance of such traditional knowledge for the Ocean, include the IPBES [Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services] Global Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, the IPCC Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate, and regional workshops in preparation for the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, to name a few.”⁹²

While science and technological progress help SIDS tackle their development and sustainability issues, governance and financial frameworks must also be in place to ensure their climate-based ocean security. Failure to govern via effective and equitable resource and financial management puts existing protective systems under strain. This can affect the sustainability, survival and security of island communities. Palau, for example, explained that “the [UNFCCC] must establish equitable access to climate financing and viable technological transfer for BOTH mitigation and adaptation” to address sea level rise and avoid a “slow and painful death”.⁹³ At COP26, the AOSIS informed that small island states lacked “the necessary financial and other resources to rebound and rebuild”.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Tonga Government, “Statement delivered by His Excellency Mr. Viliami Va’inga Tōnē”, op. cit.

⁹² “Statement delivered by Fiji on behalf of the Pacific Small Island Developing States”, op. cit.

⁹³ Palau Government, “Statement by His Excellency Surangel S. Whipps, Jr. President of the Republic of Palau”, op. cit.

⁹⁴ Alliance of Small Island States, “COP26 World Leaders Summit 2021, Statement by the Honourable Gaston Browne, Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda and Chair of the Alliance of Small Island States”, 1 November 2021, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/ANTIGUA_AND_BARBUDA_cop26cmp16cma3_HLS_EN.pdf.

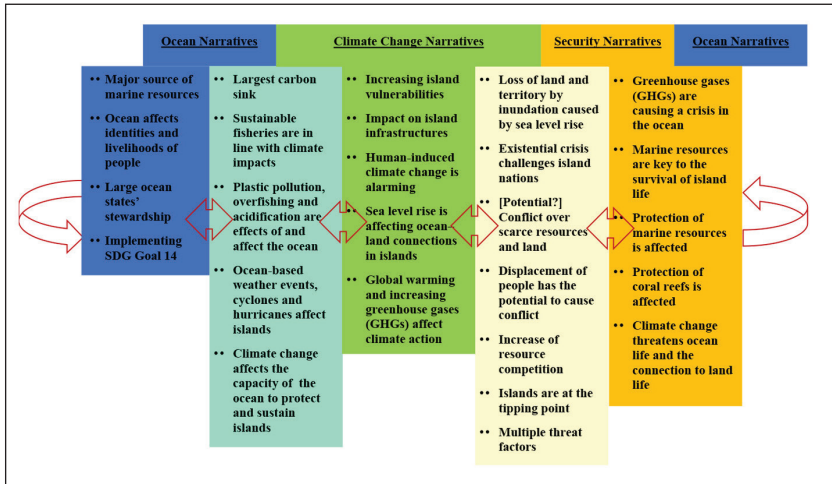
Governance and financial challenges are firmly embedded in national and international policy frameworks. Because island economies are small and have limited resources, international policy challenges have a bigger impact on their national action. Therefore, greater coordination of international action is necessary. On behalf of Pacific SIDS at the 2019 UNSC debate, Tuvalu argued that “the United Nations needs to focus attention on climate-security issues through a special representative; and preventive interventions need to be supported to protect small States from falling into prolonged cycles of instability”.⁹⁵ A climate-security special representative could help the existing institutional mechanisms, including the UNSC and UNFCCC, coordinate and streamline multifaceted issues with governance and finance frameworks across the related issue areas covered by the UN.

International cooperation is also supported by the commitment from large and resourceful states, including some of the major carbon emitters. This is inconclusively highlighted by Papua New Guinea at COP26 as they called for the “major carbon emitters to own up and acknowledge the impact of high carbon emissions to Small Island States including victims of climate change”.⁹⁶ Across multiple policy platforms, island nations are debating threat factors and problem-solving means that are particularly relevant in their island context. Figure 1 lists key threat factors and problem-solving means discussed in the ocean, climate and security forums.

⁹⁵ United Nations Security Council, “8451st Meeting”, op. cit., p. 80.

⁹⁶ Papua New Guinea Government, “Papua New Guinea Country Statement by Honourable Jame Marape, MP, Prime Minister at the High-Level Segment World Leaders” Summit of the Twenty-Sixth Conference of Parties (COP26)”, 1-2 November 2021, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/PAPUA_NEW_GUINEA_cop26cmp16cma3_HLS_EN.pdf.

Figure 1: List of key threat factors and problem-solving means discussed in the ocean, climate and security forums



Source: Author's computation.

These factors can vary across different island nations in terms of the level and importance of impacts. However, there is a shared understanding about island nations' unique vulnerabilities because they are extremely susceptible to climate manifestations. Impacts and challenges pertaining to sea level rise are inevitable because the ocean forms a large part of them. This is reflected in their policy narratives across different policy platforms. In the oceanic, climate and security spheres, such issues traverse various policy platforms and create linkages between challenges and problem-solving frameworks. Discourses and identities constituted in international policy platforms of island nations can be used to explore the ocean-climate-security nexus at the national level. A national-level assessment can inform how national security interests are constructed in their ocean constellations, which include security discourse and identities driving regional security interests of larger Indo-Pacific partners.

Recommendations

National policymakers' regional and international development and security partners should consider the ocean an integral part of island nations' security framework.

Island nations have self-declared themselves as small but large ocean states. Their national sovereignty and territorial integrity are defined by the maritime boundaries they occupy. Climate manifestations such as sea level rise threaten the territorial integrity of island nations. While sea level rise threatens the socio-economic and physical infrastructure of island nations, particularly their coastal land areas, occupying a large ocean area also multiplies the threat factors. The large ocean, as defined by the EEZs of island nations, forms a major resource for providing food and water security, socio-economic activities, international trade and maritime links. However, climate impacts are inevitable and their impacts on the oceans are largely felt in the small and low-lying islands. While protection is required from climate impacts, full security is not met unless ocean-based climate impacts are addressed. Therefore, development and security partners should explore and coordinate the challenges faced by island nations linked to their occupying oceans.

Development and security partners should also focus on the broader meanings of security adopted by island nations.

Island nations experience multidimensional threat factors associated with climate change. Manifestations of climate change threaten island nations' sustainability, development and security, particularly the low-lying archipelagic states such as the Maldives, Tuvalu and Seychelles that are constantly affected by sea level rise. Sea level rise threatens the security of islands by damaging livelihood and causing potential loss of land and territory and displacement of people. These are not traditional threats discussed in the context of security communities. Rather, these are threat factors that do not require military-based approaches. While the military and defence sector is – directly and indirectly – involved in climate and environment-related activities such as disaster relief and management, the multi-level threats caused by climate change also concern multiple sectors like

the environment, health, and marine resource sectors. The meaning of security should be broadened to address multidimensional threats.

National and regional actors should establish multisectoral and integrated approaches to security in island nations.

Traditional definitions of security that focus on defending one state against (possible) danger brought on by military-based state activities may not adequately capture what security means to island nations. As suggested, broader meanings of security can help to identify the threat factors shaping the security interests of island nations. The impact of climate change on island nations explains how the threat factors are multifaceted in nature. The multifaceted nature of climate change is elucidated by how climate impacts threaten, exacerbate, and multiply the existing vulnerabilities and challenges experienced across multiple sectors and areas of island nations. The impacts transfer across sectors affects the economic, political and infrastructural conditions across communities. Therefore, the security interests of island nations are only fulfilled by addressing the multiple threat factors associated with climate change; this can be achieved by adopting a multisectoral and integrated approach to security by integrating development, sustainability and political (or governance) based solutions.

Conclusion

This Scan discusses the ocean-climate-security nexus in island nations of the Indo-Pacific by analysing their policy narratives in international policy platforms. Using data extracted from multilateral policy narratives, similar themes and identities emerge about the challenges faced by island nations that traverse the ocean, climate and security spheres. This Scan reveals that the ocean-climate-security nexus can help identify and explain the drivers of national and regional security interests of island nations. It is important to understand that developing island nations depend on external cooperation through aid partnerships to achieve the type of security that best services the vulnerabilities and threat factors affecting their regional status and territorial integrity.

The discourse analysis in this Scan shows that security interests are linked to the ocean and climate-related issues. Moreover, climate impacts have been identified as the underlying threat factors that travel across both the ocean and security narrative platforms. This interrelationship – the ocean-climate-security nexus – also demonstrates the construction of security in a multidimensional context where threat factors are not singularly related to conflict and war. The multidimensional ocean-climate challenges faced by SIDS need multisectoral approaches that look at security through a broader lens. As island nations coordinate ocean and climate governance, the ocean-climate-security nexus can ensure the incorporation of island interests into the traditional security sphere of the Indo-Pacific.

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Dr Rasheed has published in international peer-reviewed and policy journals, including his most recent work titled, 'Small island developing states and climate securitisation in international politics: Towards a comprehensive conception' in *Island Studies Journal* (2022). He has contributed chapters in edited volumes, including one titled 'Drivers of the Maldives' Foreign Policy on India and China', in C Raja Mohan and Chan Jia Hao (eds), *South Asia Discussion Papers: Navigating India-China Rivalry: Perspectives from South Asia* (ISAS, 2020), and 'The Early Development of the Small Island Developing States' Climate Governance: A Disproportionate Impact on United Nations Climate Negotiations', in Stefano Moncada et al. (eds.), *Small Island Developing States, The World of Small States* (Springer, 2021).

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