

# **Pivotal Players or Passive Pawns?**

## **The Foreign Policy of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the Indo-Pacific vis-à-vis Major Players**

By

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## Abstract

This qualitative study analyses the foreign policy orientations of four Small Island Developing States situated in the Indo-Pacific – Solomon Islands, Fiji, Seychelles and Mauritius – vis-à-vis major players in the international system. Fundamentally, the study grapples with the tension between traditional scholarship, which predominantly portrays small states as passive actors in the international system, and emerging literature that challenges this narrative and highlights their agency. A thematic analysis of official government speeches from these states between 2017 and 2024 is conducted, employing Marijke Breuning’s theoretical framework for analysing small state foreign policy as an emblematic framework reflecting the core assumptions of traditional small state foreign policy conduct. This study evaluates the framework’s explanatory power for these states. Additionally, elite interviews with government officials from the selected states supplement the findings by validating and deepening the insights from the thematic analysis.

The findings reveal that Breuning’s dependency-based framework, exemplative of the traditional scholarship, is unable to accurately account for the foreign policy orientations of these states. Instead, by integrating aspects of Holsti’s role theory, this study asserts that these states enact the roles of ‘pioneer’ and ‘activist-challenger’, contrasting sharply with Breuning’s conceptions of compliant and counter-dependent foreign policies. Building on these findings, this study contributes to the extant literature by proposing a framework that articulates an alternative category of small state foreign policy orientations.

The framework further expands the current literature by proposing five alternative sources of power for what is identified as ‘Ocean States’: power through position, engagement in international and regional organisations, possession of valued resources, narrative influence, and moral suasion. Ultimately, the study provides an alternative framework for the analysis of the foreign policies of Ocean States that can serve as an analytical tool for scholars and practitioners alike. By reframing small states’ agency and challenging the core assumptions of traditional small state scholarship, this study broadens theoretical approaches and reconceptualises concepts such as power and dependence. This contributes to a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of these Ocean States in the international system, repositioning them from passive pawns to pivotal players.

**Keywords:** foreign policy, Small Islands Developing States, agency, International Relations, major players, Indo-Pacific, Ocean States

## Prelude

This is a story of hope –  
a tale of the underdogs,  
of states rarely mentioned in international politics,  
who scarcely exist in the geographical vocabulary of people

*or*

who exist only in the imagination as fleeting dreams of tropical tourist treasures.

These states too often disappear on our maps,  
are mentioned only with reference to fatalistic narratives of sinking shores,  
subsumed by the mighty wraths of the rising oceans.

While this is indeed a ubiquitous reality, it is not the only thing that these states  
represent.

For in these states lies a resilience that makes hopelessness and passivity an  
impossibility.

This is the story about Solomon Islands, Fiji, Seychelles, and Mauritius –  
states too often painted as passive pawns,  
moved at the whim of major powers on the chessboard of great power rivalry.

**But this is not a story of passive pawns.**

**It is a story about pivotal players.**

It is a story of hope.

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
AGOA	African Growth and Opportunity Act
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ANT	Actor-Network Theory
AOSIS	Alliance of Small Island States
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian States
AU	African Union
AUKUS	Australia, United Kingdom, United States
BIOT	British Indian Ocean Territory
BOT	British Overseas Territories
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
COFA	Compact of Free Association
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
COP	Conference of the Parties
EDCF	Economic Development & Cooperation Forum
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EU	European Union
FFWP	Fiji's Foreign Policy White Paper
FIPIC	Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation
FOI	Freedom of Information
FPA	Foreign Policy Analysis
FSM	Federated States of Micronesia
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
G20	Group of 20
G77	Group of 77
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GNI	Gross National Income
GNP	Gross National Profit
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IGO	Intergovernmental Organisations
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IO	International Organisation
IOC	Indian Ocean Commission
IORA	Indian Ocean Rim Association
IPEF	Indo-Pacific Economic Framework
IR	International Relations
IUU	Illegal, Unregulated, and Unreported
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPA	Marine Protected Area
MSG	Melanesian Spearhead Group
MSR	Maritime Silk Road
MVI	Multidimensional Vulnerability Index
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement

NDC	Nationally Determined Contributions
NRC	National Role Conceptions
OACPS	Organisation of Africa, Caribbean and Pacific States
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPEC	Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
ORF	Observer Research Foundation
OS	Ocean State
PC	Pacific Community
PIDF	Pacific Islands Development Forum
PIF	Pacific Islands Forum
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PSIDS	Pacific Small Islands Developing States
QUAD	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
RAMSI	Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands
RCOC	Regional Centre for Operational Coordination
RMIFC	Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre
RO	Regional Organisation
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAGAR	Security and Growth for All in the Region
SAT	Speech Act Theory
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SLOC	Sea Lines of Communication
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States
WHO	World Health Organisation
WIO	Western Indian Ocean
WTO	World Trade Organisation

## Chapter 1: Introduction

*If Lilliputians can tie up Gulliver, or make him do their fighting for them, they must be studied as carefully as the giant.*

- Robert Keohane (1969)

### 1.1. Introduction and background

In recent years, the Indo-Pacific<sup>1</sup> has garnered renewed attention, especially by the United States (US) and its partners in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the so-called Quad), viz Australia, India, and Japan (Baruah 2022b: 1), as well as France and other big powers, including the European Union (EU). This renewed attention is predominantly driven by concerns over the rapid rise of China and the increasing influence that it is exerting in the region through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Maritime Silk Road (MSR) (Scott 2021: 70; Baruah 2022b: 1; Pan & Clarke 2022: 2). India's emergence as an economic powerhouse and its subsequent increasing influence in regional affairs has further prompted the heightened interest in the region (Anwar 2020: 112). As explained by Agastia (2020: 297), the Indo-Pacific has been recognised as a "strategic centre of gravity due to the rise of China and India, the US pivot, and other middle powers such as Indonesia"<sup>2</sup>.

Along with this, the region contains critical Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC), rich fisheries and biodiversity hotspots, and vast energy and mineral resources on the seabed (Baruah 2022a). Important SLOCs include the Straits of Hormuz (connecting the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman), the Strait of Malacca (connecting the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea), the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb (linking the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean), and the Mozambique Channel (facilitating trade from East Africa) (Baruah 2022a; Singh 2022; Baruah *et al.* 2023). In terms of its rich fisheries, in 2020, the region accounted for 74 per cent of the world's marine capture, while the western and central Pacific Ocean alone supply half of the world's tuna (Salim 2024). Meanwhile, the Indian Ocean contains 30 per cent of the global

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<sup>1</sup> Although the Indo-Pacific has gained considerable traction in recent years, the concept is by no means novel and can be traced back to the work of German geographer Karl Haushofer. The concept of the 'Indo-Pacific' was supposed to serve as an anticolonial vision, undermining the Western rivals of Germany during the interwar period (for more, see Li 2022).

<sup>2</sup> This study uses double quotation marks ("") when quoting from sources, while single quotation marks (") or italics are used to emphasise certain words or phrases.

coral reef and over 40,000 square kilometres of mangroves, playing a pivotal role in marine biodiversity (Greenpeace International 2021).

Beyond living marine resources, the Indo-Pacific is also rich in deep-sea minerals, including cobalt, copper, nickel and titanium. These resources are essential for the transition from fossil fuels to clean energy (Prasad & Hardy 2023). Notably, the minerals in the Clarion Clipperton Zone (CCZ) in the northeastern Pacific, such as titanium, are estimated to be enriched 6000 times more than land-based minerals, making the extraction of metals from the ocean a lucrative alternative to traditional land-based mining operations (Yadav 2024: 1). Prasad and Hardy (2023) explain that the discovery of these minerals “has initiated a race to the sea floor as high-income countries clammer for underwater minerals”.

Crucially, many of these SLOCs, critical minerals and resources lie within or near the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) of islands, making the islands, by virtue of their geography, key players. Indeed, McDougall and Taneja (2024: 241) explain that “the EEZs [...] give them [islands] a greater strategic importance than their land areas alone would warrant”. For example, the trade route extending from the Strait of Malacca past the Cape of Good Hope passes Mauritius, while the trade route running from the Cape of Good Hope to the Hormuz Strait runs past Seychelles (Rodrigue 2017). The transportation of resources, such as fish, is also concentrated in the maritime zones surrounding island states. Notably, the Majuro Atoll, the capital of the Marshall Islands, is the world’s busiest tuna transshipment port (Lochtier & Daunt 2024). Recognising the strategic and economic potential of these islands and their EEZs, China has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Cook Islands on 15 February 2025, agreeing to collaborate on deep-sea mineral research and potential mineral extraction (IISS 25 March 2025).

As maritime resources gain strategic importance, regional peace and stability become a priority for many states (New Zealand Government 2019: 5; Anwar 2020: 112; Tahir & Amin 2023: 1). As noted by the Indian External Affairs Minister, “as we envisage the Indian Ocean as an engine for growth and prosperity in our region and beyond, it is of utmost importance that these waters remain safe and secure” (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India 2017). However, one of the primary perceived challenges to this stability is the rise of China, particularly its assertive naval activities in disputed

maritime zones<sup>3</sup>. Beyond military manoeuvres, China's growing influence extends to diplomatic and economic engagements with states across the region, including small island states. For example, the MoU between China and Cook Islands has caused serious concern for states such as Australia, France, Japan and New Zealand, who perceive such agreements as signs of Beijing's expanding influence (IISS 25 March 2025).

These island states play a crucial role in the regional security architecture not only due to their strategic locations and EEZs but also because of their control over vital maritime resources. Scott (2021: 68) holds that these islands have become "a source of inter-state resource rivalry" as major powers compete for influence over these states and their surrounding waters, which contain vast economic opportunities. The above-mentioned MoU between China and the Cook Islands exemplifies this ongoing competition, as does China's assertive claims over the Spratly Islands and its adjacent waters (Doyle & Rumley 2019: 23). This geopolitical contestation extends beyond China's engagements. In 2024, Australia signed an aid agreement with Nauru, mirroring a similar deal Australia reached with Tuvalu in 2023 (Tekiteki 2024). That same year, the US signed a defence deal with Papua New Guinea (PNG), granting the US unrestricted access to six ports and airports. In a different agreement, PNG also entered a deal with Australia, securing funding for a team in Australia's National Rugby League competition, with the condition that PNG would not allow Chinese police or military forces to be based in the Pacific state (Tekiteki 2024). Evident in the above is a clear rivalry between the US and its allies, like Australia, on the one hand, and China, on the other, for control of islands.

Expanding on the inter-state rivalry, Poon (2021: 42) explicates that in the Indian Ocean, China and India are competing for influence, with countries such as Mauritius, Maldives and Seychelles becoming focal points. While Mauritius has historically had strong ties with India, China has been increasing its interactions with the country, with China and Mauritius officially signing a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in October 2019

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<sup>3</sup> For example, China's claims over territory overlap with the EEZ of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam. In January 2025, China deployed its largest coastguard vessel to Manila's EEZ. This follows increasing tension between Manila and Beijing over the past two years (Al Jazeera 2025).

(Ancharaz & Nathoo 2022: 2)<sup>4</sup>. Maldives, a country that has historically had strong ties with India, is now facing similar circumstances, with increased attention from actors such as China, which sent three navy ships to Maldives in August 2017 (McDougall & Taneja 2020: 8). Having a critical location due to its proximity to important SLOCs, the Maldives have attracted the attention of both India and China (Malik 2020: 139). In recent years, China has been able to make major inroads into the country, with the Maldives joining the BRI in 2014 and signing a FTA with China in 2017 (Malik 2020: 140; McDougall & Taneja 2020: 9).

India has also shown great interest in the Indian Ocean Island of Seychelles. In 2015, the two countries signed an agreement that would allow the development of joint facilities on Assumption Island and aid in patrolling the vast EEZ of Seychelles for threats such as piracy, illegal fishing and drug-trafficking (Debates 23 May 2020). However, in 2018, this deal was cancelled by the serving President of Seychelles, Danny Faure (Kaura 22 June 2018). Since then, India has successfully inaugurated a security establishment on Mauritius' Agaléga Island. In 2024, it officially opened the Agaléga Airstrip and Saint James Jetty on the island, which allows India to strategically monitor the Indian Ocean Region (Kumar 15 April 2024).

In the Pacific Ocean, Small Island Developing States (SIDS) (to be defined in 1.2.2.) have similarly been drawn into a tug-of-war between major powers, as geopolitical tensions over resources and strategic locations increase (Baruah 2022b: 4). Tensions have been especially high between the US and China, with the US declaring in its declassified US Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific, that one of the objectives was to “ensure the Pacific Islands remain aligned with the United States” (United States 2021: 9). Such objectives have become increasingly urgent as China has found relative success in winning over countries in the region. In 2019, both Solomon Islands and Kiribati cut ties with Taiwan, while Nauru switched diplomatic recognition to China in January 2024 (Parlevliet 17 July 2024).

In April 2022, China signed a security cooperation agreement with Solomon Islands, with Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare, arguing that the security agreement that had, until that stage, been in place with Australia (an ally of the US),

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<sup>4</sup> One month after the FTA between China and Mauritius came into effect, India signed a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) with Mauritius (Ancharaz & Nathoo 2022: 2).

no longer being sufficient in dealing with the threats faced by the island (Bane 2023: 208). To further ramp up its efforts, the Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, visited eight islands at the end of 2022 to propose an economic and security deal (Pandalai *et al.* 2022: 3). Although the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) rejected the proposal, China has nonetheless shown intent to exert influence in the region (Pandalai *et al.* 2022: 3).

In response, the US has increased its efforts and engagements in the region. The US has entered into a trilateral security agreement with the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia (known as AUKUS), and enhanced cooperation through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue which includes the US, Japan, India and Australia (Anwar 2020: 113; Morgan 2022: 55). In May of 2023, the US signed a defence and maritime surveillance agreement with Papua New Guinea (PNG) which will increase the US military presence on the island (Al Jazeera 2023d), while in 2024, the US renewed the Compacts of Free Association (COFA) with the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Palau and Marshall Islands which provides the US with unilateral use of strategically located military facilities on the islands (Keen & Sora 12 March 2024).

The increasing influence of China is not only alarming to the US but other countries in the region have recently announced new policies to respond to China's rise (Pan & Clarke 2022: 2). For example, Pan and Clarke (2022: 2) explain that the United Kingdom<sup>5</sup> has launched its 'Pacific Uplift' policy, Indonesia – its 'Pacific Elevation', and Australia – its 'Pacific Step-up'. New Zealand has also launched its 'Pacific Reset', citing a similar concern to the US of the involvement of external actors "who may not always reflect our values across their activities" (New Zealand Government 2019: 7). Such policies have resulted in very practical initiatives forming. For example, Australia has partnered with the US to build a new naval base in PNG.

Along with the more specific policies aimed at the Pacific only, several countries have launched broader Indo-Pacific strategies, which espouse their visions for the region (Medcalf 2019: 81-82). Countries that have released Indo-Pacific strategies or mentioned the term in foreign policy documents include the US, the UK, Canada,

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<sup>5</sup> The United Kingdom is considered part of the Indo-Pacific due to its regional presence through the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) in the Chagos Archipelago, including Diego Garcia (Gilli 2019: 45-46). On 3 October, the governments of the Republic of Mauritius and the UK published a joint statement signalling the UK's intent to hand the Chagos Archipelago to Mauritius (UK Government 2024). Additionally, in the Pacific, the UK retains one British Overseas Territory (BOT) – the Pitcairn Islands (UK Parliament 2023).

Australia, Bangladesh, South Korea, Japan, Germany, Netherlands, France, Lithuania and the Czech Republic<sup>6</sup>. Countries such as the US, have released strategies that depict their vision of the region as a “free and open Indo-Pacific”, with countries like Japan, India, Australia, Canada, Lithuania and the Netherlands, *inter alios*, sharing similar visions (Beeson & Wilson 2018: 93; Byrne 2019: 190; Doyle & Rumley 2019, Medcalf 2019: 81).

In its “Towards Free and Open Indo-Pacific” strategy, Japan highlights the importance of establishing a region that is governed by the rule of law, freedom of navigation and free trade (The Government of Japan 2019). In Canada’s Indo-Pacific Strategy, one of the main objectives is to “promote peace, resilience and security”, while mention is also made of the challenges posed by China’s “assertive pursuit of its economic and security interests” (The Government of Canada 2022). Policies directed at the Indo-Pacific, have not only been articulated by states, but regional organisations, such as the European Union, the Association of Southeast Asian States (ASEAN), and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), have similarly expressed interest in staking out their vision for the region (He 2018: 119; Berkofsky & Miracola 2019).

Considering this, Fiott and Simón (2022: 4) accurately express that “the Indo-Pacific region has emerged as the centre of gravity of global military competition, economic growth, and technological innovation”. Concurrently, islands are clearly caught in the competition for influence by major players. Brewster (2024: 12) explains that in particular, the immense size of the Indian Ocean makes access to military bases essential if major players wish to project naval and air power. Small states, and specifically island states are prime candidates for these military bases and consequently their geographic positioning is significantly enhanced (Brewster 2024: 12). Brewster (2024: 12) further explains that major players such as China and India will in all likelihood pursue influence among these states for various reasons, which include, resource access, regional alliances or access to ports and airfields.

While much attention has been given to how the ‘larger’, ‘more powerful’ states such as the US, India, Japan, Australia, *inter alia* conceive of the Indo-Pacific, as was briefly outlined above, less has been said about the (major) role that *small* states, and more

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<sup>6</sup> These are the states that have specifically released strategy documents on the ‘Indo-Pacific’. Other countries, such as India, have released strategies, but not named them exclusively as Indo-Pacific strategies.

specifically SIDS have vis-à-vis the Indo-Pacific. For example, in his article 'Indo-Pacific Visions', Medcalf (2019: 85) posits that narratives about the Indo-Pacific are informed by the intersecting interests of the major powers (US, India, Japan, China), middle powers (Australia, South Korea) and more distant actors such as Europe. In this specific instance, Medcalf fails to consider that SIDS may not only have interests in the future of the region but may also play a critical role in determining the future of the region. Tuan (2019: 127) and Berkofsky and Miracola (2019) similarly discuss the various strategies for the region, citing the US, Japan, India, Australia, Russia and the EU as examples, yet fail to include other actors, such as SIDS. Veenendaal and Corbett (2019) identify this trend, explaining that:

*Political science suffers from an unacknowledged gigantism. Most of our theories are designed to explain phenomena that occur in large countries: the US, China, India, Russia, major European nations. If smaller cases ever enter the conversation, it is to test whether these theories apply elsewhere.*

This study posits that one of the prime reasons for the failure to pay attention to smaller states is that there is still a relatively unchallenged assumption that prevails, not only in the academic literature but also in the everyday narrative in the media, that small states, and in this case, SIDS, are necessarily the weaker (and therefore insignificant) actors and those with limited power or even a deficit of power. Small states are seen to be dependent actors, while the larger states are the actors with autonomy and independence. This line of thinking can be traced back to the traditional literature on small states within the discipline of International Relations (IR) that posits that small states, and in this case SIDS, have a marginal position in the global political arena and little power to influence affairs (Ashe *et al.* 1999: 210). Given this assumption, studying the actions and foreign policies of small states has not been seen as a worthwhile or beneficial endeavour, since small states merely reflect the interests of the larger states. It is exactly this sentiment that this thesis will explore.

## **1.2. Literature overview**

Although an in-depth literature review is conducted in Chapter 2, this section provides a brief discussion of scholarship pertaining to two key concepts interrogated in this study, viz., foreign policy and small states, with specific attention to SIDS.

### 1.2.1. Conceptualising foreign policy

As a point of departure, it is necessary to situate this study within the field of IR and the sub-field of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) and define relevant terms. Here, it must be noted that although this study is concerned primarily with the analysis of foreign policy, this does not automatically imply that it is only limited to the confines of FPA. Rather, considering the fact that this study focuses on states as the main actors – that is, states are the level of analysis – the insights from IR are especially pertinent, perhaps more so than insights from FPA, where the latter focuses primarily on the “process of foreign policy formulation, the role of decision makers and the nature of foreign policy” (Alden & Aran 2012: 2). However, insights from both fields are still considered.

Within this context, it is necessary to define what is meant by foreign policy in this study. Beach (2012: 2) explains that:

*As with most concepts in political science and IR that attempt to understand key aspects of a very complicated reality, there is considerable debate about how we should define ‘foreign policy’.*

Scholars such as Christopher Hill have posited that foreign policy should be understood as “the sum of external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually a state) in international relations” (Hill 2003: 3). However, defined in this way, analyses will then predominantly focus on the broad trends in foreign policy and not, as Beach (2012: 2) explains, “individual actions and decisions”.

Some definitions of foreign policy focus primarily on defining foreign policy in terms of *who* it is conducted between. For example, White (1989: 1, cited in Tayfur 1994) defines foreign policy as “government activity conducted with relationships between state and other actors, particularly other states, in the international system”, while Frankel (1963:1) similarly explains that foreign policy refers to “decisions and actions which involve to some appreciable extent relations between one state and others”. Both White and Frankel’s definitions focus on the fact that foreign policy is conducted specifically between states and thus exclude the fact that foreign policy could be conducted by regional organisations such as the EU. While Beach (2012: 2) considers this to be a potential problem, in the context of this study, this is not problematic as states are the level of analysis, and other actors such as regional organisations fall outside of the purview of this study.

Other definitions focus on defining foreign policy in terms of its function or goal. Modelski (1962: 6) proffers that “foreign policy is the system of activities evolved by communities for *changing* the behaviour of other states and for adjusting their own activities to the international environment” (emphasis added). Jensen (1982: 231) offers a similar definition to Modelski, suggesting that foreign policy is essentially the reaction of a state to external conditions. Hermann (1990: 5) writes that foreign policy is a:

*Goal-oriented or problem-oriented program by authoritative policymakers (or their representatives) directed toward entities outside the policymakers' political jurisdiction.*

Webber *et al.* (2002: 10) explain that foreign policy is comprised of the objectives of a state, their values, the decisions reached, and actions taken in the pursuit of designing and managing the control of relations with foreign societies. In these instances, these definitions do not only mention *who* the actors involved are, namely states or communities, but also *what* the purpose of foreign policy is, namely, to configure, direct and preside over the policies directed at the external environment of states.

Building on this and in an attempt to find a working definition of foreign policy for this study, it is useful to dissect the concept ‘foreign policy’ into its two constitutive parts, namely ‘foreign’ and ‘policy’. With regards to ‘foreign’ this study understands it to imply all actions that are specifically aimed at external parties (Beach 2012: 2). In Rosenau’s (1971: 15) definition of foreign policy, he similarly emphasises that foreign policy refers to the external behaviour of states. In fact, it may be useful to draw on the German word for ‘foreign policy’, namely, ‘Außenpolitik’ where ‘Außen’ translates to ‘outside’. In this regard, the foreign in ‘foreign policy’ is that which distinguishes this form of policy from domestic policy<sup>7</sup>.

In terms of ‘policy’, Beach (2012: 2) questions whether this should refer to the objective that the action was supposed to achieve (policy as planned – *ex ante*) or the tangible outcome of the action (policy as executed – *ex post*), considering that these can differ

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<sup>7</sup> Although a distinction can be drawn between domestic policy and foreign policy, this is not to suggest that the two are independent. This is a point made by Gourevitch (1978: 911) who suggests that “the international system is not only a consequence of domestic politics and structure but a cause of them”. A similar argument is made by Putnam (1988: 434), who through his ‘two-level game’ explains the interconnection between the domestic and international, highlighting how politicians must navigate both arenas simultaneously. At the domestic level, politicians need to keep interest groups satisfied to maintain power, while at the international level they have to secure favourable agreements while minimising negative consequences. Decisionmakers always need to take both into consideration.

quite radically. For example, in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2021 the original goal of US foreign policy was to create a stable and functioning state devoid of the threat of terrorism (Al-Qaeda) and ultimately democratic in nature (Waldman 2013: 826). However, the actual result of the action was the opposite, with the failure of the US in Afghanistan leading to the rise of the Taliban and a country afflicted with poverty and human rights violations (Robinson 22 June 2023). In this sense, the question can be asked, namely whether the foreign policy of a state should be inferred from the goals it sets out, or the actual tangible actions that take place. Responding to such issues, Beach (2012: 3) introduces a broad and pragmatic definition, namely, that foreign policy is:

*Both the broad trends of behaviour and the particular actions taken by a state or other collective actor as directed toward other collective actors within the international system. Foreign policy actions can be undertaken using a variety of different instruments, ranging from adopting declarations, making speeches, negotiating treaties, giving other states economic aid, engaging in diplomatic activity such as summits, and the use of military force.*

The above definition is useful since it does not only provide insight into *who* conducts foreign policy, namely states; but it also defines *where* it takes place – in the international system - and *how* it takes place – through speeches<sup>8</sup>, for example. The only aspect that is missing in this definition is the *purpose* of foreign policy. In this regard, this study draws both from the definition provided by Modelski (1962: 6) that reasons that the aim of foreign policy is to change the behaviour of other states or to adjust the states own activities to the international environment, and by Wallace (1971: 11) who states that foreign policy embodies a series of attitudes towards the global environment and a deliberate image of what the country's place in the world is or ought to be. Based on the above, foreign policy is defined by this study as the broad patterns of behaviour of states toward other states in the international arena, with the dual purpose of influencing the behaviour of other states and projecting the role that the state currently holds or aspires to hold in global affairs<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> This definition is particularly important to this study, since the study uses speeches to infer what the foreign policy of a state is (see 3.4.3.1.).

<sup>9</sup> Integral to this definition is that it does not focus on the outcome or implementation of foreign policy but rather focuses on the behaviour or orientation of states towards their external environment. In this sense, foreign policy is also about the role that a country projects and enacts, which is suitable for this study since it draws on Holsti's national role conceptions to interpret a state's foreign policy orientation (see 3.4.4.).

Having defined what foreign policy is, or at least what it is understood as in this study, it is worth pointing out that scholars have argued that foreign policy is influenced by various factors. For example, the Realist school of thought argues that the foreign policy of a state is influenced by the position of a state in the international system and the balance of power (Tayfur 1994: 119). That is, if one wants to understand what influences the foreign policy of states, one simply needs to look at a state's relative position in the international system (Beach 2012: 19). As Souva (2005: 149) explains, "foreign policy, in this view, is primarily a function of the external environment". Because the state is seen as a unitary and rational actor, it is not necessary to pay attention to factors such as the components of the government, for example (Alden & Aran 2012: 3). Rather, scholars can analyse the national interest or the power<sup>10</sup> – which is equated with military power and informed by a state's geographic position, material resources and demography – to understand a state's behaviour (Alden & Aran 2012: 4).

On the other hand, liberal theories argue that foreign policy is also influenced by factors such as democracy (regime type), international institutions, and interdependence. For example, whereas Realists argue that regime type is irrelevant – governments will do what they need to do to survive in this anarchic world – liberalists posit that regime type is fundamental to explaining foreign policy. One of the most prominent arguments made in this regard – which draws on Kant's perpetual peace theory – is that liberal democracies are less likely to engage in wars with one another, as they prefer to resolve approaches through negotiations (Alden & Aran 2012: 51). However, while such theories focus on factors beyond just the power of a state as an explanation for foreign policy behaviour, they still err towards a more structural understanding of foreign policy, that is, where structure (such as the regime type), as opposed to say individual leaders, ultimately determine the foreign policy of states.

Frustrated with such oversimplified explanations of foreign policy, scholars falling under the behaviourist tradition have argued that a better understanding of foreign policy could be obtained by improving the methodological approaches of foreign policy analysis. Such thinking gave rise to what is now known as FPA, which, as Hudson (2005:1) explains, has:

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<sup>10</sup> Morgenthau uses 'power' and 'national interest' synonymously.

*an actor-specific focus, based upon the argument that all that occurs between nations and across nations is grounded in human decision makers acting singly or in groups.*

Scholars such as Jervis (1976), and Sprout and Sprout (1956) argue that an explanation for foreign policy could be found in investigating the individual decision maker (Alden & Aran 2012: 5). Behaviouralists posit that foreign policy is influenced primarily by how decision-makers subjectively perceive their environment (White 1989: 13-15, cited in Tayfur 1994: 120). In this regard, a major contribution was made by Kalevi Holsti (1970) through his seminal text on 'National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy'. In this text, Holsti (1970: 240, 245) argues that there are four concepts that are vital to analysing foreign policy, namely (i) *role performance*, which he defines as referring to the attitudes, decisions and actions governments take to implement, resulting in the general foreign policy behaviour of governments; (ii) *self-defined national role conceptions*, which refer to the policymakers own perception of the role their state should play; (iii) *role prescriptions*, which refer to the perceptions, emanating from the external environment, about how the given state should behave and (iv) a state's position or status, that is, a *system of role prescriptions*. Although there are numerous findings made in Holsti's paper, like the fact that a state can have multiple national role conceptions, one of the central contributions made in his article is the importance of looking at the self-conceptions of decision-makers as an explanation of a state's behaviour. Holsti's point is that it is not only the structure of the international system (in terms of the distribution of power) that determines a country's foreign policy behaviour but also the way in which the country *itself* perceives its role.

Taking a slightly different angle, but still focusing on influences not related to the structure of the international system (the distribution of power), Kenneth Boulding (1959) argues that "it is the set of beliefs, biases and stereotypes" that "play the most important role in shaping foreign policy decisions", while for Allison and Halperin (1972: 55), it is not only the individual decision-maker that needs to be taken into consideration but rather, there has to be recognition that "a large part of that context is the existing configurations of large organizations" and consequently "any decisions made took place within the context of institutions" (Alden & Aran 2017: 8). Considering this, Alden and Aran (2017: 8) explain that "the role and contribution of specialized ministries, departments and agencies [...] needed to be accounted for in FPA". Nanjira (2010) proffers that colonisation, decolonisation and membership in international

organisations (IOs) constitute key driving forces of foreign policy, and thus, as Graham (2017: 136) explains, the historical context can also be an important determinant of foreign policy. In this sense, the scholars above have all contributed to formulating an understanding of foreign policy and its influences by looking beyond structural theories of International Relations.

These theories or ideas of the influences on foreign policy discussed above often intersect directly with 'size-related theories' of foreign policy analysis. For example, even in the case of Boulding's (1959) explanation where he notes that the "beliefs, biases and stereotypes" shape a state's foreign policy, this can still be influenced by a country's size, where size refers to the landmass, population, and natural resources of a state. Leaders of large states may have a different interpretation of the role their state has to play based on the resources it has, for example, when compared to the leaders of small states. Allison and Halperin's (1972) assertion that the institutional context needs to be considered can be linked back to the concept of state size, as different dimensions of size, such as population or economy, can influence the functioning of institutions<sup>11</sup>.

Considering this, Rosenau (1966: 27) argues that the variation in the foreign policy of states can be explained by three variables, one of which is the physical size of a population, be it small or large. In this instance, size refers to both the physical and human resources, including population, gross national product and the territory of a given state (McGowan 1974: 38; Rosenau & Hoggard 1974: 121). Scholars such as Hudson and Day (2020: 170) expand on this line of thinking, similarly, positing that a major determinant of foreign policy is the national attributes of a state, which include elements such as natural resources, population, territorial size and geography. Holsti (1995: 256) also refers to national attributes, incorporating in his definition, territorial size, population, economic system and the performance of the economy, as well as the level of economic development of a state.

Hill (2016: 179) explains that "the physical characteristics of a state have important implications for all areas of public policy, not least foreign policy". Renouvin and Duroselle (1968: 3, 8) hold that these physical characteristics, such as tangible

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<sup>11</sup> Panke (2012b: 387) explains that small states often have fewer economic and financial resources, which results in fewer staff in ministries. The limited budget also influences how many diplomats can take part in negotiations and how well informed they are (Panke 2012a: 316).

resources, are the “basic forces” of a state’s foreign policy, and they determine the extent to which a country can have an impact on the external environment. Calleya (2016: 425) explains that factors such as a lack of natural resources, a small population, or remoteness and insularity can impact the economy of states as well as their institutional capabilities, which, as Day and Hudson (2020: 170) posit, influence the ability to project their foreign policy. Importantly, in his discussion on the implementation of foreign policy and resources specifically, Hill (2016: 147-148) explains that size does not only have to refer to tangible sources such as landmass or population but can also include intangible sources such as expertise, levels of education, technological capacity, as well as degree of development. Holsti (1995: 56) makes a similar observation, noting that the level of technological development and public education are also important considerations.

Such assertions, as discussed above, have inspired a burgeoning field of foreign policy literature that investigates the foreign policy of states by categorising them as small, medium, emerging, large, and great powers, to name a few. In this sense, Wallace (1971: 7) explains that “the nature of the foreign policy process, indeed the whole problem of foreign policy, is clearly of a different order [...] in great powers or medium powers from that in small or weak states”.

### **1.2.2. Small Island Developing States as a type of small state**

This study is particularly interested in a specific type of small power, or an acute type of small state<sup>12</sup>, namely Small Island Developing States. Briefly, SIDS<sup>13</sup> refers to a number of island states that were recognised as presenting a unique case in terms of their environment and development at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UN n.d.). On the international policy stage, SIDS place a significant emphasis on the existential threat posed by climate change (Malcolm and Murday 2017: 238).

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (n.d), these countries constitute some of the world’s smallest and most remote states, and

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<sup>12</sup> Throughout, this study interchangeably uses the term ‘small state’ with ‘SIDS,’ since SIDS represent a distinct category within the broader classification of small states. However, the researcher recognises that findings specific to SIDS may not necessarily apply to all small states.

<sup>13</sup> As with most definitions and categories, there exists considerable debate regarding what constitutes a SIDS. However, it is not in the purview of this study to engage this debate.

although they are not necessarily a homogenous unit, they do share some common characteristics, such as a small population, small territories, high levels of dependency which stem from their relative isolation from global markets, and extreme vulnerability to climate change (Kelman & West 2009: 2; De Agueda Corneloup & Mol 2014: 282). As explained by the Foreign Minister of the Seychelles (Radegonde 22 February 2023):

*SIDS often lack the resources and infrastructure to respond effectively to natural disasters and humanitarian crises, making them highly dependent on foreign aid and assistance.*

While by definition SIDS are necessarily small states, they suffer from an additional 'disadvantage', namely, the fact that they are also islands. Additional disadvantages that come with being an island include, for example, insularity. SIDS are "by nature isolated" and rely heavily on the actions of others (Faure 22 September 2020).

Since SIDS are a type of small states, the assumptions made about small states and their foreign policy extend to SIDS. Small states, specifically, are often assumed to be merely pawns in the games of the great powers (see Vartak 2022). Scholars such as Vital (1967), Rothstein (1968), Bjøl (1971), De Raeymaeker (1974), Väyrynen (1997), Goodby (2014), Heng and Aljunied (2015) and Efremova (2019) all claim that small states have limited manoeuvrability, autonomy and agency and thus rather tend to make foreign policy decisions that align with or are reflective of more powerful states (to be discussed in more detail in 2.2.3. and 2.2.4.).

The problem with such accounts is that they are largely one-sided, overlooking the agency and power that small states and SIDS may have. Furthermore, there are several reasons to believe that even if such accounts were accurate in explaining the behaviour of small states prior to the end of the Cold War, this is no longer the case, as will be argued and demonstrated throughout this study.

### **1.2.3. Emerging and challenging literature on SIDS**

In recent years, there has been an emerging branch in the literature that challenges this portrayal of small states and, for the purpose of this study, SIDS, as inherently without agency. For example, Malik (2020: 135) explains that small powers play an important role in the "Great Game". In fact, according to Malik (2020: 135), small powers

*[o]ften determine the nature and outcome of major power competition as major powers become great powers with the support of small and middle powers [...] the support of small and middle powers, or lack of it, makes all the difference between great power dominance and defeat.*

Furthermore, within the context of the Indo-Pacific, Malik (2020: 134) explains that:

*China, India and the United States each has a distinct vision of the region based on their respective geo-strategic interests whose success hinges on enlisting the support of small island states and middle powers.*

McDougall and Taneja (2024: 241) argue that small island states in the Indian Ocean are “not pawns acting at the behest of more powerful actors, but sovereign states making informed choices”. Assertions, such as the ones made above, call into question whether SIDS are as insignificant as earlier literature tends to suggest. Baldacchino (2010: 21), for example, has noted that islands are increasingly being recognised as “sites of agency” and “depositories of new things”. Furthering such a sentiment, a notable contribution has been made by Bueger and Wivel (2018), who, by looking at the case of Seychelles, demonstrate that these states are not necessarily what Holbraad (1971: 78) refers to as “the pawns of international politics”. Rather, small states “often have issue-specific capabilities that may be used as a tool for niche influence” (Bueger & Wivel 2018: 175).

For example, Seychelles, otherwise considered a relatively insignificant state to larger powers because of its limited material capabilities, created a role for itself as a pivotal player in the Indian Ocean during the outbreak of piracy off the coast of Somalia in 2008 (Bueger & Wivel 2018: 175; Otto 2022: 10). Seychelles used its strategic position to market itself as a haven for counter-piracy operations. It opened its airstrips and ports for foreign militaries, which aided in generating new economic revenues for the small country (Bueger & Wivel 2018: 178). Additionally, it presented itself as a willing partner in prosecuting pirates and thus started benefiting from a “substantial capacity building program in its criminal justice sector”, while its security sector attracted substantial assistance (Bueger & Wivel 2018: 178-179). In this way, Seychelles solidified its role as a reliable partner to international actors (Bueger & Wivel 2018: 179).

Such a view aligns with Neumann’s (2023: 60) explanation that there is a certain prototype of states that, although considering themselves as small, are excelling in specific niches. Neumann cites Luxembourg and its exemplary banking and Nepal and

its specialisation in military prowess as examples that not all small states should be limited to the category of lacking agency. Hawksley and Georgeou (2023: 149) provide cases from the Pacific, where Tuvalu, for example, although having no obvious resources, has strategically rented out its '.tv' internet domain to a US media company, which accounts for 8.5 per cent of its domestic revenue each year. Vanuatu has been creative in utilising its sovereignty by selling its citizenship to wealthy people in search of a new passport.

Apart from this example, SIDS have also pushed for a new system of classification, where they are no longer referred to as 'small island states' but rather as 'Large Ocean States' (Morgan 2022: 45) (see also 6.2.4). This is grounded on the basis that although these states may have small landmasses, they nonetheless have large oceans given the size of their EEZ (Hume *et al.* 2021: 2). Fiji, for example, has a land area of 18,270 square kilometres, yet its EEZ equates to 1.3 million square kilometres (OHRLLS 2020: 4). Tuvalu and Nauru stand out with the highest-land-to-EEZ ratios, where their maritime zones exceed their land areas by factors of 25,210 and 15,532 respectively. In 2017, the President of Palau emphasised the importance of the size of the ocean by explaining that:

*My country Palau is a Small Island Developing State located just 6 degrees north of the equator in the Pacific Ocean. While it is small in land, at only about 180 square miles, it is a Large Ocean State or roughly the size of France, under its jurisdiction.*

Such assertions have begun to challenge the traditional notions surrounding SIDS, namely that they are weak states because they are small<sup>14</sup> (Chan 2018: 538). Tarte (2022: 34) explains that "there has been a very deliberate attempt to challenge notions of small, vulnerable and fragile [...] with a counter narrative emphasising the collective strength of 'large ocean states'". Furthermore, SIDS have been able to position themselves as influential players in the international arena by combining their political, moral and economic weight (Tarte 2022: 34). Tarte (2022: 34) explains that evidence of this is the renewed momentum behind sub-regional groupings such as the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) and the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF).

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<sup>14</sup> The argument being made by SIDS is that 'small' is terra-centric or land-based classification that overlooks the vastness of their maritime territories, which, in reality, position them as large ocean states.

Another example is the formation of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), which now represents 20 per cent of UN membership (Morgan 2022: 52). By assimilating into such groups, these SIDS have been able to pursue collective diplomacy with successful outcomes (to be discussed in more detail in 6.2.2.). Morgan explains that “by aggregating common positions, island states have disproportionately shaped international cooperation to reduce emissions” (2022: 52). A case in point is the pivotal role that island nations played in ensuring that the United Nations climate negotiations in 2015 had tangible outcomes (Morgan 2022: 52). While these negotiations had been stalled by a lack of consensus on “who was most responsible for climate change and how much finance would be provided to poorer nations to help deal with its impacts” an initiative led by the Marshall Islands aided in creating a coalition that eventually sealed the “first truly global climate treaty” (Morgan 2022: 53).

### **1.3. Research problem, questions, aims and contributions**

The fundamental research problem identified in this study is the tension between traditional small-state literature – which portrays small states as system-ineffectual, of minimal concern to great powers, heavily influenced by more powerful states, primarily focused on resisting external pressures, incapable of competing on equal footing with major players, and lacking the resources for proactive international engagement – and the emergence of a new strain of thought (as discussed in 1.2.3) that challenged these assumptions. The recent developments in the literature call for a critical re-evaluation of the traditional literature on the foreign policy of small states, and it is this which motivates the study and informs the research question, which reads as follows:

*To what extent do the interactions between SIDS and major players in the Indo-Pacific between 2017-2024 reveal the need to rethink the core assumptions of traditional frameworks of small state foreign policy orientations and is there a need to reconceptualise concepts such as power and dependence in relation to the conduct of small states?*

In order to answer the question above, this study addresses three sub-questions:

1. How does the traditional literature portray the foreign policy orientations of small states?
2. What type of foreign policies do SIDS, as a sub-set of small states, *actually* pursue?
3. How do the selected states challenge traditional understandings of power, dependence, and the foreign policy options available to SIDS?

This study will demonstrate how the frameworks that are used to understand the foreign policy of small states do not adequately account for explaining the foreign policy of SIDS. It challenges the long-standing assumptions about the foreign policy of small states and explores the manner in which SIDS in the Indo-Pacific express power in their foreign policy vis-à-vis the major players. This study embraces the challenge posed by Keohane, as highlighted at the beginning of this chapter, namely that there is a necessity to study and scrutinise small states as carefully as the larger states are studied in scholarly analysis. In doing so, the main contributions of this study are to expand and refine the literature on small states, and specifically SIDS, by:

- Developing an alternative framework that encapsulates the unique foreign policy behaviour and orientation of SIDS, capturing and reflecting on the agency they have.
- Providing alternative conceptualisations of ‘power’ within the context of what will be framed as Ocean States rather than Small Island Developing States.

Having outlined the contributions of this study, it is equally important to point out three important limitations that are acknowledged. First, this study focused on a sample of four SIDS drawn from a broader group of 39 SIDS. Therefore, the findings may not necessarily be generalisable across all SIDS. Second, the study adopted a particular regional focus, namely the Indo-Pacific. While this focus provided depth, it limits the conclusions reached to SIDS in other geographic regions, such as the Caribbean. Third, this study was limited to studying the dynamics between SIDS and major players, specifically between 2017 and 2024. Although this period accounts for recent developments, it may not reflect longer-term trends.

#### **1.4. Structure of the study**

Considering the above-mentioned, the structure of the study will be as follows:

Chapter 1 introduced the study. It provided an overview of this study, focusing on discussing background information that led to the identification of a research problem. It then demarcated the research question, the objectives, and contributions of this study. Additionally, it outlined the overall structure of the study.

Chapter 2 focuses on an in-depth literature review and answers the first sub-question, namely, ‘How does the traditional literature portray the foreign policy of small states?’.

This chapter begins by investigating the relationship between ‘smallness’ and the foreign policy options available to small countries. In particular, the notion that smallness equates to a power deficit will be highlighted as both a prominent theme in the traditional literature and the dominant narrative on small states currently. Considering that this seems to imply that small states necessarily have a dependent foreign policy, the next step is to introduce and operationalise Marijke Breuning’s framework, which explicates the foreign policy orientations of states so that it can be applied in the fourth chapter.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to an in-depth discussion of the methodology utilised in this study. In this chapter, the researcher discusses the interpretivist research worldview, the qualitative research design, the research methodology, data collection tools, and tools of analysis. Furthermore, the researcher reflects on the ethical considerations of this study.

Chapter 4 applies Breuning’s framework to the selected SIDS, namely, Solomon Islands, Seychelles, Fiji and Mauritius, in an attempt to answer the second sub-question, namely: ‘What type of foreign policies do SIDS actually pursue?’. In each instance, the country is briefly introduced to provide important context to the reader, such as the history and geography of the state insofar as they are related to the foreign policy of the state. Each country overview is followed by a section in which Breuning’s framework is applied in what is labelled as the ‘Foreign policy analysis’. Finally, for each state, there is a section assessing its foreign policy orientation. The application of Breuning’s framework is conducted to demonstrate that the framework, as an emblematic framework of small state foreign policy orientations, falls short in explaining the foreign policy of the selected SIDS.

Chapter 5 is the first of two chapters concerned with analysing the findings of the previous chapter. It begins by first outlining the roles that the selected four states enact. It then aims to specifically answer the third sub-question, namely, ‘How do the selected states challenge traditional understandings of power and the foreign policy options available to SIDS?’ In particular, the case is made for the reconceptualisation of dependence to complex interdependence in the context of these Ocean States. This alternative understanding allows the researcher to demonstrate how power can be

located in the respective role conceptions of the states as identified in the previous chapter.

Chapter 6 is the second part of the two chapters concerned with analysing the findings of Chapter 4. This chapter specifically focuses on dissecting the power of Ocean States and tracing it to power through position, power through international organisations, power through possession of the object of value, power through influencing and determining the narrative, and power through morality. The chapter ends by proposing an alternative framework that more accurately describes the foreign policy orientations available to Ocean States. Chapters 5 and 6 present the theoretical contributions made by the scholar to the field of IR and sub-discipline of FPA.

Chapter 7 will conclude the research. In this chapter, the main findings of the research are discussed, with a specific focus on the implications of the findings for the field of foreign policy. The conclusion also identifies areas for further research and ultimately highlights the original contribution to knowledge that was made in this thesis.

## **1.5. Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter was to frame and introduce the broader study. A key aspect of this was positioning the research within the field of IR and the sub-field of FPA. This positioning was particularly important to develop a working definition of foreign policy for this study, which will focus on how states interact with one another in the international arena and what image they portray. Additionally, the chapter introduced the primary focus of this study: Small Island Developing States. These states have emerged as focal points of great power competition in the Indo-Pacific. Their strategic positioning along critical SLOCS, their expansive territory which encompasses large maritime areas and rich resources, and their potential role in maintaining regional stability have underscored the enduring significance of geography and brought them into the spotlight.

Recent scholarship on SIDS has started to challenge the traditional literature about small states that assumes that they are simply pawns in the games of the great powers. Instead, there is a growing argument that major powers are increasingly dependent on the strategic location of these SIDS. These islands have also expressed notable instances of agency, such as Seychelles' repositioning itself as a critical player in countering piracy, and Tuvalu reconceptualising what constitutes resources by, for

example, renting out its '.tv' domain for a source of revenue. Some SIDS are even advocating for a redefinition of their identity, shifting from being seen as small island states to being recognised as Large Ocean States.

Despite these examples of agency and strategic repositioning, the dominant narrative often remains tied to the traditional perspective that emphasises that small states are necessarily characterised by a power deficit (to be discussed in detail in 2.2.9). By identifying these trends, this chapter laid the foundation for the research question, as well as the sub-questions. In the next chapter, an in-depth literature review of the traditional literature on small states is conducted with the aim of specifically answering the sub-question 'How does the traditional literature portray the foreign policy orientations of small states?'

## Chapter 2: Literature review

*Sometimes it seems as if small states were like small boats, pushed out into a turbulent sea, free in one sense to traverse it; but, without oars or provisions, without compass or sails, free also to perish. Or, perhaps, to be rescued and taken on board a larger vessel.*

- Ramphal (cited in Harden 1985)

*Definitions of Small Island Developing States never fail to emphasize that we are all maritime countries and that we share similar development challenges. After marvelling at our stunning oceans and landscapes, it is much later that our admirers pause to consider our limited economic resources, our remoteness, our susceptibility to natural disasters, our vulnerability to external shocks, and our excessive dependence on international trade. To hear these characterizations and the difficulties of overcoming them, it is almost as if small island states are doomed to fail from the start. However, from small islands come big ideas. No one should underestimate our resolve. Failure, for us, has never been and never will be an option. Despite real challenges, there is an abundance of energy and innovation inside of us all, to push ourselves and our nations as far we can go.*

- Former Seychelles President Danny Faure (2017)

### 2.1. Introduction

This chapter, which is split into two sections, reviews the literature on small states. The first section begins by providing an overview of how small states are positioned in the traditional literature. This includes analysing their (i) varying definitions, (ii) portrayal, and (iii) foreign policy behaviour. Along with this, the concept of 'power' within the context of small states is also discussed. The second section of the chapter introduces and operationalises a framework for understanding small state foreign policy behaviour<sup>15</sup>, which will be applied in the fourth chapter to determine whether it can accurately account for the foreign policy orientations of these states. The central aim of this chapter is to underscore that, despite efforts to challenge the traditional portrayal of small states as inherently defined by a power deficit and as ineffectual actors, these notions still prevail. This necessitates the application of a framework in

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<sup>15</sup> Foreign policy 'behaviour' and 'orientation' are closely related concepts, although a slight distinction can be made. According to Herman (1980: 12), orientation refers to how a government or specific leader defines a given situation and the style of behaviour they are likely to adopt. Tayfur (1994: 116) explains that orientations are the highest guides for action of a government and refer to the underlying tendencies and principles that shapes a state's overall conduct. The behaviour of a state, while influenced by the general orientation, refers specifically to the concrete activities of the states. Given this distinction, when speaking about the actions and decisions taken by states, the study will refer to foreign policy behaviour, whereas when referring to the broader manner in which it positions itself, reference will be made to foreign policy orientation.

Chapter 4 to examine whether it can effectively explain the foreign policy orientations of small states, specifically SIDS<sup>16</sup>.

## 2.2. Small states in the literature

### 2.2.1 Definitions: ‘small states’, ‘small powers’, and ‘weak states’

The literature that explores the foreign policy of small states invariably starts with a shared caveat: it is exceptionally difficult to find an agreeable definition of a small state (Vandenbosch 1964; Amstrup 1965; Väyrynen 1974; Baehr 1975; Sutton & Payne 1993; McGraw 1994; Commonwealth Secretariat 1997; Joenniemi 1998; Crowards 2002; Knudson 2002; Browning 2006; Marleku 2013; Jesse & Dreyer 2016; Willis 2021). This difficulty stems from the various approaches to defining small states, with scholars most notably employing either qualitative or quantitative criteria. However, before delving into this, it is crucial to distinguish the terms: ‘small states’, ‘small powers’ and ‘weak states’ since they are often used without qualification and interchangeably. For example, in one paragraph of his book, Vital (1967: 77, 79), explains that “a small *state* is more vulnerable to pressure”, while in another section, Vital refers to the “rough limits of the isolated small *power’s* strength [emphasis added]”. In these instances, he blurs the distinction – if there is one – between the two terms by using them interchangeably.

It should also be noted that the term ‘small powers’ presents a paradox since it appears contradictory to place the words ‘small’ and ‘power’ next to one another as a ‘small state’ is generally defined by a lack of power (Handel 1990: 10). This raises the question: if a small state clearly lacks power, why refer to it as a ‘small power’? One possible interpretation of this interchangeable usage is provided by Keohane (1969: 291), who specifically writes that “small states have risen to prominence if not to power”. This suggests that ‘small powers’ may refer to a class of ‘small states’ that have acquired some power. However, this is unsatisfactory, since scholars who use the term ‘small powers’ specifically define them by their lack of power.

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<sup>16</sup> This study acknowledges that SIDS fall under the purview of Nissology, which is defined as the “study of islands on their own terms” (McCall 1996: 78; see also McCall 1994; Baldacchino 2008; Mountz 2015; Kakazu 2021: 1). However, this study approaches SIDS through the lens of small state literature. This decision is driven by the aim of the research, which is to explore the dynamics between SIDS and major players in the Indo-Pacific. In particular, the small state literature provides tools to analyse the behaviour of SIDS specifically in the context of foreign policy, which aligns with the aim of the research.

Similarly, so, the term 'small state' is also not without problems, since it has been applied to cases, such as Chad and Saudi Arabia, which have enormous territories. This raises the question of whether these states should truly be considered small. Noting this, Handel (1990: 11) proposes the term 'weak state' as an alternative since it can be applied to countries that are geographically large but nonetheless weak. While it may appear apt to employ Handel's term of 'weak state', this study finds this undesirable.

Firstly, the term 'small state' is used more extensively in the literature, with the concept of a 'weak state' having garnered considerably less attention in research (Amstrup 1965: 168). Secondly, the term 'weak state'<sup>17</sup> carries a far more negative connotation than 'small state'. This could be problematic in relation to the purpose of this study because, while it is possible to argue that a 'small state' may have power in some sense, it would be more difficult to advance the argument that a 'weak state' has power. Using 'weak state' would create a similar paradox to the term 'small power'. In this sense, the above two paragraphs point to the lack of internal consistency in the terminology used to describe small states.

However, although recognising that all three terms are imperfect, this study will use the term 'small state', using the variations only when used by authors in a specific context. Adopting Ockham's razor, it seems plausible to suggest that these three terms all refer to a similar type of state, with the differing terms being a result of different time eras. Neumann and Gstohl (2004: 4) underscore this point, arguing that:

*Small states started life as a residual category and under a different name [...] 'small powers' are nowadays simply referred to as 'small states'.*

Theoretically, it could further be posited that 'small powers' and 'weak states' may be more reminiscent of the Realist tradition, whereas 'small states' reflect the era during which the League of Nations was established, and all states were ostensibly considered 'equal'. Having briefly addressed this, the next task is to delineate how a 'small state' can be defined. Here it must be noted that the aim is not to pinpoint a

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<sup>17</sup> A weak state is also sometimes used to describe a 'failed state', which refers to a state whose government cannot exercise effective control over its territory or borders (Breuning 2007: 149). Rotberg (2003: 5), for example, explains that failed states are "tense, deeply conflicted, dangerous, and contested bitterly by warring factions", where the government lacks control over its geographical expanse. However, this study does not situate itself within the failed state framework. Instead, when referring to weak states, it understands them according to Handel's (1990) conceptualisation above.

precise definition but rather as Vital (1967: 81) states, “make clear the identity of the subject of this study”.

### **2.2.2. Four approaches to defining small states**

A review of the literature on small states seems to indicate that there is a general trend of defining small states through four approaches: material, perceptual, relational, and behavioural. However, each of these comes with significant definitional weaknesses. Material approaches, for example, incorporate quantitative metrics. Thorhallsson (2018: 18) explains that population is the most common single variable used to define state size. This is based on the idea that population size reflects the level of human capital and provides a general indicator of the domestic market size (Crowards 2002: 143). Vital (1967: 81), for example, posits that a small state is a state with a population of less than 10-15 million in the case of economically advanced countries and 20-30 million in the case of underdeveloped countries. Expanding on this, East (1973: 557) suggests that a small state is generally characterised by: (1) a small land area, (2) a small population, (3) a small Gross National Profit (GNP), and (4) low levels of military capabilities. Hoadly (1980: 122) makes a similar assertion, explaining that small states are defined by indicators such as small populations, land areas, production levels, wealth and military capabilities.

One of the observations to be made about material definitions of size is that they are focused primarily on landmasses, often overlooking the significance of maritime space. This land-biased perspective is deeply rooted in traditional Realist thought, where territorial size is viewed as a direct source of power (Chan 2018: 540). However, many states that identify as ‘Large Ocean States<sup>18</sup>’ challenge this assumption, asserting that their vast maritime domains – recognised under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) – constitute a crucial dimension of their influence. According to UNCLOS, states have an EEZ of up to 200 nautical miles from their coastlines, which they may use “for the purpose of exploring and exploiting, conserving and managing the natural resources” (Chan 2018: 541).

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<sup>18</sup> Solomon Islands, Fiji, Seychelles and Solomon Islands have all referred to themselves as ‘Large Ocean States’ since 2017 (see 6.2.4.).

This shift in perspective arguably reflects a broader challenge to conventional geopolitical theories. As Robert Cox (1995: 31) famously argued, a “theory is always for someone and for some purpose”. The historical emphasis on land as one of the primary determinants of power is not an objective truth but rather a reflection of dominant geopolitical priorities at the time. In the contemporary age, traditional theories are being challenged and reconceptualised as oceans and EEZs gain prominence.

A further difficulty with material definitions is the arbitrariness of the thresholds for these characteristics. For example, according to the Commonwealth Secretariat (2024), a small state is a country with less than 1.5 million people, while according to the Forum of Small States at the United Nations (UN), small states can have a population of up to 10 million (Súilleabháin 2014). This highlights a notable discrepancy in the criteria that constitute a small state. This issue holds for any of the aforementioned characteristics: how does one determine where the threshold should be drawn to distinguish between a small state and a non-small state? Furthermore, another issue is that a state may have a small land area but a large population (Thorhallsson 2018: 18). In this instance, should the given state be considered small or not? Considering these difficulties, other scholars have focused on more qualitative approaches, turning to perceptual, relational and behavioural definitions.

A perceptual definition of a ‘small state’ argues that what makes a ‘small state’ ‘small’ is the recognition by the state itself and by other states that it is small. Such an approach is based on the work of Rothstein (1968: 29) and Keohane (1969: 296), who respectively explain that:

*A small power is a state which recognizes that it cannot obtain security primarily by use of its own capabilities [...] the Small Power’s belief in its inability to rely on its own means must also be recognized by the other states involved in international politics.*

and

*A small power is a state whose leaders consider that it can never, acting alone or in a small group, make a significant impact on the system.*

Evident in the above extracts is that a small state is not characterised by the specific attributes or deficiencies it has, but rather by the position it holds in both the perception

by others and by itself (Rothstein 1968: 29). A problem that the researcher finds with such an approach is that if perception is the defining feature of smallness, then what happens if a state refers to itself as both a 'small state' and a 'large state' at once. For example, in the past, the President of Palau has referred to Palau as being small in terms of its land, but in terms of its ocean<sup>19</sup>, it should be considered a 'Large Ocean State' (Hume *et al* 2021: 2). Alternatively, what happens if the state refers to itself as a large state, but other states perceive it as a small state? In this sense, perceptual definitions falter when states perceive themselves differently or when external perceptions diverge.

Differing slightly from a perception-based definition is a definition based on relativity. Jensen (1982: 5) explains that what is of interest is not the size of the unit but rather the nature of the relationship between the two states. For example, Jensen points out that if one considers Poland next to Russia, then Poland is a small state. However, if Poland is placed next to Lithuania, it might be considered a more powerful actor since it is the superior actor in the relationship. Considering this, Knudson (2002: 184) holds that a small state is any state that has significantly less power compared to another state in a relationship. Jesse and Dreyer (2016: 10) advance a similar viewpoint, suggesting that a small state can be defined as a state that is always weak at regional and global levels, although they argue they may be strong at a sub-regional level. Such definitions refrain from always labelling a specific state as absolutely small and rather leave possibilities for states, regardless of their size, to be considered small states. However, a shortcoming of this approach is that it is always context-specific, so it might be difficult to conclude whether a state is a small state or not. The answer to whether Poland is a small state would, in all likelihood, always be dependent on the context, diminishing the analytical clarity and utility of the term 'small state'.

A final manner in which a small state can be defined is in terms of its behaviour. East (1973: 576), a much-cited scholar in this regard, holds that small states have the following behavioural trends:

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<sup>19</sup> In this instance, the concept of a state's 'size' encompasses not just its land area but also its maritime territory. Sutton and Payne (1993: 585) highlight how SIDS have benefited significantly from the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. This convention has allowed these states to extend their sovereign control over territorial waters that were formerly considered part of the high seas, while also significantly expanding their EEZ. In this sense, Sutton and Payne (1993: 585) suggest that SIDS have been transformed from being 'resource poor' to potentially 'resource rich' states.

- (a) *low levels of overall participation in world affairs;*
- (b) *high levels of activity in intergovernmental organizations (IGO's);*
- (c) *high levels of support for international legal norms;*
- (d) *avoidance of the use of force as a technique of statecraft;*
- (e) *avoidance of behaviour and policies which tend to alienate the more powerful states in the system;*
- (f) *a narrow functional and geographic range of concern in foreign policy activities;*
- (g) *frequent utilization of moral and normative positions on international issue.*

If one were to take one of these behavioural trends, such as “low levels of overall participation in world affairs”, this could lead to the interpretation that small states are those states that participate scarcely in world affairs. However, caution is needed to avoid conflating a characteristic of a state with its determining feature. In the case of the above, this would imply that all states that participate seldom in world affairs are small, and therefore, countries such as North Korea would need to be accepted as small states, which is something few would agree with. This situation illustrates the ‘affirming the consequent’ fallacy, which is when one assumes that if a certain condition is met, then a particular result must follow. This line of reasoning further assumes that a state’s level of participation is solely determined by its size, while in reality, a state’s size is not a reliable indicator of its participation. For example, if a state participates minimally in world affairs, then it must be a small state, which, however, overlooks the possibility of other factors that could influence a state’s level of participation.

The point of this is to suggest that patterns of behaviour cannot be used to necessarily define a concept. Stating that small states can be identified by certain patterns of behaviour, such as high levels of support for international legal norms, is of little use in defining a small state, since other states that are not small may similarly exhibit such behaviour. Consequently, while certain patterns of behaviour may be common among small states, they cannot serve as definitive criteria for identifying them. As such, even behaviour-based definitions of small states have their shortcomings.

Having explained the different approaches to defining small states, it is important to reemphasise that the aim of this research is not to solve the perennial problem of finding an acceptable definition. In fact, Väyrynen (1971: 91) points out that:

*One must be careful not to emphasise definitional problems too much, because it could easily lead to definitional platonism and therefore the neglect of other essential states of the research.*

The point of the above was merely to demonstrate some of the difficulties of finding a working definition for small states, with no single definition having the ability to fully encapsulate their complexities. Considering this, the next task involves tracing how the term 'small state', regardless of the definition employed, has been treated in the literature.

### 2.2.3. The portrayal of small states

Regardless of how a small state is defined, there are common trends in the literature regarding how they are portrayed. Originally, if one traces small states back to ancient Greek times, small states were treated favourably. Liska (1957: 32) explains that philosophers, ranging from Plato and Aristotle, and then later to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, praised the idea of small states since the limited size of the small state was seen as a condition of a good life. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, the small state was seen as more appealing than large states, which were supposedly absolutistic and centralised (Amstrup 1965: 163). However, this sentiment changed drastically between the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> and late 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Instead of viewing the small state as valuable, small states were framed in a negative sense, with Ludwig von Rochau (1853) arguing that small states were responsible for:

*[...] das Erb- und Grundübel, an dem unsere Nation seit Jahrhunderten elend darniederliegt, die Quelle alles unseres historischen Unglücks, unserer Ohnmacht, unserer inneren Zerwürfnisse, unserer Niederlagen und unserer Bürgerkriege, der Verkrüppelung unseres Nationalgeistes und unserer politischen Unmündigkeit<sup>20</sup>.*

In this statement, von Rochau attributes the historical misfortune, internal discord, civil wars and powerlessness of German states to small states. In fact, the years preceding the Second World War were described as miserable years for those states that were small and weak with numerous small states succumbing to the larger powers (Vandenbosch 1964: 300). According to Nazi theory, large states should expand, while small states, should be pushed to the periphery or destroyed (Whittlesey 1942: 172). Consequently, small states were no longer seen as valuable, but rather as states that were constantly fighting to survive (Schwarzenberger 1964: 102). Vandenbosch (1964: 294) posits that a small state is any state that cannot engage in war on equal footing

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<sup>20</sup> [...] the hereditary and fundamental evil from which our nation has been miserably afflicted for centuries, the source of all our historical misfortunes, our impotence, our internal strife, our defeats and our civil wars, the crippling of our national spirit and our political immaturity.

with great powers while Schwarzenberger (1964: 109) argues that small states have, in his words, “ridiculously little of the very ‘currency’ that shapes the environment in which they exist”. Väyrynen (1971: 97) supports Schwarzenberger’s earlier commentary on the battle for survival of small states, arguing that the policies of small powers have been a battle for survival against great powers. Handel (1990: 36) concurs, emphasising that survival is the preoccupation of weak states.

As a result of this extreme focus on survival, small states have been seen to occupy what Väyrynen (1997: 42) calls an ‘unhappy role’ in world politics. Vital (1967: 77) expands on the situation that small states find themselves in, explaining that:

*A small state is more vulnerable to pressure, more likely to give way under stress, more limited in respect of the political options open to it, and subject to a tighter connection between domestic and external affairs [than a great power].*

Consequently, Rothstein (1968: 29) posits that a small power is a state that cannot achieve security mainly through its own means and must rather rely on other actors for this purpose. The implication of this is that a small power has only peripheral control over its fate (Rothstein 1968: 25). It follows from this, that if a small state has no control over its fate, then as Keohane (cited in Baehr 1975: 460) explains, a small state can also never have a meaningful impact on the system, whether acting independently or in a small group. Therefore, they may best be labelled as ‘system-ineffectual’ states – states that cannot influence the system (Keohane 1969: 296). Väyrynen (1974: 14) further explicates that small powers are those states that are highly dependent on other countries, have a minimal ability for independent decision-making and are characterised by a lack of autonomy.

This portrayal of small states has persisted beyond the end of the Cold War and well into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Knudsen (2002: 189) proffers that a small state is seen as being ineffective in advancing its inhabitants’ interests in the external environment, thus sharing the same sentiment as scholars such as Rothstein, Keohane and Väyrynen. Insanally (2013: 99) posits that small states lack the “strategic clout” to obtain any substantial concessions from larger, more dominant countries, while Hill (2016: 254) posits that these states, due to their lack of resources, are unable to be proactive in the global arena. To highlight the lack of agency of small states, Holsti (2016: 109), introduces the concept of ‘dependence’, which he defines as a situation where the

'smaller' state only has the ability to act in its domestic and foreign policies with the permission of the state it is dependent on, and where the ability to incentivise or influence the relationship is substantially imbalanced. In such a situation, Holsti (2016: 109) explains that:

*The major power – what we call the mentor – establishes the parameters for the political and economic actions of the dependent state and has the means to ensure conforming behaviour.*

Considering this theme of dependence as explained by Holsti, Maass (2017: 27) ultimately explains that no actions of the small states when acting individually will be able to alter the overall structure of the environment in which they exist, and they are therefore irrelevant to the structure of the system<sup>21</sup>. The structure of the system exists and evolves independently and irrespective of the small states (Maass 2017: 27).

The portrayal of small states in the literature, as outlined above, is crucial as it lays the foundation for examining what the foreign policy orientations of small states are, a discussion that follows below. In particular, the following discussion, in tandem with what has been discussed above, contributes to answering the first sub-question of the study, namely, 'how does the traditional literature portray the foreign policy orientations of small states?'

#### **2.2.4. The foreign policy orientations of small states**

The literature on small state foreign policy behaviour and orientations can broadly be categorised into two perspectives: those who believe that small state behaviour is conditioned and explained by the external environment, and those who contend that attention should not only be focused on the external but also the domestic environment. The implication of the former approach is that small states are depicted as having little agency or manoeuvrability in their foreign policy. In the case of the latter, small states may have some agency in their foreign policy. By and large, the earlier literature on small states comprises the first grouping. Proponents of this view maintain that domestic factors are negligible in shaping foreign policy, as small state foreign policy is influenced by the structure of the international system. Therefore, foreign policy can best be explained by focusing on the international level of analysis

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<sup>21</sup> In 7.4.1. the argument will be made that small states – and SIDS in particular – can have some level of impact on the structure of the system

since small state foreign policy strategies tend to demonstrate a sensitivity to external demands (Elman 1995: 177; 178).

Within this context, Liska (1957: 41) explains that when small states are involved in war, they have two options in terms of their behaviour. They can either join the anti-hegemonic powers, or they can side with the 'unbalancer'. According to Liska, the best option would be for the smaller states to ally themselves with the opponents of the hegemonic great powers. Liska's work largely influenced the subsequent literature that was written on balancing and bandwagoning. Scholars such as Walt – who are emblematic of the Realist/neorealist school of thought – suggest that small states can, through their foreign policy, either enter alliances with the aim of balancing or bandwagoning against a threat (Karsh 1989; Reiter 1994: 241). As mentioned in 2.2.3, this is based on the understanding that small states cannot guarantee their own security (Sutton & Payne 1993: 588). In the case of balancing, a small state might form an alliance against the stronger power to counter the threat, while in the case of bandwagoning, small states side with the stronger state to minimise any potential losses (Walt 1987: 4). Ultimately, Walt (1987: 21-31) is of the view that small states are more inclined to bandwagon, especially if the great power is geographically proximate.

In the 1990s, a further foreign policy option for small states was introduced, namely that of hedging. Hedging refers to a stance taken by small states where they take a middle position between the two dominant approaches of bandwagoning (aligning with the threat) and balancing (countering the threat). This position aims to cultivate relationships with both the competing powers, so that the small state is not in a position where it is overly dependent on any single major player. As noted by Kuik (2021: 306), this often involves purposefully contradictory behaviour: a small state may attempt to strengthen its military cooperation with one major player (military balancing), while concurrently deepening its economic engagement with another (economic bandwagoning). Koga (2018: 642) offers further examples, such as diplomatic balancing combined with economic bandwagoning. In practical terms, a small state may join an alliance against a threat (this would be referred to as military balancing) while concurrently increasing its trade with the same threatening power (this would refer to bandwagoning economically). Ultimately, according to Kuik (2021: 302),

hedging is an instinctive behaviour where small states insist on not taking sides and resist being forced into rigid alignment.

Apart from these options, several scholars suggest a further viable foreign policy orientation for small states. Rothstein (1968: 30-31) is of the view that neutrality and nonalignment are strategies that are particularly attractive to small states, where neutrality refers simply to the desperate attempt of small states to remain outside of future wars rather than a particular interest in impartiality. Rothstein's explanation of neutrality at the time<sup>22</sup>, can perhaps be likened to what Rogers (2007: 355) would many years later describe as 'isolation'. According to Rogers, isolation is an extreme form of realism in which a country pulls back from actively participating in the global arena to avoid being drawn into any conflict<sup>23</sup>.

Espindola (1987: 76) similarly reasons that small Third World states can pursue a policy of neutrality, although she questions the extent to which this would truly provide the small state with security, considering that neutrality is not only something that is stated or declared but also something that needs to be implemented. On the topic of non-alignment, Schaufbuehl *et al.* (2015: 903) explain that non-alignment was a strategy pursued by small countries to participate and engage in the Cold War, rather than avoid it. These states specifically sought to exploit Cold War tensions for their own objectives. This perspective draws upon the views of leaders like President Nasser and Nkrumah, who considered non-alignment as a strategy to gain support from both sides without joining either formally. Such states also emphasised the possibility of seeking help elsewhere if one part failed to provide the necessary support (Alam 1977: 173). For Raghavan (2017: 327), non-alignment is a useful tool to exploit the hostilities between two major actors. This view underscores the positive aspects of non-alignment, which include the furtherance of national interests, in contrast to the

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<sup>22</sup> In particular, Rothstein (1968: 32) states that "in discussing the utility of the concept, it seems prudent to use one of the currently fashionable terms, like 'noninvolvement' or 'nonalignment' to indicate that the efforts of the Small Powers to extricate themselves from purely Great Power conflicts and, above all, to avoid war are being discussed". For Small Powers, the aim is merely to stay out of war.

<sup>23</sup> Insofar as both Rothstein's 'neutrality' and Rogers' 'isolation' hinge on the avoidance of being drawn into conflict, they can be compared to one another. Alam (1977: 170) touches on the link between neutrality and isolation when he states that "the basic difference then between neutrality and neutralism is that the former is isolationist [...]". However, this study acknowledges the legal nature of the concept of neutrality, which refers strictly to a state that remains non-involved in war (Alam 1977: 169).

negative aspect, which entails a refusal to take sides in any military alliance of world powers (Alam 1977: 170).

A strategy of positive non-alignment is different to what Mouritzen (1991: 220) calls a strategy of non-commitment, where the strategy of non-commitment may be likened more to negative non-alignment. Mouritzen (1991: 220) holds that weak states can pursue a strategy of non-commitment, which is an attempt to steer clear of involvement with either of the strong powers. In contrast, non-alignment appears to be an active policy pursued by small states to capitalise on the tensions between two major powers.

Other variations also exist. For example, according to Mouritzen (1991: 221), an alternative to a strategy of non-involvement is a strategy of mediation, which may be used to reduce dangerous tensions between strong powers. This may be similar to Holsti's (1970: 265) role conception of a mediator-integrator, where a state attempts to play a mediatory role between two states and reconcile conflicts or differences. Playing a mediator role, is a way for a small state to show that it serves a purpose, whereas usually its presence goes unnoticed (Neumann & de Carvalho 2015: 11). Neumann and de Carvalho (2015: 16) are therefore of the view that a central component of small states' foreign policy is status-seeking, which refers to the actions taken by states to better their placement. Norway has for example, in the past, involved itself as peacemaker in the Middle East conflict, after which it was recognised by the US as playing the role of a good small ally and punching above its weight (Neumann & de Carvalho 2015: 11). Status-seeking can be an effective way for small states to conduct their foreign policy, since status is not only contingent on military capabilities, but also on non-material resources, such as values like democracy and human rights – aspects that small states can more readily attain (Duque 2018: 4). Status-seeking, as a strategy, allows states to “climb the global pecking order by being recognised as a ‘good’ state” (Wohlforth *et al.* 2017: 527).

Alternatively, Sutton and Payne (1993: 588) posit that a further option for small states is to seek collective security in a regional or universal organisation. For instance, states may rely on the UN to resist aggression on their behalf. This was a point made by Fox (1965: 777) much earlier, where she explains that European small states:

*[...] cling to the hope that the United Nations would contribute to their security  
[...] perhaps by offering some protection from hostile powers with illegitimate claims.*

However, the fact that the UN has on numerous occasions not punished aggression against small states<sup>24</sup>, makes the feasibility of such a strategy rather questionable (Sutton & Payne 1993: 589). Espindola (1987: 77) similarly writes that regional security arrangements may be a viable strategy for small states, as the regional security arrangements could intervene should a small state require security assistance. Such strategies are based on idealist interpretations, where states believe that they can pursue their foreign policy by relying on international rules of law for protection (Rogers 2007: 356).

Taking a different perspective, Richardson (1978: 64) proposes the bargaining model to elucidate the foreign policy of small states. The bargaining model argues that, in exchange for economic or military aid, small states (dependent countries) will comply with the foreign policy demands of larger states (Biddle & Stephens 1989: 412). A defining element of this relationship is that the powerful states secure the cooperation of the weaker states either by presenting them with rewards or enforcing punishment (Moon 1985: 317). Consequently, the foreign policy behaviour that weak states can pursue is compliant behaviour based on the preferences of more powerful nations.

Dependency theory, although also arguing that smaller states align their foreign policy with larger states, attributes their alignment to the economic interests of core countries penetrating the smaller states (Biddle & Stephens 1989: 412). Whereas the bargaining model emphasises the short-term nature of the relationship, the dependency model rather suggests that the foreign policy behaviour of the weaker states is conditioned by a long-term structural relationship (Moon 1983: 321). This means that the restricted behaviour of the weaker states is not only based on reward or punishment behaviour but rather on a history of relations. Moon (1985: 306) is a strong proponent of this view, holding that the economic, political, social and cultural dependency that defines the relationship between the dependent and dominant state works as 'consensus producing forces'. In other words, the dependencies create a situation where the weaker states naturally align their policies with those of the dominant state, which leads to consensus without the need for explicit coercion, as posited by the bargaining model.

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<sup>24</sup> For example, consider Indonesia's invasion of East Timor in 1975 or the ongoing dispute over the Western Sahara (Sutton & Payne 1993: 589).

Touching on the theme of compliance, which is prominent in the bargaining model, Carney (1989) suggests that such states' foreign policy can best be understood through the patron-client relationship. Such a relationship is characterised by compliance, where the patron expects that the client will support the patron in its vital interests (Carney 1989: 45). According to Shoemaker and Spanier (1984) – two of only a handful of scholars to describe inter-state relationships through the patron-client model – the key defining elements of this relationship is a decided asymmetry between the military capabilities of the patron state and the client state, such that security transfers are always from the patron to the client. While scholars argued that this model would no longer be relevant in the post-Cold War era, Veendendaal (2017: 574) dismisses this notion, and demonstrates, by looking at three island microstates, namely St. Kitts and Nevis, Palau and Seychelles, that the model is still relevant in affirming, specifically, that small states do not have the freedom nor independence to construct their preferred foreign policies.

Contributing to the literature on small state foreign policy behaviour, Hey (2003: 5) provides a list derived from the small state literature where she identifies various small state foreign policy behaviour characteristics. According to Hey's (2003: 5) list, small states are likely to demonstrate minimal involvement in international matters, focus on a narrow range of foreign policy topics, restrict their actions to their geographic area, prefer diplomatic and economic instruments over military options, adopt neutral stances, encourage collaboration while avoiding cooperation, and allocate an excessive amount of resources towards ensuring their physical and political security as well as their ultimate survival. This list reflects the earlier Realist assumptions that portray small states as insecure and with limited foreign policy options.

The main point to be made about the above is that these prevailing theories and concepts all suggest that small states have very little manoeuvrability in their foreign policy. As Browning (2006: 672) aptly suggests:

*Such approaches ultimately treat small states as objects of international relations, rather than subjects [...] Their foreign policies are taken to be responding to events rather than being able to shape them.*

While this was undoubtedly the prevailing logic during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, it would be amiss to suggest that there were no challenges to such interpretations. Most notably, Vandebosch (1964) and Fox (1965) were two of the first scholars to suggest that

small states may have some agency. For example, Vandenbosch (1964: 302) points out that some small states have argued that though they lack economic, military and diplomatic power, they are in possession of higher, nobler qualities. Contributing to challenging traditional portrayals of small states, Fox (1965: 784) explains that it is important to consider not only what small Western European states have to gain in their foreign policy objectives, but also what they can contribute. To support her argument, Fox points out that these states have provided almost a quarter of the experts for technical assistance programs, while also contributing large financial contributions to special funds, often much more than is required. A few years later, Fox (1968: 752) suggests that:

*Often ignored is the way in which certain kinds of small states themselves affect the international system [...] any particular small state may not be an “essential actor” in the system, but it would not be the same system without this class of powers.*

Singer (1972, cited in Hey 2003) contributes to this discourse, suggesting that while small states may not possess ‘coercive power’, they may well possess ‘attractive power’, which allows small states to exploit their importance to other states. The above challenge to the traditional literature is based on a revision or alternative understanding of power. Before delving into this alternative view, it is necessary to critically reflect on the concept of power, as will be explored below.

### **2.2.5. Defining power**

A concept that has yet to be defined in this study is ‘power’. At the outset, this study concurs with the assertion that power is central to the field of IR. This assertion is encapsulated by Guzzini (2017: 737), who states that power appears to be an explanatory concept that few can do without in the field of IR. Mattern and Zarakol (2016: 625) similarly point to the centrality of power, suggesting that power is deeply implicated in the international system, while Drezner (2021: 30) suggests that the centrality of power to the field of politics is indisputable. Such assertions justify the need to define power, even though it is frequently the subject of scholarly discussion, and readers may sigh at having to read yet another examination of power.

On that note, the study finds it important to clarify from the outset that the concept of power will be examined specifically within the context of IR, since power is a term that is discussed in a plethora of different fields. However, even when confined to the realm

of international relations this study acknowledges, as most other scholars have, that power is an extremely difficult concept to define (Bierstedt 1950; Dahl 1957; Bachrach & Baratz 1962; Emerson 1962; Bachrach & Baratz 1963; Baldwin 1979; Mearsheimer 2001; Nye 2004; Nye 2011; Drezner 2021). Considering this, this study notes that it does not attempt to resolve all longstanding debates about a definitive definition of power but rather locates a definition of power for this study and operationalises it.

Furthermore, as a caveat, it should be noted that this study does not differentiate between 'power', 'influence', and 'control', as scholars such as Bierstedt (1950), Lasswell and Kaplan (1950), and Hill (2016)<sup>25</sup> have done. Instead, it uses the term 'power' in a broader and generic sense, interchangeable with 'influence' and 'control' as explained by Baldwin (1979: 162). Delving into the intricacies of these terms would require more space than this study can accommodate. Additionally, several scholars see 'influence' and 'control' as a dimension of 'power'. Russel (1938: 24) refers to power that is exercised over humans as 'influence', and Rothgeb (1993: 27) incorporates 'control' as an element of 'power', while Nye (2011: 11) suggests that some people distinguish influence from power which is however, for Nye, confusing since the dictionary uses the terms interchangeably. These statements support this broader usage.

Drezner (2021: 31) highlights that the confusion surrounding the concept of power in IR literature is exacerbated by the myriad adjectives often appended to 'power,' namely: 'command power', 'compulsory power', 'co-optive power', 'hard power', 'soft power', 'sharp power', 'smart power', 'naked power', 'network power', 'social power', 'ideational power', 'institutional power', 'discursive power', 'productive power', 'protean power', 'symbolic power', 'relational power', and so forth. This study aligns with Dahl's (1957: 202) assertion that an entity that is described by many different labels with subtle or significant differences in meaning is, in all likelihood, not one single entity but many entities. Consequently, Dahl (1957: 2020) suggests that, considering this, it may be more productive to develop a range of theories but with limited scope, each with a context-specific definition.

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<sup>25</sup> For Hill (2016: 145), power is synonymous with hard power, while influence refers to soft power. Barnett and Duvall (2005: 2) do not seem to make a distinction between power and influence; however, they make a distinction between compulsory power, which refers to the instance where one actor has direct control over the other, and institutional power, where actors have indirect power over the others. The latter may be more similar to influence.

Barnett and Duvall (2005a: 41) concur with such an assertion, similarly explaining that power is exercised in various forms and manifests in various manners. This study interprets these two statements as meaning that in different contexts, scholars will employ different theories of power, and therefore, instead of searching for one grand theory of power, it may be more fruitful to understand power as a temporal concept, occurring in a particular context.

### **2.2.6. A definition of power for this study**

In light of the above discussion, the definition that this study adopts for the term ‘power’ is hybrid, drawing on multiple sources. It incorporates Dahl’s (1957: 204) definition, which is when A successfully manages to get B to do something B would not otherwise have done. Rothgeb (1993: 193) supports Dahl’s explanation, defining power as the ability of an actor to compel other actors to adhere to their preferences, even when those actors are unwilling to do so. Furthermore, power involves the ability of the actor to act independently, free from external pressures that might coerce the actor into pursuing undesired actions (Rothgeb 1993: 193). Additionally, to build on this definition, this study incorporates Deutsch’s (1978) understanding of power as the ability to change how results are distributed in a given environment (cited in Rothgeb 1993: 19).

In Rothgeb’s (1993: 22) analysis, he blurs the distinction between controlling actors and manipulating the environment (or changing the distribution of results) as he holds that changing the environment is usually a result of controlling an actor’s behaviour. However, this study retains this distinction between controlling actors and manipulating the environment since it holds that an actor can change the environment without necessarily having to control another actor. In this sense, power can be understood as either getting another actor to do what they would not ordinarily do or the ability to change the environment in which they operate. Nye (2009: 155) succinctly sums up this definition, stating that power refers to the extent to which a state is able to “control the political environment and get other countries to do what it wants”.

Considering this, at any stage in this study, should the researcher wish to make the point that a certain state has power, the researcher will need to then demonstrate that an actor has managed to (1) get another actor to do something the latter would not ordinarily do, or (2) the actor has been able to change the distribution of results. Here,

it should be noted that Dahl's (1957: 204) definition is undergirded by the notion of intentionality. That is, A has to have intended to control B because if B changed its actions under mistaken impressions that A wanted to change its behaviour, then this does not constitute power according to Dahl, since it was not A's intent that B does so. However, this study does not take intentionality to be a necessary component for power to be exercised. Rather, it agrees with Barnett and Duvall's (2005a: 50) assertion that power can be exercised even if unintentionally. That is, power exists even when those who are exerting power are unaware of how their actions may produce unforeseen consequences.

Furthermore, it is necessary to explain at what stage the actions of a state constitute 'changing the distribution of results' or 'changing the environment'. This study suggests that this refers to a situation where the actions of a given state cause a change in the status quo – a deviation from how matters are usually conducted. For example, a state being able to influence policy in a new direction could be an example of 'changing the environment', or a state successfully gaining access to something that it does not ordinarily have access to (i.e., alternative or new financing) would be an example of 'changing the distribution of results' and therefore evidence of having exerted power.

Lastly, part of this hybrid definition entails an understanding that, as explained by Emerson (1962: 32), power is not an attribute of an actor but always a property of social relations. That is to say, when discussing power in this sense, it is important to specify: (i) who is influencing, (ii) who is being influenced, and (iii) with respect to what (Baldwin 1979: 163). Simply stating that X has power is insufficient; such a statement is vacant unless, as Emerson (1962: 32) points out, it is specified over whom power is exercised. Barnett and Duvall (2005a: 41) support such an assertion, positing that the discussion of power in international politics cannot be had without including an examination of *how*, *why*, and in *which* cases certain actors have power over others. Essentially, then, the hybrid definition that this study proposes is a relational definition, since the study subscribes to the view that power cannot exist in a vacuum – it can only exist in relation to another (Bachrach & Baratz 1963: 633).

A relational definition of power has often been placed in contrast to a substantive or possessive definition (which is essentially a resource-based definition). Generally, a relational definition is employed to overcome the paradox that occurs in a possessive

definition, whereby one is obliged to maintain that the actor with the most or best resources will always have power, when this is often not the case. The relational definition used in this study, however, does not discount the fact that power can still be based on resources. Rather, 'relational' is used to argue that power only occurs when other actors are present. If a country, endowed with all the resources in the world, were to be the only country that existed, this would not constitute power, since power is always in relation to another.

### **2.2.7. The bases of power**

Having delineated what definition of power this study adopts, another important aspect in the discussion of power is what power has been based on, or what Baldwin (2013: 278) refers to as 'power resources'. According to Baldwin, power resources are defined as the "raw materials out of which power relationships are forged" (Baldwin 2013: 277). In this sense, the next section aims to determine what the raw materials are that allow A to get B to do what B would not ordinarily do, and what allows A to change the distribution of results? To answer these questions, it is worthwhile to explore power in a historical context. Tawney (1931: 230-231) explains:

*The foundations of power vary from age to age, with the interests which move men, and the aspects of life to which they attach a preponderant importance [...] It has had its source in religion, in military prowess [...].*

Taking the early 1900s as a starting point (it is not possible to discuss power since the beginning of times), power was understood as force and based on military might. Scholars such as Morgenthau and Taylor highlight this. For example, in determining what accounts for the power of a nation, Morgenthau (1948) explains that geography, natural resources, industrial capacity, military preparedness, and population are all vital sources of power. These can be considered bases of power because they allow a state to become more militarily strong. Writing on population, Morgenthau (1948: 91) posits that a large population is vital for the development and sustainability of modern war. Similarly, he states that natural resources are particularly important for the waging of war (Morgenthau 1948: 83). For Taylor (1955: xxiv), a Great Power is determined by its ability to conduct and wage war. Such an assertion alludes to the fact that power is rooted in military capability since he views military strength as the primary criterion for determining a state's power.

During the interwar period, power was increasingly conceptualised in terms of economic strength and ideological appeal. Carr (1946: 108) suggests that political power is based on military and economic means as well as power over opinion (propaganda power). However, economic strength is relevant only insofar as it contributes to the military instrument (Carr 1946: 113). In other words, economic power is ineffective if it is not supported by military weapons (Carr 1946: 119). Carr (1946: 136) also highlights that the First World War taught belligerents that an important component of war is the psychological aspect, which must supplement economic and military war. In this sense, propaganda power is an important aspect of power. Despite these nuances, Carr (1946: 109) maintains that “the supreme importance of the military instrument lies in the fact that the *ultima ratio* of power in international relations is war”. In this sense, economic strength and influence over opinion are important bases of power insofar as they contribute to the capacity of a state to wage war.

During the Second World War, power was characterised by total war capacity and technological advancements. This is encapsulated in the following words by Rothgeb (1993: 1), who explains that during the Second World War, “a country’s armed forces could seize hundreds of square kilometres in a day and could gobble up whole nations in a week”. As a result of the weak states’ lack of military capabilities, they had no choice but to yield to the strong (Rothgeb 1993: 2). Carr (1946: 109) holds that because of the ongoing potential for war, military power is the most central type of power. In fact, he asserts that ‘Powers’ are ranked by their military capabilities, including manpower (Carr 1946: 109). Gilpin (1981) is of the view that the term or concept of ‘power’ serves as a broad term encompassing the military, economic, and technological strengths of states. Mearsheimer (2001: 55-56) follows a similar logic, positing that the core of a state’s effective power lies in its military capabilities, which mainly depend on the size and strength of its armed forces.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, power was still defined in terms of the strength of the military, with Rothgeb (1993: 2) explaining that the Soviet Union was able to influence Eastern Europe to reflect its own priorities as a result of its cosmopolitan ideology and military capabilities. Similarly, so, military power played an important role in establishing liberal democracies wherever the British and Americans

were present<sup>26</sup>. Evidently, during both the Second World War and the Cold War era, power was based firmly on military strength. Scholars such as Gilpin posit that the ultimate power base is the capacity to wage war. Gilpin (1981: 24), for example, argues that although power may take many forms, “force is the ultimate form of power”. Hart (1976: 289) expresses a similar sentiment, explaining that military expenditures and the size of armed forces are often taken as measures of a state’s power in empirical research, while Baldwin (1979: 167) reasons that power is derived from resources such as money, tanks, bombs, information, and allies. Mearsheimer (2001: 55) aptly explains that during the Cold War, American leaders were concerned with the growth of the Soviet Union and their scientific achievements, since should these result in the Soviet Union becoming wealthy, then this could greatly increase their military capabilities.

Evident in the above, is the fact that power is defined in a distinctly Realist way, that is, the ability of A to get B to do what B would not otherwise do is based on material resources, in particular, military capabilities (Barnett & Duvall 2005a: 40). Consequently, until recently, the power of a state has been based off its military capabilities. This sentiment is succinctly articulated by Mearsheimer (2001: 55), who reasons that in international relations, a state’s effective power is fundamentally derived from its military force. Consequently, the field of IR has been preoccupied with military force. Baldwin (2013: 285) aptly explains that:

*The importance of military force has been exaggerated; the role of nonmilitary forms of power has been underestimated; and the field of international relations has been impoverished by its insulation from studies of power in other realms.*

### **2.2.8. Challenging traditional conceptions of power**

In the post-Cold War era, the concept of power has shifted towards considering how power may not only be limited to and based on material resources but also incorporates elements of symbolic and normative resources (Barnett & Duvall 2005a: 50). One of the strongest proponents of this view has been Joseph Nye, who

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<sup>26</sup> Of course, it must be pointed out that military power did not always result in positive outcomes for the actor with the military power, evident in the US’s defeat to a “militarily insignificant opponent” in Vietnam (Rothgeb 1993: 5).

introduced<sup>27</sup> the concept of soft power, to contrast hard power. In his discussion, Nye (2004: 6) points out that although Britain and France had more tanks than Germany (before 1940), this did not result in an accurate prediction of the outcome of battles. This raises an important point, namely that a resource-based definition of power, which is the definition apparent in the above explanations, has a shortcoming. Nye (2013: 2) argues that those states that have a considerable amount of power still do not always achieve their outcomes and as a result, power is not a guarantee that your aims will always be achieved. Rather, resources can at best be seen as “putative power, as a power base, or as potential power” (Rothgeb 1993: 20). Hill (2016: 146) similarly speaks of resources as the forces that determine the ambition and limits of a country’s impact on the world. However, resources in themselves are not operational instruments but need to be operationalised into capabilities (Hill 2016: 146). For resources to serve as power, there needs to be a power conversion (Nye 2013: 2).

Considering this, scholars such as Nye have introduced ‘soft power’ as an alternative conception of the ‘hard power’ discussed above. Soft power is defined by Nye (2013: 5) as “the ability to affect others to obtain preferred outcomes by the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuasion, and positive attraction”. Since his definition of ‘soft power’, Nye has further built on this concept to introduce the idea of ‘smart power’, which refers to the ability to successfully combine both hard and soft power (Nye 2017: 2). Thus, countries that do not necessarily have the most resources can project power, albeit soft power. Consequently, instead of thinking that military means are the only way to get one actor to act in a way they would not usually or to change the distribution of results, Nye suggests that there are a variety of ways that an actor can obtain the desired outcomes.

Given the attempts to rethink ‘power’ and what ‘power’ means, some scholars have started to give examples where small states have managed to accumulate power - they have started to demonstrate how major powers are not the only actors who can utilise their resources to overcome the objections of other actors (Barnett & Duvall 2005a: 50). Such arguments can be traced back to Vandebosch (1964: 302), who points out that certain small states have argued that though they do not have

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<sup>27</sup> Nye’s concept of soft power is arguably based on the much earlier work of Bachrach and Baratz (1963: 952) who explain how power can be exercised by setting the political agenda and preventing specific issues from being discussed. This involves, “manipulating the dominant community values, myths, and political institutions and procedures”.

economic, military or diplomatic power, they have other qualities that are higher and more noble. Speeches from small states at the UN frequently share such sentiments, evident in the speech by a representative from a Central American country who stated that:

*The only power to which my country dares to pretend is that which is derived from right and equity, and if sometimes it thinks of greatness it is in proportion to the splendour of the causes to which it always devotes itself [...] I am proud to be one of you and to represent among you a small country which compensates for the smallness of its territory by the width of its humanism (quoted in Vandenbosch 1964: 302).*

Other scholars, such as Keohane and Nye (1977) famously argued that questions about smallness and greatness should refer to questions of ‘clout’, which in turn refer to niche areas, where small states possess great issue-specific power (Neumann & Gstöhl 2004: 8). By examining how Switzerland was able to influence the financial services sector or how Saudi Arabia and Kuwait exerted influence in the oil sector, Keohane and Nye (1977), support their claim that small states have considerable power with regards to certain issues. Ingebritsen (2006) introduces the idea of ‘social power’, which describes how small Scandinavian states, which are militarily weak and economically dependent, can act as norm entrepreneurs in the international arena. In particular, Scandinavian countries, such as Norway and Finland, have focused on pioneering and advancing norms related to sustainable development practices, peaceful conflict resolution and the reallocation of resources from the wealthy to the less privileged (Ingebritsen 2006: 283). De Carvalho and Neumann (2015) similarly focus on the Scandinavian countries, positing that these countries punch above their weight by portraying themselves as ‘good’ powers, also through their involvement in mediation in conflicts and international crises. The idea of moral leadership or issue-specific agency is not limited only to the European context. Baldacchino and Corbett (2023: 219) explain how SIDS such as the Maldives and Seychelles have assumed a ‘moral’ sense of leadership, advocating issues that large states find difficult to ignore or speak out against.

Boon and Ardy (2017: 122) posit that some small states have demonstrated ‘pivotal power’ and others ‘systemic power’ which extends beyond the confines of their ‘smallness’. Drawing on the work of Dybczyński, Herbut (2017: 166) explains that the ‘smallness’ of a state may actually work in its favour as it may increase its capacity to

negotiate and manoeuvre or even manipulate the political system. Herbut (2017: 166) goes on to explain that in the globalizing world, ‘flexibility’ is becoming increasingly important. Coupled with this, a small state draws less attention than larger states, which, according to Herbut, makes it easier for the state to adapt to the changing environment and demonstrate flexibility. Radoman (2018: 84) suggests that small states can challenge the apparent power deficit that defines their existence if power is conceived of as a multidimensional concept consisting of economic strength, attractiveness of culture, and scientific excellence. This is based on the work of Goetschel (1998: 31), who argues that at times, smallness may be advantageous, especially in an era where military power has to contend with power exercised in other fields, such as in terms of culture and identity.

Picking up on a similar theme regarding how power may be exercised in a different field, Wright (2020) focuses on how small states have ‘creative agency’:

*Creative agency is the capability to define and exercise power on one's own terms, such that even in the wake of economic, military, or political dependence on larger neighbours, small states can distinguish themselves through what they may offer through diplomacy, niche economies, key resources, or as catalysts for regional and international cooperation and integration.*

Consequently, she explains that:

*If, however, one begins with a focus on the histories of these states themselves, creative agency readily emerges as a driving force to ensure that the small state not only survives but thrives in the world.*

Wivel (2021: 500) points out that small states have been able to pursue “smart” or “entrepreneurial” policies. One such example is Estonia, which has turned its exposure to Russian cyber threats into an opportunity to develop its own advanced digital capabilities. These competencies have not only enhanced its own national resilience but have positioned Estonia as a pivotal contributor to US cybersecurity policies and military operations. In this sense, attempts have been made in the more recent literature on small states to rethink the manner in which they do possess power. This is largely a result of arguing that a power base does not necessarily have to be a military one but can be based on other bases that may even be immaterial, or nontangible, such as morality, as was discussed in the above section (this will be further argued for in Chapter 6). Indeed, Wivel (2021: 493) writes that the grand strategy of small states has evolved from focusing fundamentally on questions

surrounding military security to also considering nonmaterial sources of power. This section further complements the section in Chapter 1, namely 'Emerging and challenging literature on SIDS' that discussed how scholars such as Baldacchino (2010), Bueger and Wivel (2018), Chan (2018), Malik (2020), Hume *et al.* (2021), Otto (2022), Morgan (2022), and Hawksley and Georgeou (2023) are demonstrating that SIDS, as a type of small state, have some form of agency or power.

### **2.2.9. Pinpointing a hierarchy of power**

Above, this study has demonstrated that there have been some challenges to the traditional conceptions of power. After the end of the Cold War, the concept of power was arguably broadened beyond just an understanding of military capabilities as the singular source of power. However, the question that now needs to be asked is whether this challenge has resulted in a paradigm shift in terms of conceptualising power, or not. This study maintains that despite the challenge, there has been no substantial paradigm shift in the conceptualisation of power. A resource-based definition of power still prevails and consequently, a hierarchy of power has been established. In fact, here it is useful to examine the exact words of Nye (2011: 9) – one of the most ardent promoters of soft power – who nonetheless makes the assertion that military capacity is “one of the most important international power resources”. This seems to then allude to what Baldwin (1979: 181) suggests much earlier on, namely that scholars who refer to an ultimate form of power imply that there seems to be a single continuum of power ranked according to effectiveness or importance. It is exactly this point that this study wants to make in terms of its review of power. Although different bases of power have been identified, especially in the more contemporary literature, this has not resulted in the understanding that small states may be just as powerful as large states but rather in the establishment of a hierarchy of power.

This study posits that contemporary events still demonstrate that it is largely an unspoken truth or unwritten rule that small states have a power deficit. In other words, in some instances, some small states have demonstrated their power in a specific field, such as 'social power'. However, if the question were asked, namely, who between the US and Norway is a more powerful actor, then few would say that Norway is the more powerful actor. Rothgeb (1993: 42) explains that “the political, military, and economic resources available to the United States owing to its large size” provide it

with the capacity to operate more effectively in some areas than other states, which may have economic resources but lack military resources. In this sense, it still seems to be implicit that smallness in some way always refers to a power deficit. Maass (2017: 220-221) describes small states as being small either because they are “poorly endowed with material resources” or because they are ‘little’, in which case a “lack of power is the key characteristic of a small state”.

This literature review asserts that small states are still mainly conceived of in the second sense of ‘small’, namely ‘little’, because they are, as postulated in the first definition, “poorly endowed with material resources”. There seems to be a link between ‘smallness’, a ‘lack of resources’ and a necessary ‘power deficit’. Nye (2011: 12) captures this sentiment in his comment that:

*In general, a country that is well endowed with power resources is more likely to affect a weaker country and be less dependent upon an optimal strategy than vice versa.*

This assertion by Nye (2011) links back to the claim made by Rothgeb (1993: 192), who similarly highlights the importance of resources, suggesting that although resources are not a sufficient condition for endowing a state with power, there is generally a close relationship between resources and the ability to influence others. Resources are in some way seen as a necessary condition, though not sufficient.

The claim that this study makes, namely, that in the contemporary era, the narrative regarding small states still seems to suggest that small states necessarily have a power deficit, is motivated by an analysis of how small states and Small Island Developing States are portrayed in the media. Hey (2003: 3), emblematic of the perceptual definition of smallness, points out that a state can be considered to be small “if other states’ peoples and institutions perceive that state as small”. This can be linked to Speech Act Theory (SAT), where speech acts “are actually constitutive of social reality” (Chiang 2015: 4). That is, speech acts are endowed with the ability to order social relations and organise institutional reality (Benoit-Barné & Cooren 2009: 24). In line with this, this study posits that the speech acts, that is, newspaper articles and the media narrative, order the way in which small states are perceived when it comes to concepts such as power.

For example, in a newspaper article appearing in the *South China Morning Post* it was argued that India’s assistance to the Pacific Islands states “could be a template for

great powers' engagement with small nations in strategic regions" (Seneviratne 2 June 2023). In this phrase, the most obvious indication of a power deficit is the fact that reference is made to 'great powers' and then to 'small nations', instead of 'small powers'. Thus, while scholars in the literature have in recent years pointed out how small states have power, this does not seem to reflect in the narrative in the media. This finding seems to confirm what Neumann and Gstohl (2004: 4) point out nearly twenty years prior, namely that 'small powers' are nowadays simply referred to as 'small states' and that this "usage certainly further underlines their presumed lack of power".

Secondly, in this statement, the great powers are put in the position of being able to engage with the small nations, as though the small states do not have the ability to engage the large powers. A further example is found in an online article published by the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) (Vartak 15 December 2022). In this article, it is stated that:

*Small Island Developing States (SIDS) located in the Western Indian Ocean such as Maldives, Madagascar, Comoros, Mauritius, and Seychelles, are being dragged into the great power rivalry.*

By using the word 'dragged', it appears as though SIDS have no ability to resist this and have no agency or autonomy. Furthermore, it is also stated that "the bigger powers have been engaging with the islands on a larger scale to boost their presence in this maritime expanse". Once again, emphasis is put on how larger powers are the ones with the power to engage. Rarely is it written that small states are engaging large powers. In another instance, the same author writes that:

*A heavy involvement of China in Madagascar puts it at a high risk of instability and political upheaval. This is a clear example of how the strategic interests of large powers can bring the SIDS to the brink of collapse (Vartak 15 December 2022).*

While this paper does not dispute the validity of the claim being made, it is interesting to note, once again, how SIDS are being positioned or framed in relation to great powers. Vartak (2022) argues that the interests of large powers can bring SIDS to a collapse, thus reinforcing the idea that it is the larger states that have the power and the SIDS that have a deficit of power.

Furthermore, the author of the ORF article points out that "powers such as the US, Japan, Australia, and India are largely concerned with the increasing influence of

China in the region”. Clearly, in the phrasing of this sentence, large states such as the ones listed are the ones that yield power. It seems almost inconceivable that a small state could be considered a power. In another journal article, similar claims are made with Robinson (2018: 337) stating that:

*Seychelles is one of a group of weak island states, along with its fellow Indian Ocean nations Mauritius, Madagascar, Maldives and Comoros, dependent on an ocean they have a constrained ability to manage.*

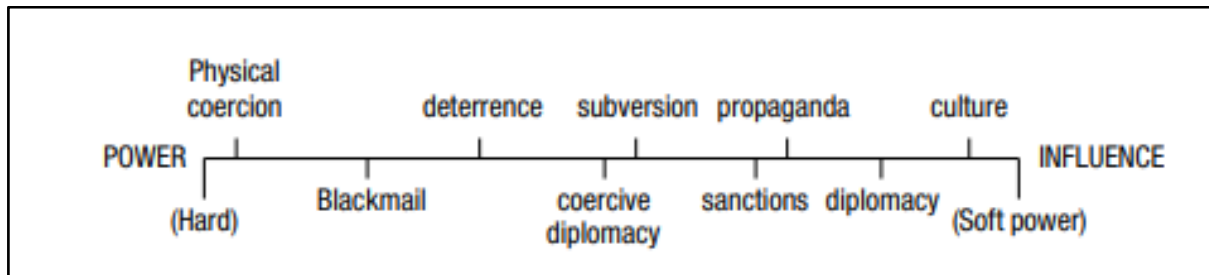
Robinson (2018: 337) then proceeds to explain that these nations are all characterised by a “meager and insubstantial” oceanic capability to collect and share information and that ultimately none of these states are maritime powers.

This study does not have the space to conduct an analysis of every single newspaper or journal article that has been written – for that would be an impossible task. It also recognises that there is an alternative narrative that does surface from time to time in the media about small states and agency. This media narrative parallels the emerging narrative in the academic literature that argues that small states have some agency and power. Keen and Tidwell (2024), for example, authored a policy brief titled “Geopolitics in the Pacific Islands: Playing for advantage”, while a piece from the Lowy Institute states that “faced with this new ‘great game’, Pacific Island countries have become diplomatic price-setters and are leveraging increased competition to maximise development benefits” (Sora *et al.* 2024).

On the one hand, this emerging narrative is still marginal and overshadowed by the dominant narrative that views these islands as powerless. On the other hand, the emergence of this alternative narrative does point to the tensions between the traditional view of small states and the emerging view of their strategic agency. In this sense, the strongest interpretation of this literature review is that an underlying assumption prevails, namely that small states necessarily have a power deficit. A weaker interpretation would recognise the tension between two competing narratives, one suggesting small states have some form of power or agency, and the other maintaining that they lack power.

This study specifically engages with the strongest form of the argument, which then, by implication, addresses the weaker interpretation. Ultimately, the main point the researcher makes, in relation to the literature reviewed on power, is that there appears to be a ‘hierarchy of power’. For example, while Hill (2016: 145) (see Figure 1 below)

posits that there is a continuum of power, with hard power falling on one side and soft power on the other side, it fails to consider the presence of a hierarchy.



**Figure 1.** Continuum of power in foreign policy

Source: Hill (2017: 145).

That is, while it is perhaps acknowledged that some small states may in fact have a certain type of power, such as ‘social power’, this concept of ‘power’ is relegated further down the hierarchy than other sources of power, such as ‘hard power’ – which the major powers wield. This reiterates Knorr’s (1983: 22-23) earlier assertion, namely that hard power or ‘brute force’ is seen as the ultimate form of power and dominates all other forms of power.

At this point, it might be necessary to briefly summarise the argument developed in this section: traditional literature depicts small states as having a power deficit, a claim or assumption based on a conception of power that is closely linked to the resources of a state – specifically its military and economic capabilities. This echoes the Realist viewpoint that maintains that states with the superior military and economic resources have a greater variety of foreign policy options available at any given point in time (Vital 1967: 78). Or, as Nye (2011: 8) holds, a state can be considered powerful if it possesses a considerable population, extensive territory, abundant natural resources, economic strength, military capability, and social stability. In more recent literature, there has been an attempt to challenge this by, for example, demonstrating how small states may have specific-niche areas through which they can exert power. In this sense, attempts have been made to re-conceptualise power as not necessarily (only) linked to tangible resources.

However, while scholars have made this point in the literature, it does not appear as though the dominant narrative and everyday reference to small states reflect such a re-conceptualisation. Ultimately, small states are still relegated to their role of being

passive objects with no power because of their size – they are marked by a power deficit. This power deficit leads to a sense of dependence where small states are dependent in their foreign policy on larger states. Considering this, it is apt to introduce a theoretical framework below that will be applied to the foreign policies of the small states in this study.

### **2.3. Theoretical framework**

Despite challenges to the notion that small states are necessarily defined by a power deficit and therefore are perceived to have very limited manoeuvrability in their foreign policy behaviour, this perception remains largely unaltered in the dominant discourse. In fact, here it is necessary to refer specifically to the words of Breuning (2007: 151) who, writing in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, explains that “small states are defined as those that have a rather limited capacity to exert influence on other states”. This is just one example demonstrating that small states are still widely perceived as being mostly ineffectual actors with limited power, dependent on major powers and not the other way around. Against this backdrop, this section introduces what this study considers to be one of the more recent frameworks for understanding the foreign policy behaviour of small states.

This framework, to be discussed below, is chosen for specific reasons. While traditional theories such as bandwagoning and balancing are predominantly based on the understanding that foreign options are shaped by the balance of military power, the theoretical framework utilised in this study emphasises the multifaceted constraints that shape small state behaviour, particularly for those in the global South. This includes not only a focus on security concerns but also economic dependence. In this sense, this study concurs with Wivel’s (2021: 493) observation that although recent transformations in the international system have not resolved “the security predicament of small states”, they have undoubtedly “transform[ed] the nature of the challenges faced by small states”.

Importantly, this is not to suggest a complete dismissal of realist frameworks such as balancing or bandwagoning. On the contrary, this study acknowledges their foundational role theorising state behaviour during periods when military capability was the central axis of global politics. Indeed, this study recognises that to some extent, these frameworks appear to have an increasing relevance in a time period

where military power may be resurfacing. Bueger and Stockbruegger (2022: 200), for example, point to the growing militarisation in the Western Indian Ocean, exemplified by China's establishment of its first overseas naval base in Djibouti in 2017 and the growing military presence of other powers such as the US and Japan in the region.

While acknowledging this fact, this study does not adopt these frameworks as the core theoretical framework. Rather, the framework proposed below offers a more contextually appropriate framework for analysing the foreign policy behaviour of small states in an era marked by interdependence. That said, this study does return to the concept of hedging in Chapter 6, where it considers how elements of hedging behaviour might be incorporated into an alternative framework for small state foreign policy behaviour.

In this regard, the framework originally proposed by Jeanne Hey (1993) and then further refined and utilised by Marijke Breuning (2007) provides the more elaborate, recent and applicable framework (however, not without its shortcomings as will be discussed in 2.3.2) especially in the context of the foreign policy behaviour of small states<sup>28</sup>. Their framework focuses specifically on the type of foreign policy behaviour small states pursue, where they take it as a starting point that a small state is dependent on a larger state, which is a premise that this study argues, is still the dominant assumption in, not only in the literature but also in everyday parlance. Although Hey (1993) was the original creator of this framework, this study initially uses Hey and Breuning's interpretations in tandem since they supplement one another.

### **2.3.1. Introducing Hey and Breuning's framework**

According to both Hey (1993) and Breuning (2007), the foreign policy of smaller states (specifically in the global South) is limited by their reliance on a more powerful state. Their dependence means that they have four foreign policy orientations that they can pursue, namely: (i) *consensus-oriented*, (ii) *compliant*, (iii) *counter-dependent* and (iv) *compensation*. A *consensus-oriented* foreign policy is one in which the leader of the smaller state willingly aligns their foreign policy with that of the dominant state (Breuning 2007: 152). The idea of consensus originates from the work of Bruce Moon (1985: 305), who, drawing on the work of Neil Richardson (1981), explains that a

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<sup>28</sup> This framework is particularly relevant because it discusses the foreign policies of small states in the global South which contrasts the earlier work that considers predominantly small states in Europe.

consensus-oriented foreign policy is one in which policy agreement may be reached without prior consultation. This is because policymakers in both countries share a mutual understanding of appropriate foreign policies, therefore eliminating the need for coercion (Hey 1993: 552). In this case, the foreign policy preferences of the small states' leaders conform to the preferences of the major players.

However, in instances in which a small state does not align its foreign policy voluntarily, then the more powerful state may pressure the smaller state into doing so, which results in what Hey (1993: 545) calls a *compliant foreign policy*. Compliance specifically refers to the situation where the smaller state is convinced to adopt a position that is contrary to its original position (Richardson 1981: 89-90). In contrast to the consensus foreign policy, the compliance foreign policy emerges against the wishes of the smaller states' leaders (Hey 1993: 552). The result is that its foreign policy will reflect the interests of major powers as opposed to their own national governments (Hey 1993: 8).

Should the smaller state choose not to align its foreign policy, then it may pursue a *counter-dependent* foreign policy. Hey (1993: 549-550) suggests that the key defining element of a counter-dependent foreign policy is a leader's dissatisfaction with the dependent position of their state, while Breuning (2007: 152) further explains that this type of orientation manifests in an intransigent attitude towards this dependence. In this case, such states are frustrated with their dependence and try to lessen the implications of their dependence, with the result usually being that the leader/s of the more powerful state are displeased (Breuning 2007: 152). Hey (1993: 549) specifically writes that a counter-dependent foreign policy is characterised by an 'anti-core' foreign policy, and a defining feature of this policy is that it must distinctly aim to reduce economic or political dependence.

Lastly, small states may pursue a *compensation* orientation, in which the leaders of these states will challenge the leaders of powerful states with the specific aim of appeasing domestic audiences (Breuning 2007: 152). Earlier on, Hey (1993: 552) explained that in such a case, the policymakers are generally not necessarily starkly opposed to their dependent position but rather develop this stance "to mollify domestic opposition to dependence". In other words, foreign policymakers prioritise the desires of their domestic audience over their own preferences (Hey 1993: 550). The key

distinction between a counter-dependent and a compensation foreign policy lies in the source of the anti-core sentiment. In a counter-dependent approach, this sentiment arises from the leaders' own frustration with the state's dependence on external powers. In contrast, a compensation policy reflects anti-core sentiments driven by domestic pressures, as leaders respond to the demands of their domestic audience.

Apart from the four types outlined above, Hey (1993: 551) also refers to one final type, namely 'independent foreign policy,' which she defines as a policy that originated autonomously as a result of a country's dependent situation. This type of foreign policy is driven by the country's own internal motivations and circumstances and can be either anti- or pro-core. However, this study does not refer to this final type, since Hey (1993: 551) specifically describes this as the only type of foreign policy that is not classified based on the outcome of policies but rather on the process. Therefore, to determine whether a country pursues such a foreign policy would require an investigation into the process through which the policy was formulated. Since this study does not focus on foreign policy as a process, and rather on foreign policy as an orientation (see 1.2.1.), it falls outside the purview of this study to investigate this type of foreign policy.

Having examined both Hey and Breuning's contributions to small states' foreign policy typologies, this study will focus specifically on Breuning's final articulation of a framework for the foreign policy orientations of small states, which omits the final type ('independent') originally included by Hey (see Table 1 below for a summary)<sup>29</sup>. Breuning's framework is selected primarily because it aims to depict the foreign policies of developing nations in the global South, while Hey focuses specifically on states in Latin America. Additionally, Breuning's work, published in 2007, offers insights that represent the perspectives of more contemporary scholars.

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<sup>29</sup> At times, the research may still refer to Hey where additional depth is required.

**Table 1.** Summary of Breuning's foreign policy types

<b>Foreign policy type</b>	<b>Policy outcome</b>	<b>Policy alignment</b>	<b>Foreign policy drivers</b>
Consensus	<i>Pro-core</i>	<i>Alignment between policy preferences of core and periphery countries (original alignment existed, therefore no coercion needed)</i>	<i>Similar preferences to larger power are already in place</i>
Compliance	<i>Pro-core</i>	<i>Alignment between policy preferences of core and periphery country (original misalignment prior to coercion)</i>	<i>Coercion by larger power</i>
Counter-dependence	<i>Anti-core</i>	<i>No alignment between policy preferences of core and periphery country</i>	<i>Displeasure with dependent relationship</i>
Compensation	<i>Anti-core</i>	<i>Non-alignment between policy preferences of core and periphery country</i>	<i>Domestic pressure</i>

### 2.3.2. Critique of Breuning's framework

While Breuning offers an insightful description of the foreign policy orientations that small states can pursue, this study finds difficulty with her distinction between the *compliant* and *consensus-oriented* foreign policy on the one hand, and the *counter-dependent* and *compensation* foreign policy on the other hand. Breuning explains that the difference between a compliant and consensus-oriented foreign policy lies in the motivation behind the actions. In a consensus-oriented foreign policy, the choice to align a country's foreign policy with a more powerful state's foreign policy is based on the understanding that the smaller state lacks the resources to be able to act

independently. Breuning then explains that this results in a voluntary choice to align its foreign policy. In the case of a compliant foreign policy, the decision to align the foreign policy with a more powerful state comes only after the smaller state has been subject to the influence of the larger state.

However, this study takes issue with this explanation because if a state chooses to pursue a consensus-based foreign policy because it realises that it cannot act independently, then surely this cannot be argued to be a completely voluntary decision. Rather, the very fact that the country recognises that it is constrained by a lack of resources means that it is in some way left with few options but to align its foreign policy with the larger state.

A second difficulty with the above-mentioned framework is that it is rather difficult to determine whether a country has been exposed to the influence of a more powerful state and whether this has been the determining factor in changing its position. While there may be a few exceptions where a country was clearly coerced into changing its foreign policy stance, most of the time it is less obvious. That is to say that even if it is accepted that *Instance A* is an example of a country being influenced to change its decision, the question can then be asked: when is there an example of a country not being influenced? Or, what constitutes influence? Is it a visit by a foreign minister, or is it the threat of sanctions? Answers to such questions, in all likelihood, rest only with the decision-makers themselves, which this study does not have access to. Even if it did, such information is often treated as confidential and as such, it is unlikely that such information would be shared with the researcher.

Thirdly, this study finds that it is very difficult to differentiate between the counter-dependent and compensation foreign policy orientations. In the case of the former, Breuning reasons that a state will exhibit 'defiant' behaviour that usually results in the displeasure of the more powerful states, while in the case of the latter, she posits that leaders will try to antagonise the leaders of more powerful states. When expanding on the notion of 'antagonising', this study argues that this could also be likened to acting in opposition, counteracting or acting in a hostile manner towards major powers which may irritate them (Collins Dictionary 2023b). In this sense, these two foreign policy orientations are very similar. In fact, Breuning (2007: 152), goes so far as to suggest that:

*The difference between consensus-oriented and compensation-oriented foreign policies will be difficult to discern from a state's behaviour alone. Here, too, the difference is primarily in the motivations that drive the policy choices.*

Here, it is useful to refer back to Table 1, where it was stated that a difference between the two orientations is the fact that in a compensation foreign policy orientation, the actions of the government are driven by domestic pressures, whereas in a counter-dependent foreign policy, the action is driven by a displeasure of the government itself with the dependent relationship. Once again, while this may provide a point of differentiation, it is difficult to do so without intimate knowledge of the decision-making process, which is a process that is usually not disclosed in speeches<sup>30</sup>.

The aim of the above-mentioned critiques is not to undermine Breuning's framework, but rather to suggest that it is very difficult to accurately determine when a compliant versus consensus-oriented, and counter-dependent versus compensation-oriented foreign policy is being pursued, without a careful analysis of the motivations behind the actions, which would require an intense analysis of the decision-making process.

Graham (2017: 137), writing about Breuning's orientations, confirms this, explaining that it is difficult to differentiate between these orientations when one lacks in-depth knowledge of the foreign policy-making processes of particular states. While exploring this would undoubtedly be a valuable exercise, it does not fall within the aims of this study. Consequently, this study simplifies Breuning's framework to two main orientations: namely, compliant and counter-dependent. This simplification does not detract from Breuning's framework, since it still captures the two fundamental positions: whether a state's foreign policy is aligned with a major player or whether it reflects an anti-core sentiment.

### **2.3.3. Operationalising Breuning's framework**

Considering the challenges identified in Breuning's framework, this study now proceeds to slightly modify Breuning's framework to suggest that a state can pursue either a (1) compliant-oriented or (2) counter-dependent foreign policy orientation. To reiterate: this study does not lose any analytical power by reducing the types of foreign policies from four to two, since the primary focus here is on whether the outcome of the foreign policy aligns or does not align with that of a major player, rather than delving

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<sup>30</sup> This study will use speeches to infer what a state's foreign policy orientation is (see 3.4.3.1.).

into the domestic influences behind the policy decision. Having said that, in the case of the compliant foreign policy, this study suggests that there is a visible ‘pro-core’ sentiment, while in the counter-dependent foreign policy, an ‘anti-core’ sentiment is evident. To apply Breuning’s framework, it needs to be operationalised, which will be achieved by converting her descriptions and explications into questions. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, it will be said that *Country X* can be said to be pursuing a:

- *Compliant foreign policy orientation*: if it can be demonstrated that it aligned its foreign policy with that of a major player. In this instance, it is important to define and delimit what is meant by ‘alignment’. That is, how can it be accurately determined that a state has, or has not, aligned its foreign policy with another state? According to Wilkins (2012: 56), alignment implies a situation where there is agreement on either one or numerous important issues. Miller and Toritsyn (2005: 333) further explain that alignment refers to a relationship between two actors where one can expect to see a certain sense of policy coordination, while Ward (1982) maintains that alignment does not necessarily manifest in formal treaties but can be observed by a variety of, what he calls, behavioural actions. Erkomaishvili (2019: 31) states that alignment is a continuous and malleable process and denotes the starting phase of special cooperation between actors. Importantly, what needs to take place for something to be considered ‘alignment’ is support in the domain of foreign policy that is either vocal or supported by tangible action (Erkomaishvili 2019: 31). Given this, in this study, alignment refers to actions taken by a state on various issues that demonstrate support for another state and its preferences. This ‘support’ implies a pro-core sentiment. Consequently, a key question to ask when applying this framework is: are there instances where one of the specified states aligns its general foreign policy specifically with that of major powers?

- *Counter-dependent foreign policy orientation*: if it adopts an anti-core, or anti-major power foreign policy, that can be linked to feelings of frustration arising from its dependence on the major power. However, more than just trying to find ways to lessen the dependence, such states take on a distinctly anti-core or anti-major power foreign policy. This may antagonise the leaders of major powers since the actions taken towards the major powers are defiant (Breuning 2007: 152). According to the Collins Dictionary (2022b), ‘antagonise’ amounts to “make hostile, annoy or irritate” or “to act in opposition to or counteract”. When understood this

way, countries such as Venezuela and North Korea can be said to be pursuing a counter-dependent foreign policy. For example, Thies (2017: 674) reviews the foreign policy of Venezuela through the lens of National Role Conceptions (NRC) and discusses how Venezuela, specifically under Hugo Chávez, took on a strong 'anti-imperialist agent' under which it combats the hegemonic pretension of the United States. Considering this, a key question to ask is: are there instances where a state adopts an anti-core sentiment or hostile position towards major powers because it is frustrated with the feelings of dependence?

Finally, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by 'major powers'. That is, if this study seeks to determine whether the identified states align their foreign policies with major powers, then it is necessary to specify who the major powers are. Buzan and Wæver (2004: 46) suggest that great powers typically penetrate several neighbouring regions, while superpowers range over the entire global system. According to Schweller's (2017: 4) conceptual framework that classifies powers into either 'great powers', 'major powers', 'middle powers', or 'minor powers', a major power is a great power of the second rank. That implies that while they can exert a significant influence on both the regional and global level, unlike great powers, they do not excel in all the constituent elements of state power. Perhaps the most obvious examples of great powers would be the US and China, while Japan, Germany, and France are examples of major powers.

For the purposes of this study, a category of 'major players' is used, encompassing both Schweller's (2017) conceptions of major and great powers. The term allows the study to consider a wider range of states. Numerous states are currently classified as 'emerging powers' that, although not necessarily quite at the level of a 'major power', should still be considered as 'major players', especially relative to their roles in their respective geographical regions and to the Small Island Developing States being discussed. This would include states like India and Australia. India, for example, may not be considered a traditional major power but is undoubtedly an emerging power. Australia is also not necessarily a traditional major power, but in the context of the Pacific, is a pivotal player and justifiably a major player.

Here it is important to note that within the Indo-Pacific, the balance of power is undergoing transformation, consequently introducing numerous new players

(Brewster 2024: 2). While the US has traditionally been the dominant power in the Indian Ocean and is expected to remain a strong power in the foreseeable future, several other players, such as India, are assuming a more pronounced role (as mentioned above). Brewster (2024: 4) identifies India as a major regional power, with India having the largest military in the Indian Ocean and determined to counter China's influence. China may be labelled a major power in the Indian Ocean, especially through its BRI initiative (Brewster 2024: 7). In addition, other middle powers, such as Australia and France are also playing an increasingly important role in the Indian Ocean Region, with Australia possessing one of the most capable navies in the region, and France perceiving itself as a sovereign actor due to its island territories (Brewster 2024: 9). Finally, Brewster (2024: 11) is of the view that Indonesia, Japan and South Africa are also important middle powers who are assuming a growing role, with Japan, in particular, having political and economic engagement with most of the states in the region. To avoid switching between 'major', 'great', 'regional', and 'emerging' powers, and becoming entangled in the definitions of these respective categories, this study adopts the term 'major players<sup>31</sup>' to refer to these states.

## 2.4. Conclusion

This chapter, serving the purpose of a literature review, began by defining small states. Small states were demonstrated to be an elusive and nebulous term to define since they can be defined using material, perceptual, relational or behavioural criteria. Despite the variety of definitions, a consensus emerged from the traditional literature that portrays small states as insignificant actors – pawns in the games of great powers. Based on this understanding, small states are said to be able to pursue foreign policy orientations such as balancing, bandwagoning, seeking non-alignment, or engaging in a policy of mediation, amongst other orientations. These orientations suggest that small states – including Small Island Developing States – have limited manoeuvrability in their foreign policy.

These foreign policy orientations stem from a narrow understanding of power. Despite efforts in the more contemporary literature to provide an alternative understanding of power that is not only based on material resources, power is still largely understood

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<sup>31</sup> It is this consideration that reflects in the title of this thesis, which refers to 'The Foreign Policy of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the Indo-Pacific vis-à-vis Major Players', instead of in relation to major powers.

or associated with Realist conceptions. When framed this way, Small Island Developing States are consequently rendered as necessarily being defined by a power deficit and relegated to a passive role in international society. In this rendition, they are perceived to be ineffectual actors that can make no change to the environment in which they exist, cannot impact the international system, and are always dependent on a larger state.

Based on Hey's (1993) earlier work, Breuning (2007) provides an emblematic framework for understanding the foreign policy orientations of small states, including small island developing states. This framework, which was operationalised by this study, posits that small states can pursue either a complaint or counter-dependent foreign policy. The framework is based on two key questions: can evidence be found that a state aligned its foreign policy with a more powerful state? Or are there indications that it adopted an anti-major power sentiment? This framework was operationalised with the aim of applying it to Solomon Islands, Fiji, Seychelles, and Mauritius (in Chapter 4) to demonstrate that it is not sufficiently able to account for the foreign policies of these states.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

*If the map shows a different structure from the territory represented...then the map is worse than useless, as it misinforms and leads astray.*

- Korzybski (1933)

### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to clearly and coherently explain how the researcher reaches the conclusions of this thesis. As made evident in the quoted phrase from Korzybski (1933), any framework, theory or concepts the research comes up with, need to accurately reflect reality. To demonstrate that this is indeed the case, this section lays out clearly and transparently the steps that are taken to reach the conclusion. This chapter begins by firstly situating the study within the researcher's broader worldview, namely an interpretivist paradigm. This is important since it informs the reader of the philosophical assumptions of the researcher, which in turn lays the groundwork for the explanation of the research design, which in this study is qualitative. Following this, the chapter delves into the research methods, with a focus on sampling, research instruments, data, and analysis. This section essentially details the logic behind the thematic analysis of government speeches. Any challenges associated with the data are also addressed. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the ethical considerations. From the outset, it must be noted that there are certain sections that may overlap since the differing aspects that constitute methodology in its entirety can never be completely separated.

### 3.2. Research worldview

The aim of research is to “know more about something than we did before engaging in the process” (Merriam and Tisdell 2016: 3). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016: 5), this can be achieved by conducting either pure, applied, evaluation or action research. The research conducted in this study is a form of pure research, or basic research, which can be defined as:

*Motivated by intellectual interest in a phenomenon and has at its goal the extension of knowledge [...] its primary purpose is to know more about a phenomenon (Merriam and Tisdell 2016: 3).*

The idea of knowing more about a phenomenon necessitates a discussion on ontology and epistemology, that is, in the case of the former, claims about the existence of

things or the essential nature of reality; and in the case of the latter, the process by which whatever exists can be understood (Grix 2010: 66). The ontology of this study is subjectivist or nominalist. That is, this study does not subscribe to the belief, as Realists do, that the 'real world' exists separately from humans and their interpretations but rather posits that one's experience with the world 'out there' is informed by one's subjectivity. An individual's subjective-cultural beliefs organise one's experiences into categories (Neumann 2013: 94). This study, therefore, rejects the notion that there are necessarily fixed or universal truths about small states (specifically, SIDS) and concepts such as power. How small states and related concepts are viewed will fundamentally depend on the perspective adopted and by whom.

In terms of epistemology, this study is constructivist – that is, meaning about the world is constructed and not discovered. To produce knowledge, one must “inductively observe, interpret, and reflect on what other people are saying and doing in specific social contexts” (Neumann 2013: 95). In this sense, the role of the researcher is not to discover any external truth about states, but rather to interpret how states construct their realities, and how concepts such as dependency and power are shaped by the experiences of these actors. The knowledge that is produced about small states, and specifically SIDS or Ocean States<sup>32</sup>, is an interpretation about the actions of these states in a specific setting. The nominalist ontology and constructivist epistemology inform the worldview, or research paradigm, of this study, in the sense that behind the pursuit of knowing more about a phenomenon, which is the aim of this study, there is necessarily a worldview or paradigm that undergirds the researcher's approach to research.

Considering this and before proceeding to explain what the research design of this study is, it is necessary to first outline the philosophical foundations, or worldview, which undergirds this study. Guba (1990: 17) defines a worldview as “a basic set of beliefs that guide action”, or put differently, the general orientation about the world. It is important for researchers to espouse what their worldview is as it explains the choice

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<sup>32</sup> The term 'Ocean States' is introduced by the researcher in 5.2.3 as an alternative and counter-framing of the label SIDS.

behind the research design, namely, whether a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods approach is chosen (Creswell 2009: 6).

This study is grounded in an interpretive (also referred to as constructivist) orientation. As opposed to more positivist understandings of reality, which assume that there is an observable and measurable reality that exists 'out there', an interpretive orientation maintains that reality is formed through social interactions, and there exists no one, universally observable reality (Merriam & Tisdell 2016: 9).

Merriam and Tisdell (2016: 9) explain that an interpretivist orientation assumes that there can be multiple interpretations of a single event and that researchers do not 'find' knowledge but rather construct it. This aligns exactly with the constructivist epistemology explained earlier. In *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften (Introduction to the Human Sciences)*, Dilthey (1922) makes the fundamental distinction between *Naturwissenschaft* (Natural Sciences) and *Geisteswissenschaft* (Human Sciences), where Human Sciences is deeply rooted in the notion of *verstehen*. The German word *verstehen* means something akin to a deep, empathetic understanding of a phenomenon (Neumann 2013: 103). It is exactly this sentiment that the study seeks to encapsulate, namely, to transcend surface-level observations and delve into the nuanced interpretations of small state foreign policy orientations.

In summary, within the context of this study, there are several key aspects that define this orientation. Firstly, the purpose of an interpretivist inquiry is to describe, understand, and interpret a phenomenon (Merriam and Tisdell 2016: 15). The study is deeply concerned with understanding how small states navigate the relationship with major players and how these relationships can be interpreted beyond conventional Realist understandings.

Secondly, this orientation assumes that the researcher serves as the central tool for gathering and analysing data (Merriam & Tisdell 2016: 15). In this study, the researcher is directly involved in interpreting speeches, interviews, and other sources of data, which are shaped by the researcher's interpretation of the context. Thirdly, the product is richly descriptive (Merriam & Tisdell 2016: 15). By engaging with the speeches of the respective states, it provides a rich description of the behaviour of small states. In many instances, direct quotes are used to achieve this richness, allowing the reader to observe what the researcher is analysing. Furthermore, the study provides as many

specific examples as possible from the varying states, further giving descriptive insight into their experiences.

### 3.3. Research design

According to Haradhan (2018: 24), the choice determining methodology in research is “directed by the questions being raised”. The main focus of this study is to arrive at a better, more nuanced and refined understanding of *how* small states, and specifically a type of small state, namely SIDS, conduct their foreign policy in relation to major players. In this sense, the aim of the study is not to measure anything, but rather to explore. Considering this, a qualitative research design, which is defined by Mbaka and Isiramen (2021: 30) as “exploratory, and seeks to explain ‘how’ and ‘why’ a particular social phenomenon, or program, operates as it does in a particular context” is most suitable for answering the research question. Ngulube (2015: 8) further explains that research design is “a plan that describes how, when and where data are collected and analysed”. The ‘how’, ‘when’ and ‘where’ of this study will be discussed under the next section, namely the ‘research methods’ section (see 3.4.).

It may be fruitful to further describe the research design of this study as being inductive. The researcher gathers data (specifically through the thematic analysis of speeches)<sup>33</sup>, conducts field interviews and obtains information from documents to build (or revise) concepts and theories. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016: 17) explain, the inductive approach does not imply that the “researcher has a blank mind devoid of any thoughts about the phenomenon under study”. In fact, the theoretical framework introduced in 2.3.3. helps guide the inquiry and interpret the data. However, the framework in inductive approaches is not examined deductively as it would be in the case of an experiment. Rather, the framework is refined and evolves as data is collected.

It is furthermore important to make the following observation. Considering the fact that this study analyses four states namely, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Seychelles and Mauritius, it might be tempting to assume that this is a case study, or multiple-case study design, which is a type of qualitative research design or approach. However, this study does not adopt a multiple-case study design and rather uses these SIDS as

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<sup>33</sup> This was specifically used to answer the second sub-question, namely ‘What type of foreign policies do SIDS, as a sub-set of small states, actually pursue?’

illustrative examples. Although this study shares similarities with case study research, such as exploring multiple cases over time through an in-depth data collection, the distinction lies in the respective purpose of the research. In a multiple-case study design, the cases are central to the focus of the research. In the case of this study, the analysis of the four states is an illustrative example to support broader theoretical arguments. In the section below, the justification for the selection of said states will be discussed in more detail.

### **3.4. Research methods**

This section specifically outlines the sampling strategy pursued in this study, the research instruments that are utilised, the type of data sources that are collected through these instruments, and the analysis employed to interpret the data. Collectively, these aspects constitute the research methods.

#### **3.4.1. Sampling**

##### *3.4.1.1. Selection of states*

This study chose four specific SIDS in the Indo-Pacific as illustrative examples, namely: Solomon Islands, Seychelles, Fiji and Mauritius. Patten and Newhart (2019) accurately explain that “it is usually impractical to study an entire population”. This statement holds true for this study, since analysing the foreign policy of 18 Indo-Pacific SIDS is, if not impossible, simply beyond the scope of this study. Furthermore, while quantitative research often tries to “draw a sample, study it, and infer that what is true of the sample is probably also true of the population”, qualitative research, which is the approach adopted in this study, does not always necessarily try and generalise results to large groups, but rather wants to explore “a topic that adds knowledge about a process or a concept” (Patten & Newhart 2019: 114).

In this sense, while the former relies on random sampling to give every individual or group an equal chance of being selected and thereby minimising any potential bias, the latter, namely qualitative research rather makes use of nonprobability samples that do not guarantee an equal change of selection amongst persons or elements in the population (Patten & Newhart 2019: 100). The latter takes place because a central goal in qualitative research is to find information-rich cases (Christensen *et al.* 2014: 173). Within this context, one such method, which is utilised in this study, is purposive

sampling (or judgemental sampling). Purposive sampling occurs when researchers use their knowledge of a certain population or group, or in this case, countries, to select those states that they believe will be a good source of information (Christensen *et al.* 2014: 173). Specifically, in this study, the aim is not necessarily to make generalisations about all SIDS, and as such, purposive sampling is not a limitation.

Solomon Islands, Fiji, Seychelles and Mauritius are selected for various reasons. Firstly, before concretely selecting any country, a feasibility study was conducted to determine whether there would be enough data available on the islands for the researcher to analyse. While each country is worth consideration, there are sometimes constraints, such as states that rarely publish speeches. In this case, it would require the researcher to make use of another data collection tool, namely interviews, for the primary analysis. However, due to the costs of travelling to some of these islands, such as Palau or Tuvalu, it would not have been feasible to conduct interviews, and therefore, the selection of states was in part motivated by pragmatic concerns.

Furthermore, SIDS such as Niue, which is in a free association with New Zealand, and Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), and Palau, which are in a free association with the US, were not considered. Since these states are directly associated with an external power, their foreign policy is inherently shaped by the major player. Importantly, in the case of these four states, their free association came either directly or shortly after their independence and as such reflects historical circumstances rather than independent policy choices.

The second consideration was based on identifying states that could be considered as 'information-rich', where in this context, 'information-rich' refers to states that exhibit distinctive foreign policy practices that have the potential to contribute to theoretical arguments about SIDS agency. In this sense, these states were not chosen for representativeness but rather for their capacity to potentially reveal the nuanced behaviour of SIDS. Solomon Islands is chosen specifically because it represents an illuminating case in terms of its behaviour vis-à-vis major players. Unlike other states that are cautious in articulating their stance on controversial affairs, Solomon Islands has been bold in articulating its stance, often daringly calling out major players. This states inclusion was therefore based on the fact that it could provide insight into how small states navigate relations with major players, which is a central theme of this

study. Fiji was chosen on the grounds that it represents a country that is making remarkable progress in pioneering and pushing for the environmental concerns of SIDS to be heard. Similar to Solomon Islands, Fiji has also historically been vocal in calling out major players, especially in the domain of the environment. The vocality of both states suggests that they may be information-rich cases, which warrant further investigation.

The motivation behind the choice of Seychelles is based on the fact that Seychelles played a prominent role during the fight against Somali piracy, especially during 2009 and 2018, and managed to carve out a niche for itself, which has been fairly well documented in the literature (see Bueger & Wivel 2018). Seychelles has also played a leading role in advocating for the Blue Economy. The island's inclusion is therefore motivated by the fact that it could contribute to understanding how SIDS are able to pursue distinct and innovative policies despite the theoretical arguments that position them as passive. Lastly, Mauritius is chosen on the grounds that it has historically had strong ties with India but has now also garnered considerable attention from China. Furthermore, its relations with the UK have been tumultuous, considering the matter of the Chagos Archipelago. This would thus be an illuminating case to analyse in terms of how it navigates its foreign policy amid geopolitical competition. Finally, since this study is concerned with the Indo-Pacific as a whole, and not only the Indian or Pacific Ocean, it seems intuitive to select two cases from each region.

It is important to clarify some of the similarities and differences between the selected cases. At a general level, all states selected are SIDS. Furthermore, they all face common challenges relating to climate change (as discussed in 1.2.2.). However, there are a few differences between them that need to be recognised, if only so as not to commit the mistake that they can all be generalised under one stroke of the brush. Below are some crucial differences:

- The islands in the Indian Ocean are relatively new societies with no native populations. Seychelles, for example, was only inhabited by settlers in 1770 (Allen 2022). This contrasts with the Pacific Islands, which have indigenous populations of over 4000 years old. For example, according to Finney (1998: 420) Austronesians first moved to Fiji between 1500 and 100 B.C. The reason why this is important to consider is that it can explain the differences in how the

islands portray themselves in the international arena. Those with indigenous populations often have a stronger connection to the ocean, which is why they may self-identify as Large Ocean States more readily<sup>34</sup>.

- States such as Fiji and Solomon Islands have vast differences in terms of their economies, etc. They also differ in terms of history and culture, with Fiji belonging to the Polynesian ethnic group and Solomon Islands forming a part of Melanesia. These differences are important to consider, especially in terms of having a more nuanced understanding of how they conduct themselves in regional groupings, specifically in the Pacific Islands Forum.
- The developmental level of the respective four countries differs. Seychelles, for example, is considered a high-income country, whereas Solomon Islands is a low-income country. Fiji is considered a middle-income country and Mauritius an upper middle-income country. On the one hand, such factors are important to keep in mind since they can impact how a state conducts itself in the international arena. On the other hand, though, the labels of 'high-income' etc., are in themselves problematic (a point specifically stressed by SIDS) since, although Seychelles may be a high-income country, it is not any more adept or less vulnerable than Solomon Islands to exogenous shocks.

#### *3.4.1.2. Selection of years*

Fujii (1993: 75) writes that one of the key aspects of research is delimiting the research problem. That is, “we need to know precisely what the researcher intends to do [...] we need to know in equal candour precisely what the researcher does not intend to do” (Fujii 1993: 73). That said, one of the major delimitations that had to take place in this study, namely the selection of states, has already been discussed above. A further delimitation that needs to be accounted for, however, is the motivation behind choosing the years 2017 – 2024 for the thematic analysis.

These dates were chosen for two interrelated reasons: firstly, this study was not designed to be a longitudinal study, rather focusing on a specific time period (discussed in more detail in the next paragraph). While expanding the timeframe to

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<sup>34</sup> The interviews conducted in Solomon Islands indicated that Solomon Islands is intent on calling itself a Large Ocean State, while the interviews in Mauritius reflected a hesitance to solely referring to the Island as a Large Ocean State. Unfortunately, it is not in the purview of this study to examine this more deeply, although this could be one of the recommendations for future research, as discussed in 7.6.

include earlier years (e.g., from 2010 or even 2000) could certainly offer additional insights, it would have introduced greater variation in political leadership across the selected states, requiring the researcher, to, for example account for domestic political dynamics that influence the foreign policy approaches of selected states, which is a highly relevant but distinct line of inquiry that extends beyond the scope of this study. This study examines the approach of the selected states, specifically within a defined geopolitical ‘moment’ – one in which the Indo-Pacific narrative officially began to feature in the official discourse of major players such as the US and, perhaps more importantly, where China was explicitly labelled as a threat. Extending the timeframe backward would potentially risk introducing time periods that operated under different strategic paradigms.

Secondly, the year 2017, is symbolic because it represents the year in which the US released its first Indo-Pacific strategy, namely its “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” strategy (Harding 2019: 62). Prior to this, the US focused primarily on the Asia-Pacific, a region where it has maintained influence since 1945 (Scott 2018: 20). However, by the end of 2017, the term ‘Indo-Pacific’ had supplanted the ‘Asia-Pacific’ with the former being mentioned eleven times in the US National Security Strategy, while the latter was used minimally (He & Li 2020: 1).

This change signalled a deeper concern: the growing strategic challenge faced by a rising China. In its 2017 strategy, the US explicitly framed China as a threat, labelling China as a “revisionist state” and “strategic competitor” of the US (He & Li 2020: 2). The competition between China and the US is largely driven by China’s rise and the threat that this poses to the United States’ vision of a rules-based international order (Grieco 2018: 6). Indeed, the US suggests that China is seeking regional hegemony and the displacement of the US in the Indo-Pacific. This assertion is supported by reference to China’s assertiveness in the South China Sea, its potential to overtake the US by 2030 to become the world’s largest economy, its BRI strategy, and its ambition to become the number one world power status with a world-class military by 2049 (Matheswaran 2021). The year 2017, thus, marks not only a shift in language, a change from the ‘Asia-Pacific’ to the ‘Indo-Pacific’ but an intensification of geopolitical rivalry.

This shift also indicated a departure from previous US-China relations. Hu (2020: 128) notes that while the competition between the US and China has been growing since 1972, the relations markedly intensified in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and specifically during Trump's first presidency. While during the Bush and Obama administrations the two states competed, they still cooperated "in economic relations as well as in regional and global governance issues" (Hu 2020: 128). However, Trump's administration has led to an increased deterioration of the relationship. Furthermore, while this was language distinctly adopted by President Trump, President Biden continued with this narrative, labelling China "as a 'near-peer' competitor intent on displacing the United States in the Indo-Pacific" (Zongyou & Yunhan 2021: 160).

Furthermore, the release of the US strategy catalysed several other important events in 2017, such as the revival of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the US, India, Japan and Australia) and an emphasis of the term 'Indo-Pacific' in the White Paper of Australia (Chang 11 December 2017; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2017). As such, 2017 represents an important year in which the term 'Indo-Pacific' gained currency and led to physical manifestations such as countries conducting joint military exercises. Taken together, the period 2017 to 2024 encapsulates a distinct and intensified phase of US-China competition in the Indo-Pacific. By narrowing the study to these years, this research focuses specifically on how SIDS have positioned themselves within this evolving geopolitical context.

#### *3.4.1.3. Selection of speeches*

Furthermore, only the speeches of presidents/prime ministers or senior government officials were considered. This correlates to the level of analysis of this study, namely, the state level. The speeches that are used in this study were specifically those that were addressed to the international environment. As a rule, speeches that pertain to domestic affairs are not analysed. This is therefore one criterion used. Furthermore, the speeches from the UNGA are specifically from the opening sessions since this is often the opportunity for states to express their general orientation on a wide range of affairs and topics.

Importantly, it must be noted that this study adopts a qualitative approach with regard to thematic analysis. That is to say that this study does not rely on quantitative

techniques to 'measure' how many times a certain word is mentioned in a speech. If this were to be the case, it would be important that a large number of speeches are analysed so as to ensure that the findings are reliable and not only representative of a few cases. Rather, this study, in line with the qualitative nature of inquiry, is interested in, as van Maanen (1979: 520) explains, coming to terms with "the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world". In this study, it is more important to understand 'what' is being said and 'how' it is being said. Therefore, this study does not specify a predetermined number regarding how many speeches need to be analysed, as this is less important. Rather, there is emphasis, for example, on reaching a point of saturation, that is, the point at which no new information features in the speeches during the specified period under consideration.

### **3.4.2. Research instruments**

To provide a clear explanation of the research instruments used in this study, it is necessary to identify two different parts of the study, which are labelled by the researcher as the 'primary analysis' (Chapter 4) and the 'secondary analysis' (Chapters 5 and 6). The primary analysis consists of the researcher collecting speeches – a form of secondary sources (to be discussed in detail below). Speeches were located either through a search on the government's website or on the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) website archives. This is therefore solely desktop-based research. All speeches were downloaded into a document and then categorised from the earliest (those published in 2017) to the most recent speeches (those published in 2024) (the question of how they were analysed will be discussed in 3.4.4.). Information such as when the speech was delivered, by whom, and in what context was also recorded (see Annex D). Here it must be noted that it was relatively easy to access the speeches for states such as Fiji since every speech is published timeously on their website. However, in the case of Mauritius and Seychelles, it was at times a bit more difficult to find the original speeches since there was an incompleteness of the archives.

The 'secondary analysis' consists of a critical engagement with secondary sources, such as journal articles and book chapters, which were downloaded through the University of Pretoria's library webpage. Semi-structured elite interviews were also

utilised to complement and provide nuance on the primary analysis. Elite interviews, otherwise known as ‘expert interviews’ or ‘interviews with influential people’, engage with individuals who are in decision-making positions, possess specialised expertise and hold a high social status (Niu 2024: 3). These interviews took place in-person (i.e., Seychelles and Mauritius) and online (i.e., Solomon Islands). Gaining access to participants was conducted through a two-pronged strategy, namely (1) interlocutors and (2) snowball sampling. Fujii (2018: 41) posit that an interlocuter is any person who is willing to assist the researcher in serving as a bridge to potential participants, while Merriam and Tisdell (2016: 98) explain that snowball sampling is a common form of purposeful sampling where once a few key participants have been identified, they refer the researcher to other participants.

In the case of the interviews, there were several challenges. The first major challenge was gaining access to government officials who were willing to conduct interviews. This corresponds to what Niu (2024: 3) calls the “difficulty of recruiting respondents”. In the case of Seychelles, this was not too difficult. The government was extremely welcoming and willing to assist the researcher, with the researcher even being able to interview a minister. This was made possible through an interlocutor who set up all the interviews for the researcher. In the case of Solomon Islands, a snowball sampling strategy was utilised. After each interview, the researcher asked whether the participant could refer the researcher to any other participants. However, in the case of Mauritius and Fiji, gaining access was exponentially difficult, and the researcher was unable to conduct interviews with government officials despite immense efforts<sup>35</sup>.

Secondly, considering that these are elite interviews, there was a power imbalance or power asymmetry that existed between the researcher and the participant. In the context of elite interviews, researchers are often intimidated by the power of elite respondents, and therefore reluctant to challenge the views espoused by the elite participants or to ask critical questions (Niu 2024: 4). In the researcher’s own experience, this was often tied to the understanding that asking too many critical questions might make the participant uncomfortable and less willing to provide answers to subsequent questions. To mitigate this, the researcher would often wait

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<sup>35</sup> The researcher was able to conduct three interviews with representatives from the Indian Ocean Commission in Mauritius, and one interview with a former advisor to the foreign ministry (see Annex B for more details).

until the end before asking specific follow-up questions that might provoke a negative response from the participant. This enabled the researcher not to jeopardise the other questions that still had to be posed. Furthermore, by the end of the interview, the researcher had usually been able to build a certain level of trust and rapport with the participants, which made them more comfortable in answering questions that they may not have answered in the beginning.

A further significant challenge, particularly in online interviews, was participants agreeing to a time and date for the interviews but not attending. This occurred in both Seychelles and Mauritius. In this regard, the researcher learnt from Fujji's (2018: 44) assertion observation that "the key was learning not to expect that accessing interviewees would happen according to *my* schedule, because it rarely did [emphasis in original]".

Another major challenge in conducting interviews with government officials was their caution and, at times, reluctance, in 'genuinely' answering questions, especially questions that were related to geopolitical issues. For example, when questions were raised about the influence of China, participants tended to give very vague answers or, in one instance, even questioned (in a joking manner) whether the interviewer was trying to make them pick sides. To mitigate this, the research changed the framing of the question, first asking about other partners and actors such as India, the US and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) before then mentioning China. Furthermore, it must be noted that it was often the case that once the participant felt more comfortable in the interview (after having answered a few questions) that they then tended to talk more freely.

An additional challenge in conducting elite interviews was ensuring that the questions were neither too simple that the participants thought they were a waste of time, but also not too complicated that the participants did not understand them. Hochschild (2009) notes that "few interview subjects think the ways that social scientists think, so posing one's own analytic puzzle to the subject usually just elicits puzzled stares and silence or stammers". This is a lesson that the researcher learnt rather quickly (after the first interview). The researcher had to adapt questions to make them more suitable for the knowledge possessed by the participant, which is based on practical knowledge from lived experiences (Niu 2024: 19).

Finally, while most of the interviews yielded rich data, there were some exceptions. For example, in one case, the participant kept attending to phone calls. Not only did this detract from the time available, but the participant was rather distracted and often had to ask for the questions to be repeated. In another instance, the richness of the interview was impacted by the poor internet connection, with the questions having to be repeated several times, and some of the responses being largely inaudible. In these instances, the interviewer adapted by either asking the questions again later in the interview or asking the questions to another participant.

Niu (2024: 13) explains that strategic adaptation is key in overcoming some of the challenges mentioned above. In the context of this study, the researcher learnt several techniques to adapt to the challenges, one of which is how to strategically frame the interviewer in a manner that positions the researcher as simply passionate about the research topic and eager to learn more. This was especially pertinent since the researcher was addressing geopolitical competition, which is an issue that island states generally do not want to solely focus on. There are at least two reasons for this: (1) geopolitical competition is often not considered or perceived to be the number one threat to the islands; rather environmental concerns assume this position; (2) island states often have a 'friends to all' foreign policy sentiment and therefore when being questioned about which partners are the most important to them, may feel as though they are being forced to pick sides.

In this sense, their attitude to answering these questions was retrospectively lived out in the interviews. However, since analysing geopolitical competition and islands' responses to this was the aim of this study, the researcher had to find a way to still ask the questions she had prepared. The researcher specifically tried to ease any tensions and extend the message that she was not a reporter or journalist. Furthermore, attempts were made to dispel any fears that this was a 'one-way probing' where the aim was to publicise information. Rather, the researcher emphasised that participants had the option to remain anonymous.

Finally, having discussed interviews as a research instrument, the final research instrument is a literature review. Although a literature review is an essential part of every and any study and thus not typically included under the research instruments, it may be briefly alluded to in this instance as a data collection tool, since the literature

review help identify the framework in Chapter 2 – Breuning’s framework – that is used to guide the analysis of the data in Chapter 4.

### 3.4.3. Data

Data can be categorised into four different categories as demonstrated in the table created by the researcher below (see Table 2). For this study, three categories of information are used (indicated in bold in the table). In particular, primary data (specifically, interviews), primary sources (specifically, speeches), and secondary sources (existing literature such as journal articles) are utilised. In each instance, it is necessary to justify their inclusion as appropriate data and explain the parameters of their use. As a brief overview, primary data, in the form of semi-structured interviews, was collected to gain insights directly from government officials. Primary sources, such as the speeches analysed, served the purpose of capturing specifically how the respective states conceived of their foreign policy orientations and the role they play. Secondary sources, such as journal articles and books, were used to engage in theory-building as well as position this study within the existing scholarly debate. This study acknowledges a potential limitation, namely that the fact that reports from international organisations were not used in terms of understanding the role that states play. While such an inclusion may have been valuable in providing external perspectives on how the foreign policy of the four states is perceived by others, the emphasis was on understanding how these states themselves perceive their role, and as such, the interpretation of their roles was restricted to emanating from speeches.

**Table 2.** Types of information

	<b>Primary Data</b>	Secondary Data	<b>Primary Sources</b>	<b>Secondary Sources</b>
<b>Definition</b>	<b>‘Original’ or ‘new’ data collected by the researcher</b>	Existing data collected by someone else for another purpose	<b>Original documents that have not yet been edited or reinterpreted</b>	<b>Materials that analyse or interpret primary sources</b>
<b>Example utilised in this study</b>	<b>i.e. Interviews</b>	N/A	<b>Speeches</b>	<b>Journal articles and books</b>

### 3.4.3.1. *Justification for the use of speeches*

The initial justification for the use of speeches is based on the fact that the states being studied (with the exception of Fiji, which released its first foreign policy White Paper in September 2024) have not released foreign policy white papers frequently or at all. As such, the researcher had to consider what could be used as an alternative, since even though states do not always publish their foreign policy in an explicit document, it must still exist and is therefore often conveyed through speeches.

Eban (1983: 393) explains that “what statesmen and diplomats say is often as vital as what they do [...] it would not be far-fetched to go further and declare that speech is an incisive form of action”. Le Prestre (1997: 17) further expands on this, explaining that public speeches “allow the leadership to formulate political representations [...] and consolidate and legitimize its own identity at the international level”. He maintains that leaders' speeches are one of the central instruments for the construction of reality (Le Prestre 1997: 17). Modelski (1962: 19) explains that policymakers need to announce their country's position on a matter. One way to do so is to use speeches. Objectives need to be communicated, which can occur through speeches (Modelski 1962: 19). Shlapentokh (2009: 306) further reiterates the above, explaining that one major way in which information regarding the views of a state on foreign affairs can be gained is by analysing their public statements, such as speeches. Consequently, Shlapentokh (2009: 307) notes that “the speeches and articles of the leaders should be, as a rule, treated as relatively authentic reflections on the position of the government”. In this sense, speeches are taken to be a central avenue that states take to express their foreign policy and are therefore suitable for the study.

Another way to infer foreign policy could have been to look at how a state votes on issues at the UNGA. However, looking at voting patterns has shortcomings since it can be over-simplistic and does not capture the nuance or feelings of a country on that specific issue. For example, when looking at how a country voted on the Russia-Ukraine issue, it is more informative to look at what a state said about how it voted on the topic at hand, as opposed to only looking at how it voted.

A case in point is Seychelles. By just looking at the UNGA voting pattern, it would appear as though Seychelles is aligning with the US (and the Western world), considering that it voted in favour of a UN resolution condemning the invasion of Ukraine on 2 March 2022 (Shiraz 27 May 2022). However, the president simultaneously made clear in an interview that Seychelles “welcomes Russia with open arms” (Tan 27 May 2022). This confirms the assertion made by Hey (1995: 4), namely that UN voting patterns are restricted in providing a comprehensive understanding of a state’s foreign policy, considering that a large share of foreign policy actions occur outside of the UN. Considering this, this study acknowledges that UNGA voting patterns and the sentiments related to it are, for the purposes of this study, limited in what they reveal about a country’s foreign policy orientation. Therefore, speeches are selected as the unit of analysis.

#### *3.4.3.2. Justification for the use of interviews*

While speeches are the central source of data used for this study, interviews were used after the speeches and were analysed as a form of data triangulation and to gain more nuanced insight beyond what the speeches could provide. Firstly, triangulation is valuable to research since it addresses the concerns potentially raised that a study’s findings are solely based on a singular source, a lone investigator’s blinders, or a single method (Patton 2015: 975). In the context of this study, it may be argued that the conclusions are based solely on a single source of data, namely speeches. In this sense, interviews are used as a supplementary source of data to the speeches, alongside secondary sources. The interviews are not coded in the same way as the speeches, nor are they subject to the thematic analysis. Rather, they are used to interrogate whether the findings of the speeches are consistent with what the participants are expressing. This is important since the thematic analysis was conducted manually, and therefore, although the researcher did everything to ensure credibility and trustworthiness, completely removing bias would be impossible. Therefore, interviews<sup>36</sup> are one way in which credibility is enhanced.

For example, the researcher noticed in the thematic analysis that Solomon Islands was adopting what the researcher coined as an ‘activist-challenger’ role in the

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<sup>36</sup> The interviews were transcribed using professional transcription software paid for by the researcher. For accuracy, after the transcriptions were generated, the researcher listened to the interviews and read the transcription in tandem, to account for any irregularities.

international arena. During the interviews, the researcher used the opportunity to first indirectly pick up on whether this was indeed an accurate portrayal of Solomon Islands behaviour and secondly to directly ask whether such an assertion could be seen as accurate or whether it was misguided or needed refinement.

On that note, before continuing, it is worth briefly defining interviews. Merriam and Tisdell (2016: 108) explain that the central aim of an interview is to obtain “a special kind of information,” while Patton (2015: 426) reasons that interviews are utilised when the researcher requires access to a person’s perspective that cannot be gained through mere direct observation. This study specifically uses semi-structured interviews, which are interviews that are guided by a list of questions, but the exact wording or order of questions is not determined ahead of time (Merriam and Tisdell 2016: 110-111). These types of interviews were chosen because they align with the interpretivist worldview of this study, namely that individuals define the world in their own ways. While semi-structured interviews involve asking set questions, these are flexible and more open-ended, allowing the participants to provide insight from their perspective (see Annex A).

For this study, the researcher conducted two fieldwork visits and one virtual fieldwork visit. From 18 to 25 February 2024, the researcher visited Seychelles and conducted 11 interviews. The participants were all government officials from Seychelles, although they fell under different ministries. For example, the researcher interviewed participants ranging from the Ministry of Agriculture, Climate Change and Environment and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Tourism to the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Trade. Since the level of analysis is at the state level, it was important to interview government officials specifically. It must be noted that originally the plan was only to interview those specifically within the Foreign Affairs Ministry. However, this changed quite quickly. As Fujii (2018: 44) explains, “newly acquired insights might lead the researcher to seek out interviewees she may not have considered before”. In the researcher’s context, she quickly understood that the Foreign Affairs Ministry was not the only ministry that could provide insight. For example, the Ministry of Agriculture, Climate Change and Environment could provide excellent insight into Seychelles’ environmental initiatives internationally.

From 30 June to 8 July 2024, the researcher travelled to Mauritius. The researcher conducted four interviews. One interview was conducted with a former senior government official. Three were conducted with members of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) and while not at the level of analysis this study was interested in, they did provide interesting perspectives.

Two online interviews were conducted with government officials in Solomon Islands in November 2024. One participant was from the Office of the Prime Minister, while the other was from the Ministry of Home Affairs and had until recently served in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade. On average, the interviews ranged from 60 to 90 minutes, although the online interviews went up to three hours at times.

The researcher anticipates that it may be argued that the sample size for the interviews was neither consistent between the states nor large enough. However, there are explanations for this. Firstly, the interviews are not the primary data collection tool and are used to enhance the findings and confirm the reliability of the findings in the primary analysis. Along with this, qualitative research emphasises the quality of the information over the quantity. Secondly, another consideration is that in all instances, the researcher exhausted all avenues to conduct interviews. Here it is crucial to recognise that elite interviews with government officials are often difficult to conduct due to several factors, such as the availability of the participants and their willingness or ability to speak.

In the case of Mauritius, for example, the country, at the time of conducting the interviews, had not yet passed a Freedom of Information (FOI) Act (Ramsamy 2023). One individual in Mauritius explained that civil servants are not obligated to speak to individuals such as the researcher, and this could be a factor explaining the researcher's difficulty in acquiring access to participants. Ultimately, the researcher was unable to conduct a single interview with a currently serving Mauritian official. Similarly, the researcher tried to establish contact with Fijian government officials for over 5 months. All avenues were exhausted, and no government members were willing to be interviewed. The fact that states such as Seychelles and Solomon Islands had their 'secondary analysis' complemented by interviews does not decrease the reliability of the findings for Mauritius and Fiji. The researcher argues that considering the fact that Mauritius and Fiji are two of the 'larger states' of the four islands (in terms

of their government size and resources), there were often more than enough speeches to make accurate assessments.

Finally, it may be suggested that there is a difference between conducting interviews in person and online in terms of the quality of information. Fujii (2018: 42) posits that “some contacts, for instance, might give more information face-to-face than by telephone or over the internet”. The researcher, while acknowledging this observation, did not find a correlation between the quality of the discussion in an online interview or in-person interview. While, of course, an online interview is less ‘personal’ in the sense that the researcher is not able to read the body language of the participant, it should also be noted that in some cases it can make the participant more at ease. In the case of the Solomon Islands, for example, due to the unreliable internet connection, the interview had to be conducted with the camera off, thus relying solely on the audio. While the researcher cannot speak on behalf of the participant, she did get the impression that it may have put the participants more at ease.

#### *3.4.3.3. Justification for the use of secondary sources*

Finally, secondary sources, such as journal articles and books, are used to situate the findings of the primary analysis within the existing scholarship. This enables the researcher to draw on existing concepts that were, however, not usually associated with this specific research, and demonstrate how they can be suitably applied. The reason why this is important is that the researcher recognises that data does not just exist out there with meaning but can only emerge with reference to the broader academic discourse. The secondary sources facilitate this process by offering the researcher the tools and language needed to transform the raw findings into insights that could have relevance to the academic community.

The secondary sources used were not selected arbitrarily or randomly. Rather, they were selected on the basis of being most relevant to the study. The ideas and concepts taken from journal articles and books were those that were identified as being particularly well-suited in explaining, illuminating, and capturing the phenomena explored by this study. Ultimately, the criteria used for selecting secondary sources are driven by the relevance and conceptual utility of the sources.

#### 3.4.4. Analysis

In this study, the ‘primary analysis’ (see 3.4.2.) is driven by a thematic analysis. This approach moves beyond “counting explicit words or phrases and focuses on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data, that is, themes” (Guest *et al.* 2012: 12). Clarke and Braun (2013: 3) explain that one of the defining features of qualitative research is that it focuses on words as data, whereas quantitative research uses numbers as data. It is exactly the fact that this study focuses on speeches, that is, words, and specifically, the content of these speeches, that makes a qualitative approach suitable for this study.

The thematic analysis is conducted using two approaches simultaneously. Firstly, the thematic analysis is guided by the framework that was derived from Marijke Breuning’s work in Chapter 2. This operationalised framework provides two guiding questions:

1. Are there instances where one of the specified states aligns its foreign policy specifically with major players?
2. Are there instances where a state adopts an anti-core or anti-major player sentiment specifically because it is frustrated with the feelings of dependence, and does it adopt a hostile position towards these major players?

In this sense, the researcher analyses the speeches with the aim of finding themes that would provide an indication whether a given state is aligning its foreign policy or adopting an anti-core or anti-major player sentiment. However, while the researcher conducted this analysis, it became evident that states do not always make it explicitly clear that they do not align with a major player. For example, consider the following speech from Palau at the 79<sup>th</sup> UNGA:

*We continue to strengthen our national security through partnerships with allies, including the United States, Australia, Japan, and Taiwan [...] Palau reaffirms its strong and enduring relationship with Taiwan and calls for its meaningful participation in international organizations. Taiwan’s exclusion undermines the principles of inclusivity and cooperation that the United Nations represents (Senior 26 September 2024).*

In this instance, it can relatively easily be ascertained that Palau is aligned with the US and the broader West. It explicitly labels the US as its ally and the reference to Taiwan makes it clear that it certainly does not have any relationship with China. However, if a state is not aligned with another state, then it is unlikely that it would publicly

articulate that it is not aligned with another major player, unless non-alignment as a foreign policy orientation is specifically adopted. States may want to avoid alienating or antagonising major players, disrupting regional cohesion or avoiding domestic backlash. They may, of course, then suggest that they are non-aligned, which was the case for some of the states in this study (see 4.4.2. for example). However, if this phrasing is not employed, then there needs to be another way of interpreting their position. It would be a fallacy to suggest that no mention of alignment necessarily reflects no alignment. In this sense, the researcher makes use of a second approach.

The second approach utilises elements of what is known as ‘framework analysis’. Goldsmith (2021: 2061) explains that:

*The overall objective of framework analysis is to identify, describe, and interpret key patterns within and across cases of and themes within the phenomenon of interest.*

Framework analysis is a form of thematic analysis whereby the researcher, instead of starting with pre-identified themes, and then using these as a framework for coding, immerses herself in the data (known as data familiarisation) and makes notes as to what the key themes are in relation to the research question – in this case, the two questions identified above (Ritchie & Spencer 2011: 9). After conducting the data familiarisation, the researcher will then do a framework identification, whereby the researcher aims to construct an analytic structure combined with a priori concepts (those informed by the original research aims) and the concepts that have emerged in the previous step (those themes that emerged during the data familiarisation stage) (Ritchie & Spencer 2011: 10).

In this study, the researcher is guided by the two questions from Breuning’s framework that has been operationalised in 2.3.3. Concomitantly, the researcher immersed herself in the data, allowing for themes to emerge. Here, it is important to note that this process of coding for themes was done manually since it was not possible to determine beforehand whether any specific words or phrases would be searched for. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, government speeches are often marked by strategic ambiguity or silences which a computer doing the coding would have difficulty picking up on. Macnamara (2018: 12) explains that humans have the ability

*To understand nuance, figures of speech that should not be read literally, sarcasm, and other characteristics of language that, despite development in*

*neurolinguistic programming and artificial intelligence, remain beyond the capabilities of computer software.*

Additionally, there needs to be an acknowledgement of the fact that states do not always express things in the same way. By coding manually, provisions were made for this.

Saldaña (2021) points out that coding and thematic coding are often confused. He argues that there is no such thing as ‘thematic coding’ because “a theme can be an *outcome* of coding, categorization, or analytic reflection, but it is not something that is, in itself, coded” (Saldaña 2021: 19). However, there is a technique called thematic analysis, which can be based on coding. Here, he proffers that:

*It is important to note that coding and theming are not either/or procedures. Analysts, if they wish, can code their data first, cluster the codes according to commonality, and construct a thematic statement rather than a short category label from the assemblage (Saldaña 2021: 257).*

According to Saldaña (2021: 6), when spoken about in the qualitative sense, coding refers to:

*A researcher-generated interpretation that symbolizes or “translates” data, and thus attributes meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, theme, assertion of proposition development, theory building, and other analytic processes.*

As manual coding is an interpretative act (Siphe & Ghiso 2004, cited in Saldaña 2021: 12), the generation of the codes is subsequently explained. On the one hand, the speeches are analysed, or coded, for themes that explicitly answer the two questions posed. For example, a theme arises, namely, of Seychelles’ pursuing ‘African solidarity’. This is used to make the case that it prefers to align with a collective, multilateral grouping as opposed to aligning with major players. Another theme that arises is ‘friends to all’, again suggesting no single alignment but also not suggesting anti-core sentiment. A final theme that arises is ‘multilateralism’, suggesting a preference for conducting a foreign policy that prioritises engagements with international organisations, as opposed to alignment or isolation. Each country analysis, therefore, has a section where extracts are quoted from the speeches that suggest whether they are pursuing a compliant or counter-dependent foreign policy orientation.

On the other hand, the second aspect of coding is conducted to code for themes that could be understood as roles. Specifically, the researcher draws on Holsti (1970) for inspiration and similarly 'converted' statements made in the speeches into roles. By analysing the speeches of different states and then coding the speeches, Holsti (1970) was able to come up with a minimum of 17 different role conceptions that a state can have. For example, some role conceptions include, 'mediator-integrator', which is a role a state enacts if it feels it has a special task to mediate conflict between states; 'developer', which is the role a state enacts if it feels it has an obligation to assist underdeveloped countries; or 'isolate', in which case a state limits its external contact as much as possible and emphasises the fear of involvement from external actors (Holsti 1970: 269-270).

This study drew on a similar approach to Holsti's in terms of interpreting the speeches because sometimes states' foreign policies are not explicitly mentioned. The process involves the researcher reading through the speeches of the selected states and highlighting phrases that hint at a state's position or orientation towards a certain issue and is guided by the two identified questions. These are then coded thematically, and then 'converted' into a role. Holsti's method is used specifically because, as mentioned previously, sometimes states are not explicit about their stance on a matter. However, all states envision a role for their state in the international arena, which may be articulated through speeches, implicitly or explicitly. This provides an approach to help answer the guiding questions.

For example, if a state often makes reference to the fact that it wants to come up with new solutions as opposed to following the status quo, this is then interpreted as depicting a 'pioneering' role. In this sense, at the end of the thematic analysis, the main role conceptions of each state are summarised. This is used to answer the first sub-question, namely, whether states pursue either a 'compliant foreign policy' or a 'counter-dependent foreign policy'. In the case of a 'pioneering' role, this indicates that a state is not following a compliant foreign policy, because it does not align with the major players, but rather seeks innovative paths reflecting their perceived interests. As mentioned, a theme emerged that these states are 'pioneers' and 'activist-challengers'. This is an indirect way of demonstrating that they do not pursue either one of Breuning's foreign policy orientations, since these role conceptions contradict Breuning's orientations.

Admittedly, since this entire exercise is highly interpretative, the researcher is as transparent as possible about the process. Part of this transparency is reflecting on some of the difficulties that the researcher encountered.

1. The researcher had to be exceptionally aware of the context (i.e., the occasion, the date, the audience) in which the speech was articulated at all times, since the context can shape the content of the speeches. It was important, for example, not to take a speech extract out of context or overemphasise its relevance. For each speech, the researcher detailed the date, the occasion, who gave the speech and any other necessary details (see Annex D). For example, if a speech from any given state was read at the celebration of another state's national day, it may appear as though the relationship is more important than it actually is. It was equally important to be cognisant of any important background information on the states. For example, in the case of Solomon Islands, at one stage it no longer demonstrated support for West Papuans' independence. This could have mistakenly been interpreted as a result of their diplomatic switch to recognise China over Taiwan and therefore pressure from the Chinese government. However, in reality, this was actually a result of it strengthening ties with Indonesia.
2. The researcher was aware of the fact that converting findings to role-conceptions might be, yet again, influenced by the researcher's bias. To address this, quotes were frequently incorporated, which allowed readers to decide for themselves whether the categories are accurate and fair. In this sense, the researcher hoped that this transparency would aid in establishing trust with the reader.
3. Speeches may avoid explicit alignment or anti-core statements for obvious diplomatic reasons. In this sense, if the researcher had any speculations about a possible alignment or no alignment, interviews were used to triangulate this. However, the researcher acknowledges that even interviews provide limited insights. There may be knowledge that is still withheld from the interviewer in the same way that knowledge is withheld from the public in speeches. Therefore, the findings of this study are based solely on speeches and interviews, and the study does not claim to go beyond this. As far as possible, the researcher also acknowledges the ambiguous nature of diplomatic language and therefore avoids making claims about alignment that are overconfident.

### 3.5. Ethical considerations<sup>37</sup>

In their discussion on qualitative research, Merriam and Tisdell (2016: 264) identify various elements that need to be considered. There are three specific aspects discussed that need to be addressed in the context of this study, namely (i) the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection, (ii) the collection of data online and (iii) the use of humans in this study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016: 266) further explain that within the context of research, “the best a researcher can do is to be conscious of the ethical issues that pervade the research process and to examine his or her own philosophical orientation vis-à-vis these issues”. The section below, explicitly focuses on doing this.

#### 3.5.1. The researcher as the primary data collection instrument

In this study, and in line with the interpretivist philosophical worldview, the researcher is perceived as the primary instrument for data collection. As has been explained earlier, this study makes use of a thematic analysis of speeches, which may make it particularly vulnerable to the concern raised above, considering furthermore that the coding was done manually by the researcher. Because this study follows a qualitative design, it is not concerned with validity but rather credibility and trustworthiness. However, Guest *et al.* (2012: 84) refer to ‘validity’ in qualitative research and define it as “the credibility and accuracy of processes and outcomes associated with a research study”. Guest *et al.* (2012: 85) further explain that in qualitative research, validity comes from the analysis procedures of the researcher.

One way in which a strong case can be made for the credibility of the findings and interpretations is to be transparent about the process (Miles & Huberman 1994: 278). Transparency, which includes explicit documentation and description of the procedures, does not guarantee that the findings are valid, but it does provide the reader with the opportunity to make such an assessment (Guest *et al.* 2012: 85). To achieve at least some degree of validity, this study: (1) details the manner in which it conducts the coding (see above), (2) provides quotations in the text which support the findings (see Chapter 4), and (3) provides an annex (see Annex D) with a table of all the speeches used. Point two is specifically pertinent considering, as Guest *et al.*

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<sup>37</sup> This study was assigned the ethics number HUM007/0523.

(2012: 95) state, that “when presenting a thematic analysis, quotes should be a pivotal part of the narrative”. Quotes, according to Guest *et al.* (2012: 95), are especially important as they:

*Bring the raw data - the participants’ words - to the reader and are what connected the phenomenological world of the participant to the data summary and interpretation generated by the researcher.*

The findings that were made in the thematic analysis were discussed in interviews with the interviewees to determine whether they were indeed accurate or, rather, reliable findings.

A further ethical consideration to be discussed is the use of AI. With the advent of readily available Artificial Intelligence (AI) such as ChatGPT, the researcher deems it important to discuss this matter as an ethical consideration. Elsevier has recently published guidelines on the use of AI in scientific writing. According to them, it is important for authors to disclose any use of AI as this builds and enhances trust and transparency between authors, readers and reviewers (Guleria *et al.* 2023: 1297). In line with their recommendations, AI is also used in this study to improve the readability and language of the work, in other words, as a form of language editing. The use of AI for editing purposes is particularly useful for the student as it was able to aid – at times – with editing, where hiring a professional editor was simply beyond the budget of the researcher.

### **3.5.2. Collection of data online**

A large portion of this study involves accessing sources that are available online. In the case of speeches, care was taken to ensure that the speeches were authentic. Speeches are downloaded directly from the official government website or the UN archives. Only in instances where there was no alternative were speeches used, of which segments had been quoted in a newspaper article. Furthermore, sources that are used in the literature review and in the secondary analysis are obtained through the University of Pretoria’s Library Website.

### **3.5.3. Human participants**

This research makes use of semi-structured interviews as a supplement to the primary analysis. In this instance, informed consent was obtained by participants (government officials of Seychelles and Solomon Islands) (see Annex C for the distributed form).

Participants were always informed of the purpose of the study, their rights to privacy, and related questions such as whether a recording was allowed to be made. Furthermore, the issues of confidentiality and anonymity were emphasised, and participants were always given a choice on these matters. Interestingly, most participants did not want to remain anonymous. Finally, the interviews (the audio recordings and transcripts) are password protected and safely stored on the researcher's laptop. Only the researcher has access to the information.

### **3.6. Conclusion**

The prime objective of this chapter was to demonstrate how the researcher reaches the conclusions of the study. This began by first discussing the interpretive worldview of the researcher, which was comprised of a nominalist ontology and constructivist epistemology, thereby laying the foundation for the research design. The qualitative research design – which was inductive in nature – utilised a methodology comprised of a thematic analysis of government speeches that were, in turn, manually coded.

To code the speeches, the research was guided by Breuning's operationalised framework (see 2.3.3) that was comprised of two questions: 'Are there instances that reflect that a state has aligned its foreign policy with that of a more powerful state?' and 'are there indications that a state has adopted an anti-core or anti-major player foreign policy?' These two questions, which guided the interpretation of the data, were used alongside Holsti's method of identifying role conceptions. Furthermore, interviews and secondary sources, such as journal articles and books were also utilised to supplement and build on the findings of the thematic analysis.

Throughout the chapter, the researcher reflected on the merits and demerits of the various sources of data, as well as on some of the difficulties encountered and how this was overcome. The chapter concluded with a discussion on ethics, such as obtaining informed consent, accurately presenting information, and enhancing trustworthiness and credibility. Having discussed the methodology of this study, the next chapter proceeds with the analysis section.

## Chapter 4: Application of Breuning's framework

### 4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the four countries selected are Solomon Islands, Fiji, Seychelles, and Mauritius. The foreign policies of the four selected states are analysed using Breuning's framework as discussed in 2.3.3. Foreign policy, as Williams (2004: 911) reminds us, is not made in a political vacuum. Therefore, in each instance, a brief 'country overview' is provided, detailing important information such as changes in state leadership, past allies and partners, and key challenges faced by the country. This is followed by a 'foreign policy analysis' section where the speeches of each country, specifically relating to foreign policy affairs, are analysed. This culminates in a 'foreign policy orientation assessment' section, where each respective state's foreign policy behaviour is evaluated to determine whether it aligns with Breuning's proposed compliant or counter-dependent foreign policy orientations.

As a caveat, it is necessary to briefly provide a table (see Table 3 below) that details the president/prime minister of each country between the years 2017 and 2024. For Seychelles, the president and the prime minister are the same person, while for Mauritius and Fiji, these roles are occupied by different people. In the latter cases, the role of the president is largely ceremonial or honorary where executive power resides in the hands of the prime minister (US Department of State 2009). Thus, in the table below, the prime minister is mentioned in the case of Mauritius and Fiji. In the case of Solomon Islands, the head of government is the prime minister. As the table illustrates, each country has had at least two different Head of Government during the selected years.

**Table 3.** Heads of the selected states between 2017 and 2024

<b>Year/ Country</b>	<b>Mauritius</b>	<b>Seychelles</b>	<b>Fiji</b>	<b>Solomon Islands</b>
<b>2024</b>	Navin Ramgoolam/ Pravind Jugnauth	Wavel Ramkalawan	Sitiveni Rabuka	Jeremiah Manele/ Manasseh Sogavare
<b>2023</b>	Pravind Jugnauth	Wavel Ramkalawan	Sitiveni Rabuka	Manasseh Sogavare

<b>2022</b>	Pravind Jugnauth	Wavel Ramkalawan	Sitiveni Rabuka/ Frank Bainimarama	Manasseh Sogavare
<b>2021</b>	Pravind Jugnauth	Wavel Ramkalawan	Frank Bainimarama	Manasseh Sogavare
<b>2020</b>	Pravind Jugnauth	Wavel Ramkalawan/ Danny Faure	Frank Bainimarama	Manasseh Sogavare
<b>2019</b>	Pravind Jugnauth	Danny Faure	Frank Bainimarama	Manasseh Sogavare / Rick Houenipwela
<b>2018</b>	Pravind Jugnauth	Danny Faure	Frank Bainimarama	Rick Houenipwela
<b>2017</b>	Pravind Jugnauth/ Anerood Jugnauth	Danny Faure	Frank Bainimarama	Rick Houenipwela/ Manasseh Sogavare

## 4.2. Solomon Islands

*Today, we are also continually threatened by global power posturing attempting once again to dictate our fate as a region. However, we refuse to remain silent.*

Solomon Islands Prime Minister Sogavare (2017)

### 4.2.1. Country overview

Solomon Islands (see Figure 2 below), located northeast of Australia and southwest of Hawaii, is an archipelago consisting of 6 main and 900 smaller islands, 147 of which are inhabited (Government of Canada 2022). As an archipelago, Solomon Islands covers 249,000 square nautical miles and has a total land area of 28,466 square kilometres (United Nations n.d.). It is one of the poorest countries in the Pacific region, primarily due to its small, geographically dispersed population and heavy reliance on raw materials and agricultural exports, which leaves it highly vulnerable to external shocks (Australian Government n.d.). To compound this, Solomon Islands, like other SIDS, is highly vulnerable to sudden climate shocks, such as tropical cyclones, as well as gradual climate-driven changes, such as saltwater intrusion and sea level rise.

Since 2008, more than 26,000 people have been forced to relocate due to weather-related events (The World Bank 2023).



**Figure 2.** Map of Solomon Islands

Source: Mapsland (n.d.)

In terms of its history, Solomon Islands gained independence from Britain on 7 July 1978 and is currently governed by a Parliamentary Democracy with a unicameral legislature (Wainwright 2003: 488). Prior to independence, the islands were colonised by both the British and the Germans, with the former mainly controlling the eastern islands, and the latter the western islands. In 1899, the UK gained access to all nine main islands through the Anglo-German Agreement. During the Second World War Solomon Islands was subject to great power competition between Japan and the Allied forces. It was not until 1976 that Solomon Islands was granted internal self-government, followed by full independence in 1978 (Australian Government n.d.). During the Cold War, Solomon Islands was intent on pursuing an independent foreign policy. In 1983, the Prime Minister declared that assistance from traditional friends “was boring” and advocated for forging new relations with countries that shared colonial backgrounds, such as China, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore (Wesley-Smith & Portner 2010: 138).

Following independence, the US developed diplomatic ties with Solomon Islands, officially establishing an embassy in Honiara in 1988. However, the embassy was closed by 1993 due to the Clinton administration's decision to reduce diplomatic missions after the end of the Cold War (Kaur 21 April 2023). This closure created a gap in US-Solomon Islands relations, opening the way for other actors, such as China, to establish stronger ties with the country. China's presence in the region has grown through initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the China Pacific Islands Economic Development & Cooperation Forum (EDCF) established in 2006, and most notably, the signing of a security agreement with Solomon Islands in April 2022 (Kaur 21 April 2023). The security agreement followed Solomon Islands' diplomatic switch from Taiwan to China in 2019, a move some analysts attribute to Australia's insufficient response to the Island's needs despite its 'Pacific Step-Up' strategy (Shoebridge 24 September 2019). One government official from Solomon Islands suggested that the security agreement can also be understood by looking at the riots<sup>38</sup> in Solomon Islands, where Chinese businesses are typically targeted and looted (Diamana, personal communication, 24 November 2024). In his view, the targeting of Chinese nationals led the governments of Solomon Islands and China to discuss ways to protect the Chinese community, culminating in the aforementioned security deal.

Australia, the Solomon Islands' largest development partner, has played a significant role in the country's modern history, particularly following the ethnic tensions in 1998 between the Guale and Malaita groups. The tensions were so severe that the Prime Minister of Solomon Islands requested assistance from Australia in 2003, leading to the intervention of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) headed by Australia (Australian Government n.d.). This event significantly established Australia's status as a traditional ally of Solomon Islands. However, after the conclusion of RAMSI, Australia's influence in the region began to wane, with opposition figures in Australia accusing the Morrison administration of neglecting the Pacific, allowing China to expand its influence (Lemahieu 27 July 2022).

Between 2017 and 2024, Solomon Islands experienced four changes in leadership, with prime ministers frequently being ousted through motions of no confidence. Rarely

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<sup>38</sup> On November 24, 2021, deadly riots broke out on the main island of Guadalcanal in Solomon Islands. In particular, Chinese businesses in Chinatown were looted and torched, and three bodies were found (O'Brien 10 December 2021).

do prime ministers serve their full terms. In 2017, Rick Houenipwela, replaced Manasseh Sogavare as prime minister, adopting a more pro-Australia stance, notably cancelling a Chinese deal for high-speed internet (Hayward-Jones 2017). However, his tenure lasted less than two years, and Sogavare, who is distinctly more pro-China, returned as prime minister for the fourth time in 2019 (RNZ 24 April 2019). In 2024, Jeremiah Manele succeeded Sogavare, with analysts suggesting that while he was likely to maintain strong ties with China, his approach toward Australia may be less confrontational than his predecessor's (Dziedzic *et al.* 2024). Manele is also known to be a career diplomat and therefore his foreign policy will be largely built on diplomacy and engaging with international institutions (Bugotu, personal communication, 21 November 2024). These leadership changes are crucial to note, since they may influence the country's foreign policy orientation.

Finally, in terms of its membership to notable international and regional organisations, Solomon Islands is a member of the Alliance of Small Island States, the Commonwealth, the Group of 77 (G77), the Pacific Islands Forum, the United Nations, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) (CIA Factbook 2025c)<sup>39</sup>.

#### **4.2.2. Foreign policy analysis**

Between 2017 and 2024, a total of 20 publicly available speeches were analysed, including three interviews available on the internet. A key observation is that Solomon Islands, when addressing issues deliberated at the UNGA, such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict, refrains from aligning its foreign policy with major players such as the United States. For instance, Prime Minister Sogavare, in his speech on 23 September 2022 calls for restraint and diplomatic solutions, stating:

*On the Ukraine conflict, Solomon Islands calls for maximum restraint by all parties and a de-escalation of the conflict. We continue to hear words of war in this Hall of peace. We must be united in our resolve to seek peace and urge all parties to pursue a diplomatic solution to the conflict based on the spirit and purpose of our United Nations Charter.*

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<sup>39</sup> The variety of international and regional organisations of which Solomon Islands is a member already provides a possible indication of its inclination toward multilateralism. Furthermore, its broad participation enables the Island to engage in what Karns and Mingst (2004: 265-266) refer to as 'forum shopping' – leveraging multiple organisational affiliations to strategically select the most suitable platform for addressing specific issues.

Evident in the extract above is that Solomon Islands adopts a stance where it is seemingly not aligned with major players. The Island avoids displaying direct support for either Russia or Ukraine, or any other major player. This is in contrast to the major players, such as the US, the UK, and Australia, who in a joint statement expressed that:

*We reiterate our resolute condemnation of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine [...] we reaffirm our unwavering support for Ukraine's independence* (United States Mission to the United Nations 22 January 2024)

It may appear that Solomon Islands seemingly adopts a similar stance to India, given that India has “expressed deep concern at the worsening situation and calls for immediate cessation of violence and end to all hostilities” (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India 2022). Unlike the US, UK or Australia, India does not explicitly condemn Russia, suggesting similarities between Solomon Islands and India. However, a closer examination reveals a distinction between their respective positions. India’s position includes explicit reference to territorial integrity and sovereignty, asserting that “we have emphasized to all member States of the UN that the global order is anchored on international law, UN Charter and respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty of states” (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India 2022). The emphasis on territorial integrity and sovereignty can be interpreted as a subtle endorsement of Ukraine’s position. In contrast, Solomon Islands does not frame the issue in terms of sovereignty but rather focuses on calls for peace and de-escalation. Given this difference in framing, this study maintains that Solomon Islands does not align its foreign policy with India on the matter.

A further example demonstrating that Solomon Islands does not align its foreign policy with major players is its position on Palestine. Even in 2018, when Solomon Islands still recognised Taiwan and was slightly more pro-US than is currently the case, it refrained from aligning its foreign policy with major players on issues discussed at the UNGA (Houenipwela 28 September 2018). For instance, on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Solomon Islands maintained its call for a peaceful settlement and supports a two-State solution, a position that diverged from Trump’s ardent support of Israel, including the relocation of a US embassy to Jerusalem (The White House 2018; Harb 12 June 2022). Solomon Islands' position also diverged from India’s position, particularly given India’s deepening ties with Israel since 2017. This growing

relationship was evident in a joint statement between the two states, which notably omitted any mention of East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine – an omission that could be interpreted as tacit support for Israel (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India 2018).

In 2017, Solomon Islands appeared to pursue a similar position to China, one of the major players, by endorsing a two-state solution (Yi 2018). However, this was not a complete alignment of foreign policy, since, while showing a similar stance in one instance, Solomon Islands diverged on other issues, such as the issue of West Papua's right to self-determination. While China maintained a policy of silence, consistent with its principle of non-interference (Liwe 2019), Solomon Islands took a markedly different approach, openly calling for the UN to recognise West Papua's right to self-determination (Sogavare 22 September 2017). The Islands' stance not only differed from China's stance but also from the US's stance, which has supported Indonesia's claim over West Papua, as noted by Macleod (14 January 2021).

These examples demonstrate that Solomon Islands does not align its foreign policy with major players such as the US, India or China. While it may occasionally reflect a certain state's stance on a specific issue, there is no complete alignment of its foreign policy. This suggests that rather than adhering to a compliant foreign policy orientation outlined by Breuning, Solomon Islands actively charts its own course. Furthermore, the state neither exhibits a clear anti-core sentiment, since it still engages with major players.

To further demonstrate the fact that Solomon Islands does not align its foreign policy, it is also useful to look at the West Papua situation over the broader period from 2017 to 2024. In 2017, Solomon Island did not align its stance on this matter with a major player, as mentioned above. In 2018 and 2019, it appeared to align its stance with Indonesia (publicly supporting Indonesia's claim over West Papua), while from 2020, the country adopted a position more in line with China's approach by remaining silent on the matter. Seen over several years, this demonstrates not a consistent alignment but a flexible switching back and forth.

This also attests to the fact that Solomon Islands has multiple friends, as opposed to aligning with major players. Solomon Islands has frequently articulated its "Friends to

all and Enemies to None” foreign policy. At the 79<sup>th</sup> UNGA, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and External Trade under the new administration reiterated this stance, noting:

*Solomon Islands formalized relations this week with the Republic of Rwanda and Colombia [...] As a testament of our foreign policy of ‘friends to all and enemy to none’ [...]” (Agovaka 27 September 2024).*

This follows a speech made by the previous Prime Minister, Manesh Sogavare, in 2023, who boldly stated that:

*In implementing this policy, we will not align ourselves with any external power(s) or security architecture that targets our or any other sovereign country or threatens regional and international peace. Solomon Islands will not be coerced into choosing sides (Sogavare 22 September 2023).*

Solomon Islands has multiple ‘friends’, which demonstrates its inclination to avoid alignment with major players. A further key indication of this approach is its outspoken commitment to not taking sides in geopolitical conflicts. Since 2017, Prime Minister Sogavare has consistently emphasised that Solomon Islands would not remain silent while global powers attempted to dictate the fate of their region, much like they did in the aftermath of the Second World War (22 September 2017). This sentiment was further reinforced during the 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Solomon Islands’ independence, where Sogavare underscored the Island’s approach to the changing global environment:

*The global environment is undergoing dynamic changes, which sees bigger countries jostling for influence in the world and our region. We have felt these changes and are trying to understand it and respond in such a way that does not make us choose sides (ABC News 7 July 2023).*

Solomon Islands has further been vocal in articulating its interests, evident in the priority it gives to the Cuba issue. Every UN speech is consistently used to call for “the lifting of the embargo within the spirit and purpose of the United Nations Charter” (Sogavare 23 September 2022). Important, however, is the fact that while speaking out on the Cuban sanctions, Solomon Islands does not distance itself from major players, instead maintaining diplomatic respect:

*Once again, we call on our friend and partner the United States of America to end the embargo (Agovaka 27 September 2024).*

This demonstrates that Solomon Islands does not pursue a counter-dependent foreign policy. In addition to advocating for Cuba, Solomon Islands has also criticised

unilateral sanctions by certain states. For example, in 2018, Prime Minister Hokenipwela took aim at countries that pursue these sanctions:

*We have seen a proliferation of insularly focused policies on the part of some countries, causing them to renege on their commitments under various international frameworks and treaties (28 September 2018).*

The above-mentioned, is a subtle jab at the US under the first Trump administration, who withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Paris Agreement (Dudar & Shesgreen 2018). Solomon Islands has further condemned the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's missile tests over the Pacific, wishing to "register [their] strongest condemnation of the actions" (Sogavare 22 September 2017). In the same speech, Sogavare called on the US "to reconsider its position on the Paris Agreement on Climate Change". This indicates their vocal activism on numerous issues.

Solomon Islands also champions reform within the United Nations, particularly the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The island advocates for the inclusion of a dedicated seat for Small Island Developing States:

*The UN Security Council will need to adapt to today's realities and support an expanded Council with a SIDS-dedicated seat (Sogavare 25 September 2021).*

While major powers such as the US and China have recognised the need to reform the UNSC, this does not include reform of the veto-power system. Solomon Islands, however, clearly stipulates that:

*On Security council reforms, the world continues to witness the limits and failures of the Security Council to prevent deadly conflicts with the use of the veto. Fostering international peace demands an expanded Council with equitable geographical representation, that is democratic and equipped with a revised working method (Agovaka 27 September 2024).*

Solomon Islands therefore has a slightly different stance to major players, arguing that the veto-system needs to be democratised. However, while remaining vocal on issues like UNSC reform, the nation simultaneously does not adopt an anti-core sentiment toward major players. In the aftermath of the Covid pandemic and in preparations for hosting of the Pacific Games in 2023, the Island clearly acknowledged the importance of the various 'friends' it has. It highlights the role Australia played in commissioning the country's first submarine cable and acknowledges the support from various other partners:

*[Solomon Islands] acknowledges with appreciation the ongoing support from our bilateral and multilateral partners including Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, World Bank, ADB, European Union, the Green Climate Fund, and others (Manele 27 September 2019).*

The theme of having multiple partners and allies is central to Solomon Islands rhetoric. In its speeches, it avidly discusses that the island has:

*Concluded several regional and bilateral trade agreements within the Pacific, with the European and the United Kingdom of Great Britain [...] and have a non-reciprocal trade arrangement with China (Sogavare 25 September 2021).*

The above highlights that major players that are seen to be ‘in opposite camps’ often feature in the same sentences. A further example of this is Solomon Islands’ reflection on the COVID-19 pandemic, where it suggests that the Islands’ response to the pandemic was only possible “through the assistance of People’s Republic of China and Australia” (Sogavare 26 September 2020). The Island’s speeches at the UNGA in 2022 and 2023, respectively, reiterate the importance of engaging with multiple actors:

*Solomon Islands has adopted a “Friends to all and Enemies to None” Foreign Policy [...] Solomon Islands has no enemies – only friends. Our struggle is to develop our country. We stretch out our hand of friendship and seek genuine and honest cooperation and partnership with all (23 September 2022).*

*Solomon Islands’ is grateful and appreciates the ongoing support from our bilateral and multilateral partners, in particular People Republic of China who has become our leading infrastructure partner. We also thank Saudi Arabia, Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Korea and Japan for their support as well (22 September 2023).*

With the change of government in 2024, Solomon Islands has retained the ‘friends to all’ rhetoric. During a courtesy call between the newly elected Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, Jeremiah Manele and the Chinese Government, the importance of the China-Solomon Islands relationship was emphasised, with Solomon Islands remaining “grateful for the quality infrastructure China continues to provide” (Manele 5 June 2024). A few weeks later Manele paid his first official visit to Australia, which was described as an “enduring partnership” (Manele 30 June 2024). Subsequently, while noting the importance of a major player such as China, it continues to call its other partners, such as the US and, in this instance, Australia, a friend and partner (Agovaka 27 September 2024).

In terms of environmental issues, a prominent theme in Solomon Islands' rhetoric is that of advocacy and challenging the status quo. On 22 September 2017, Sogavare demonstrated this advocacy in his address:

*For Pacific nations like ours, climate change continues to be our enemy. We are constantly invaded by that enemy, every day. That is why the Pacific small island developing States have been requesting that the Security Council also address the issue of climate change. While useful, the building of sea walls and wave-breakers to mitigate some of the effects of climate change is a mere Band-Aid solution. We call on all major greenhouse-gas emitters to meet their national determined contributions for reducing emissions.*

A few years later, while speaking about the recently adopted 2050 Strategy of the Blue Pacific Continent, Sogavare (23 September 2022) explained that “all partners that wish to work with Pacific countries must align with this strategy”. This advocacy was most recently reflected at the 79<sup>th</sup> General Assembly where Solomon Islands stated that:

*The Paris Agreement is failing humanity. We need a stronger legally binding framework that will put us on a 1.5 pathway. The voluntary approach under the Paris Agreement has failed miserably. The changing narrative on climate change is unacceptable. Diversion away from talking about ambitious climate action, survival or the construction of safe Islands is replaced by discussion on sinking and migration (Agovaka 27 September 2024)*

To underscore the urgency of addressing climate change, Solomon Islands highlighted:

*Considering these challenges, the Pacific region has declared a ‘state of climate emergency.’ Sadly, we are seeing more resources spent on wars than in combating climate change. This is extremely unfortunate (Sogavare 23 September 2022).*

In addition to climate change, Solomon Islands has been outspoken on other global environmental concerns, such as nuclear waste. At the 78<sup>th</sup> UNGA, Sogavare (22 September 2023) boldly condemned Japan’s decision to release nuclear waste into the ocean:

*Mr. President, Solomon Islands stands with like-minded Pacific islanders and is appalled by Japan’s decision to discharge over a million tonnes of treated nuclear wastewater into the ocean [...] If this nuclear waste water is safe it should be stored in Japan. The fact that is dumped into the ocean shows that it is not safe. The effect of this act is transboundary and intergenerational and is an attack on global trust and solidarity. So the message is clear OUR LIVES, OUR PEOPLE DO NOT MATTER!! [...] We call on Japan to explore other options in addressing the treated nuclear wastewater and to immediately stop discharging it into the Pacific Ocean (emphasis in original).*

Furthermore, Solomon Islands also emphasises the need to recognise the critical connection between climate change and ocean health:

*Climate change is inextricably linked to ocean change [...] The increasing risks presented by Climate Change threatens the health and value of our ocean, our economic prosperity, identity, and livelihoods. I therefore urge that ocean be given equal recognition and greater prominence in the UNFCCC. For us, climate change is ocean change (Panakitasi 17 November 2022).*

These extracts demonstrate Solomon Islands' vocal advocacy for environmental and climate justice.

#### **4.2.3. Foreign policy orientation assessment**

The analysis above highlights key aspects of Solomon Islands' foreign policy, revealing that it does not pursue a strictly compliant foreign policy by aligning its foreign policy with major players. A prime example of this was its stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, where it refrained from openly condemning Russia like the US, UK and Australia, yet also did not fully align with India's emphasis on territorial integrity and sovereignty. Rather, Solomon Islands framed the issue predominantly through peace and de-escalation. Similarly, in 2017, Solomon Islands sought a distinct stance from major players on the issue of West Papua. Rather than echoing the US in supporting Indonesia or following China's silent stance, the Island took a vocal stand in advocating the right of West Papua to self-determination. The decision of the Island not to align its foreign policy was also frequently reinforced by governmental statements emphasising the Island's refusal to be coerced into aligning with major players.

While Solomon Islands did not pursue a compliant foreign policy, it also did not pursue a counter-dependent foreign policy, where it indicates an explicitly oppositional stance or anti-core sentiment toward major players. The Island actively engages with multiple major players, as illustrated by its reference in 2021 to bilateral trade agreements with both the UK and China. Evidently, Solomon Islands' approach is to engage with multiple major players at the same time. In fact, the Island utilises the attention it receives from these various major players to play off major players against each other. A prime illustration of this is its switching of diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China in 2019. In defending this move, Sogavare (15 July 2023) asserted Solomon Islands' sovereignty, stating: "who we enter into diplomatic relations with, who we have developed in cooperation with is none of anyone's business" [sic]. This statement

underscores Solomon Islands' intent to make autonomous decisions and once again signals that it does not align its foreign policy with major players.

Furthermore, again, instead of seeking to distance itself from major players completely (and effectively reflecting an anti-core sentiment), Solomon Islands seems to pursue a foreign policy marked by flexibility and adaptability. An example of this flexibility is its evolving stance on West Papua. While supporting West Papua's right to self-determination in 2017, this position has fluctuated over time, with recent speeches completely omitting reference to the issue. Rather than aligning consistently with major players, Solomon Islands adjusts its stance according to its evolving interests. The ability to change its stance reinforces the notion that it does not align its foreign policy with major players.

Additionally, the Island pursues an inclusive approach to international relations encapsulated in its 'friends to all' foreign policy. This strategy enables the country to maintain relationships with numerous, diverse actors, refusing to fully commit to any major player. Refusing to commit to major players on issues does not imply that the Island is passive. Rather, Solomon Islands actively asserts its position on global affairs, often taking a critical stance on major players, which once again demonstrates that the Island does not align its foreign policy with the actors. This is evident in its condemnation of North Korea's ballistic missile testing, criticism of the US's insufficient commitment to climate policies, and denunciation of Japan's release of nuclear wastewater. These instances demonstrate Solomon Islands' willingness to challenge dominant major players.

Ultimately, a thematic analysis of Solomon Islands' speeches suggests that the country neither adheres to a strictly compliant nor counter-dependent foreign policy orientation. Categorising its approach within either orientation would fail to capture the nuanced and dynamic nature of its foreign policy and negate the active role it plays as it plays major players off one another and challenges them.

### 4.3. Fiji

*Small as we are, Fiji will fight. We will keep being a voice for more climate ambition, more climate action. We will continue to advance our case in the great forums of the world, not only on behalf of Fijians and other Pacific Islanders but the climate-vulnerable everywhere.*

- Fiji Prime Minister Bainimarama (2019)

### 4.3.1. Country overview

The Republic of Fiji is an archipelagic nation in the central western Pacific Ocean, consisting of more than 300 islands (see Figure 3) (Tarte 2010: 67). Its claimed sea area spans approximately 1,29 million square kilometres, with a land area of 18, 274 square kilometres (One World Nations Online 2023). About a third of these islands are inhabited, and according to Worldometer (2025) , the population stands at about 933,154. As a nation with a population under 10 million, Fiji qualifies as a small state (Kelkitli 2022: 146). Lacking fossil fuel energy resources and nuclear power stations,



**Figure 3.** Map of Fiji

Source: Destination360 (2008)

Fiji is reliant on fuel imports for its energy needs (Kelkitli 2022: 280). According to the Climate Change Knowledge Portal (2021: 2), it is also considered one of the countries most vulnerable to climate-related disasters, including tropical cyclones, rising sea

levels, floods and other climate-driven threats, due to its location within the South Pacific Convergence Zone (Climate Change Knowledge Portal 2021: 2).

Beyond its geographic and environmental challenges, Fiji's political history is also significant. After nearly a century as a British colony, Fiji gained independence on October 10, 1970, adopting a constitutional democracy (Lawson 2015: 2010). However, since then, Fiji has endured four coups, the most recent in December 2006.

Following the military ousting of the elected government, Frank Bainimarama assumed the role of Prime Minister in 2007. The coup triggered international condemnation, with the UNSC, the Commonwealth and the PIF strongly opposing it. Consequently, Fiji was suspended from both the Commonwealth and Pacific Islands Forum (Powles & Sousa-Santos 2016: 2). Between 2006 and 2014, Fiji faced numerous sanctions and restrictions, although these efforts largely failed to shift the country to a more democratic path (Australian Government n.d.). Bainimarama, instead, capitalised on the sanctions by promoting a narrative that Fiji had been abandoned by its traditional allies during a time of need (Powles & Sousa-Santos 2016: 3).

In response to the diplomatic isolation, Fiji aimed to expand its relations with non-traditional partners. In 2012, Fiji joined the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), enabling it to pursue stronger relations with the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). Mawi (2015: 101) notes that Fiji's post-2006 diplomatic isolation provided the impetus to explore new opportunities, including the 'look and engage north' policy, which expanded Fiji's partnerships beyond familiar spheres of influence.

Since 2017, Fiji has undergone one change in leadership. Sitiveni Rabuka, who previously served as prime minister from 1992 to 1999, won a narrow victory over incumbent Frank Bainimarama (VOA 24 December 2022), ending Bainimarama's 16-year rule (Al Jazeera 2023a). Rabuka not only serves as prime minister but also holds the position of Fiji's foreign minister. Under his leadership, there has been a subtle shift in foreign policy, with less emphasis on China and a tilt towards traditional partners who were discarded during Bainimarama's tenure (O'Brien 2023). Waqavakatoga (2024) confirms this recalibration of Fiji's foreign policy towards its longstanding Western partners.

Fiji is also a member of several notable international organisations, including the Alliance of Small Island States, G-77, Pacific Islands Forum, the Pacific Community

(PC), the United Nations, the World Health Organisation, and the World Trade Organisation (CIA Factbook 2025a). With climate change posing significant threats, Fiji has increased its engagement in regional climate forums and international environmental debates (Shiiba *et al.* 2023: 9). Notably, Fiji held the presidency of the 23<sup>rd</sup> session of the Conferences of Parties (COP 23) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2017 (Shiiba *et al.* 2023: 9).

#### 4.3.2. Foreign policy analysis

In the case of Fiji, over 1,500 speeches were available between 2017 and 2024. These speeches were thoroughly reviewed to determine their relevance to the study – specifically, whether they were delivered at external events, as opposed to addressing internal (domestic) issues like unemployment. After this review, 73 speeches were deemed directly relevant. One prominent theme that emerged was Fiji’s distinct stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, unlike that of Solomon Islands, Seychelles and Mauritius (the latter two will be discussed in 4.4.2. and 4.5.2.). Fiji unequivocally condemned Russia’s war of aggression:

*Russia’s war of aggression on Ukraine – a scourge that reflects a brutal mentality of conquest and empire. No matter their size, no matter their might, Fiji is unafraid to condemn any warring nation* (Bainimarama 24 September 2022).

This might suggest alignment with a major player, namely the US since Fiji explicitly renounces the actions of Russia, which is similar to the US stance. However, when viewed over a longer period of time and especially focusing on the topic of climate change, it becomes evident that Fiji does not completely align its foreign policy with major players. In a 2017 speech, Prime Minister Bainimarama emphasised:

*For too long, our global conversation about climate action - especially when it comes to finance and technology - has assumed that all the answers to the big questions lie in the north, among the developed nations* (15 November 2017).

In this instance, Fiji challenges the traditional assumption that all answers to significant issues lie with countries in the global North. Instead, Fiji frames itself as an innovator, asserting its leadership in global solutions:

*We are retooling our security forces around the operational focus of climate security through our work with development partners to create the World’s first Climate Catastrophe Response Force [...] Climate-vulnerable countries should be empowered to continue becoming centres for innovation. Big,*

*global solutions always start small – and they can start with us [...] Small states may not have chosen our circumstances, but we refuse to have our future chosen for us. We deserve a voice in the long-awaited reform of the world’s debt architecture (Sayed-Khaiyum 26 April 2022).*

This rhetoric highlights that Fiji’s foreign policy does not centre on alignment or following the lead of major players. Indeed, Fiji emphasises that it refuses to have its future dictated to it and challenges the traditional dominance of developed nations as those that are the harbingers of solutions. The notion that Fiji does not align its foreign policy with major players is also made evident in Fiji’s Foreign Policy White Paper (FFPWP) (2024: 9), where it explicitly states that Fiji does not intend to choose sides:

*Fiji has no interest in doing so. We want the freedom to pursue our interests and give expression to our values in a way that does not handcuff our options to one side or the other.*

Apart from not choosing sides, Fiji pursues another strategy of vacillating support. This is important to note, since it indicates that while Fiji does not align completely with major players it also does not distance itself from them. From 2017 to 2023, Fiji oscillated between support for different major players, indicating a policy of flexibility rather than strict alignment. As noted in the FFPWP, while Fiji upholds a “friends to all and enemies to none” approach, it does not mean all relationships matter equally or are equally close (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Fiji 2024: 9). Rather, Fiji may lean more towards certain states at specific times.

For example, in 2018, Fiji openly criticised the inaction of countries like Australia on climate change:

*But, while we are seeing greater global recognition of this crisis, appropriate action has yet to follow. The response so far has been limited to mainly speeches, rhetoric and pleasantries – and in some cases, outrageously out-of-touch statements from public officials. We have politicians next door in Australia, saying we can’t expect them to act on climate, and we Pacific islanders can just move to higher ground (Bainimarama 13 May 2019).*

While criticising the inaction of countries, it becomes clear that Fiji assumes an assertive role and does not hesitate to express its stance on matters of importance. Bainimarama (13 May 2019), for example, states that:

*I have to say, I was no shining example of traditional Pacific politeness. When I’m speaking for people whose homes and livelihoods are being destroyed by rising seas, I don’t have time to be quaint or cute. We need to be bold. We need to be direct. And – as we have done throughout this journey – we need to speak together, in one voice, for the sake of all of our people.*

Speaking at a 2019 summit in Australia, Bainimarama confronted Australia's inadequate response to climate change:

*There's been another suggestion floating around from one of your former Prime Ministers that Australia should offer citizenship to Pacific islanders whose nations are disappearing beneath the seas in exchange for control of their seas and fisheries. In a time where we must be future-facing, we can hardly tolerate such insensitive, neo-colonial prescriptions. I implore leaders of Australia to visit these communities, and see them first-hand, before they propose solutions that are so blatantly out of touch with the reality we Pacific islanders live with on the ground, day in and day out (Bainimarama 8 May 2019).*

In 2019, Fiji extended its criticism to include China and India, urging these nations to reduce their reliance on coal:

*Can I say to you on behalf of all of us, that we in the Pacific urge India to do more to reduce its reliance on coal, which as we all know, is one of the greatest contributors to climate change. This is not about singling anyone out. I know Australia supplies your coal, as it does to China — who must also cut their coal reliance — and I urged the Australians to end their reliance on coal as well at the Pacific Islands Forum in Tuvalu (Bainimarama 25 September 2019).*

During this period (2017 to 2019), when Fiji critiques countries such as Australia, Fiji began to strengthen its relations with China, demonstrating its strategy of switching between partners:

*And I very much appreciate the important leadership role that China is playing – along with other nations such as India – in helping to draw global attention to the great potential this offers in the climate struggle (Bainimarama 13 December 2018).*

This stance echoed a speech in 2017 where Fiji explained that, in contrast to Australia and other powers, such as the US, both India and China understood that pollution has a cost (Bainimarama 15 November 2017). Fiji also expressed disappointment with the US for its rejection of the Paris Agreement, stating:

*We were deeply disappointed when the current administration of the United States announced its rejection of the Paris Agreement (Bainimarama 13 May 2019).*

Yet by 2019, even as relations with Australia improved, Fiji maintained its assertiveness:

*We're in a new era of bilateral relations. But to truly begin this chapter anew, the Australian government and the Australian people need to look at Fiji and*

*the rest of the Pacific through a new lens, and that starts from the very top. It must begin with the acknowledgement that – as sovereign nations – we stand as equals* (Bainimarama 17 January 2019).

In 2022, Fiji sharpened its critique of major players, declaring that no developed nations, including the US, Australia, Russia, India, and China, have:

*The moral authority to call themselves allies to the ocean if they are not urgently making deeper and faster cuts to their emissions. Not in some far-off future, but now* (Sayed-Khaiyum 14 April 2022).

This ties to the point made earlier, that while it may appear as though Fiji shares a stance with the US on certain issues, such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict, this does not indicate complete alignment across the board. Rather, Fiji's stance is more nuanced, as it may support the US in one instance, while openly criticising the same actor in another, as demonstrated in the statement above.

Despite this critique of major players, including the US, from 2022 onward, Fiji seemed to shift toward the US, expressing support for American interests in the Pacific region. Bainimarama explained that the US had been a long-time Pacific power and the recent remarks by the Vice President demonstrated that the US was prepared to become a Pacific Partner once again (Bainimarama 13 July 2022). Fiji further demonstrated its re-engagement with the US, by participating in the US-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) announced in 2022 (Kamikamica 26 January 2023). Finally, at the 78<sup>th</sup> UNGA, Fiji reinforced its support for the US:

*Fiji welcomes the announcement by President Biden earlier this week for his commitment to contribute \$11 billion a year to international climate finance to help lower-income countries implement their climate goals [...] [Fiji] also commend[s] U.S. leadership in the reform of the World Bank which is geared towards helping low and middle-income countries to access finance* (Rabuka 22 September 2023).

Therefore, while critiquing the US in previous years, Fiji decided, in 2023, to move closer to the US again. It is also worth noting that while critiquing the actions of states such as Australia, Fiji continues to engage with them, demonstrating that it is not driven by an anti-core sentiment. Indeed, Bainimarama continues to assert that Fiji is “working with [their] development partners, including Australia, Japan and the UK” (2 December 2019).

This also underscores Fiji's apparent preference for multilateralism and international cooperation over strict alignment with major players. Prime Minister Rabuka, for

instance, expressed that Fiji “must work with other nations for effective solutions” and that international cooperation “is necessary to access climate change financing” and access “adaptation strategies” (28 June 2023). The above-mentioned demonstrates a stance characterised not by a rigid alignment with a major player, but a flexible and dynamic approach defined by a shifting back and forth and a preference for multilateral engagement. Importantly, it also reflects that Fiji still engages with major players as opposed to adopting an anti-core sentiment.

Finally, Fiji’s foreign policy does not reflect either rigid alignment or outright counterdependence. Rather than conforming to the strategic agendas of global players, Fiji actively challenges the current world order, which it perceives as being dominated by insecurity and conflict (Rabuka 26 February 2024). Prime Minister Rabuka introduces the concept of an ‘Ocean of Peace’, positioning the Pacific Islands – spanning over 32 million square kilometres of the South Pacific – as “custodians of a powerful symbol of co-existence and friendship” (Rabuka 26 February 2024). This concept starkly contrasts with the geopolitical competition that currently engulfs the region. Rabuka (26 February 2024) explicitly acknowledges the strategic value of Pacific islands:

*Our Island states are acutely aware that in international geopolitics their area has high strategic value. The superpowers America and China are competing within it for influence.*

However, he asserts that Fijians:

*[...] have no desire to get caught up in, and torn by, that rivalry. We are friendly with both nations and want to keep it that way.*

This approach underscores Fiji’s resistance to power dynamics, reaffirming its commitment, alongside other Pacific nations, to an alternative vision of security that does not solely prioritise traditional security. Fiji seeks to move beyond traditional security paradigms, promoting the ‘Ocean of Peace’ as a “contribution to world order” (Rabuka 26 February 2024).

#### **4.3.3. Foreign policy orientation assessment**

As already alluded to above, the main findings of this thematic analysis reveal that Fiji does not pursue a strictly compliant or counter-dependent foreign policy. Instead, Fiji actively engages with multiple major players with the ability to shift support where necessary. In the case of the former, Fiji’s refusal to follow any major player is

highlighted by its strategic approach to securing support. When a major player fails to meet its needs, Fiji seeks assistance from another. For example, when Australia demonstrated a reluctance to take decisive action on climate change, Fiji criticised its inaction and sought engagement with China. However, by 2022, Fiji had demonstrated a shift again, signalling support for the US-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework and acknowledging the US as a longstanding Pacific power.

The above demonstrates a dynamic engagement that hinges on balancing major players rather than adhering to a rigid alliance structure. When Fiji engages with major players, it does so on its own terms and emphasises a leadership role, rejecting the narrative that positions small states as passive actors. For example, Fiji challenges the prevailing assumptions that solutions must originate in the global North. Instead, Fiji has put forward aspirations of taking a leadership role on climate change exemplified by its aspiration to develop the world's first Climate Catastrophe Response Force and advocating for SIDS to be recognised as centres of innovation. Fiji also proposes the concept of an 'Ocean of Peace' which positions the Blue Pacific (as the islands are currently known) as a zone of peaceful co-existence and friendship. The concept is also used to emphasise that Fiji does not intend to get caught up in the rivalry, which could destabilise the region but rather aims to assertively stand for peace.

Alongside this, Fiji has demonstrated a willingness to hold major players accountable for their contributions to climate change. For instance, as noted in earlier speech extracts, Fiji has openly criticised Australia's dismissive attitude towards climate change in the past, particularly in response to suggestions that Pacific Islanders should simply "move to higher ground" rather than expect mitigation efforts. Similarly, Fiji has condemned India and China for their continued reliance on coal, urging them to transition away from fossil fuels. This assertiveness highlights Fiji's broader approach whereby it does not passively align with major players, nor does it fully disengage from them through the adoption of an anti-core sentiment.

The theme of not pursuing complete disengagement or an anti-core sentiment is also evident in Fiji's preference for multilateralism and international cooperation. On numerous occasions, Fiji espoused that in order to address the pressing climate

change challenge there is an absolute necessity to work together with other states, especially in terms of accessing climate financing and adaptation strategies.

Ultimately, Fiji's foreign policy is characterised by a balanced approach; it neither fully aligns with major players nor adopts an outright oppositional stance towards them. Instead, Fiji conducts itself assertively in its interactions with these significant players, challenging them when necessary and strategically shifting its relationships to secure the best outcomes for its own interests. Additionally, Fiji takes a leadership role on climate-related issues, illustrating its ability to forge its own path rather than merely follow the lead of larger powers.

#### **4.4. Seychelles**

*From small islands come big ideas. No one should underestimate our resolve. Failure, for us, has never been and never will be an option. Despite real challenges, there is an abundance of energy and innovation inside of us all, to push ourselves and our nations as far as we can go.*

- Former Seychellois President Danny Faure (26 September 2017)

##### **4.4.1. Country overview**

The Republic of Seychelles, with a population of less than 100,000 people, is a high-income archipelago located in the Western Indian Ocean, approximately 1,600 kilometres east of the Kenyan coast (see Figure 4) (Faure 15 June 2018). Geographically, it covers a modest land area of just 455 square kilometres – roughly the size of London (Faure 18 April 2018). Additionally, Seychelles is also the smallest African country in terms of its land area and population (CIA Factbook 2025b). However, it boasts an extensive EEZ of 1, 4 million square kilometres, more than twice the size of Madagascar, illustrating the limitations of relying solely on territorial landmass to measure the significance of a country.

Although Seychelles is a high-income country, it is still classified as a SIDS, sharing many of the vulnerabilities and dependencies typical of SIDS. Its economy is heavily reliant on marine-based activities, including tourism and fishing (Saddington 2023: 1). One of its most pressing challenges is its acute vulnerability to climate change, which manifests in rising sea levels, increasing sea surface temperature and ocean acidification (Saddington 2023: 1).

In addition to environmental challenges, Seychelles faces security threats, particularly from piracy and illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing in its waters (U.S. Department of State 2022). Furthermore, its waters are used as transit routes for narcotics smuggling from the Gulf region (Robinson 2018: 332, Cabestan 2021: 59). Compounding these concerns is the growing strategic rivalries between major players in the Indian Ocean Region, which according to Robinson (2018: 333) is on a scale that far exceeds anything since the Cold War. Cabestan (2021: 58) concurs that the



**Figure 4.** Map of Seychelles

Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. (2012)

growing competition between India and China are dominating the Seychellois geostrategic landscape.

Seychelles' status as a high-income country presents additional challenges, as it limits its access to international aid. Its status has relegated Seychelles to a lower priority on the agenda of international donors. Along with this, the country is no longer eligible for development assistance from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries and has lost preferential trade benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) (Cabestan 2021: 5; U.S. Department of State 2022).

Historically, Seychelles was first discovered by Portuguese explorers in 1502 (Allen 2022), though there is cartographic evidence that suggests that Arab explorers may have visited the island earlier (US Department of State 2011). Despite visits and explorations by various pirates and explorers, the archipelago remained uninhabited until 1770 (Allen 2022: 2). In subsequent years the archipelago gained strategic prominence for its potential as a naval base supporting French interests in India and a refreshment station for slave ships transporting slaves from Mozambique and the Swahili coast to Mauritius and Réunion (Allen 2022: 2). Recognising the importance of this island, Seychelles was subsumed by a struggle for control between France and Great Britain, but in 1814, Seychelles was ceded to Great Britain under the Treaty of Paris (US Department of State 2011).

Under British rule, Seychelles was initially governed as a dependency of Mauritius until 1903, when it became a separate British Crown Colony (US Department of State 2011). In 1976, Seychelles gained independence, and by 1977 had transitioned to a one-party state. During the Cold War, it maintained close ties with the Soviet bloc, and developed relations with North Korea, China, Libya, Algeria and Tanzania (McDougall 1997: 57). Following the Cold War, Seychelles was pressured to adopt a multiparty system, leading to the adoption of a new constitution and the first elections in 1993 (Sekhu 2024). In this new era, Seychelles seemingly abandoned the ties it had with “radical Third World states” and rather fostered relations with Western countries (McDougall 1997: 58). The EU, Britain and France regained a role as important aid donors to Seychelles (McDougall 1997: 58), while China, India, the United Arab Emirates, Sri Lanka and Japan have diplomatic representation in the capital of Victoria (Cabestan 2021: 58).

India, in particular, has shown strategic interest in the archipelago, with plans for infrastructure development on Assumption Island, including an extended airstrip and a new jetty for the Indian Navy. This deal was, however, ultimately rejected by Seychelles<sup>40</sup>. To emphasise the importance of the Island to India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi appointed a former Indian Army Chief as a High Commissioner to Seychelles in 2019 (Cabestan 2021: 62).

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<sup>40</sup> The deal failed due to domestic pressure. Then serving President Faure was unable to get the support of the opposition party for ratification of the deal. Subsequently, the deal with India was stalled (Khan 2020).

In 2013, at the height of piracy threats in the Indian Ocean, Seychelles strengthened its relations with several key international partners, including the US, the UK, France, the EU, India and China. Despite this, it was not until 2023 that the US appointed a career diplomat to Seychelles, marking a renewed diplomatic effort (Joubert-Lawen 17 January 2023). Meanwhile, Seychelles celebrated 45 years of diplomatic relations with China in 2021, with China reiterating its commitment to supporting Seychelles in finding a development path suited to its unique national conditions, while Seychelles reaffirmed its adherence to the one-China policy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China 2021).

Since 2017, Seychelles has experienced political shifts, with Danny Faure serving as President until 2020, when he was succeeded by opposition leader Wavel Ramkalawan (France24 25 October 2020). Though analysts note only subtle differences in the policies of Faure and Ramkalawan, this was the first time since 1977 that the United Seychelles Party (USP) has lost power (Cabestan 2021: 58).

Seychelles is also an active member of various regional and international organisations, including the Alliance of Small Islands States, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Non-Aligned Movement, the African Union (AU), the Commonwealth, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Indian Ocean Commission, the Indian Ocean Rim Association, La Francophonie (Association of Francophone countries), the United Nations, and the World Trade Organisation (CIA Factbook 2025b).

#### **4.4.2. Foreign policy analysis**

In a thematic analysis of Seychelles' speeches, a total of 40 relevant public addresses were identified. One of the first key observations is that, similar to the Solomon Islands and Fiji, Seychelles does not align its foreign policy explicitly<sup>41</sup> with major players, especially on contentious issues at the UNGA. For instance, regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Seychelles adopted a policy of non-alignment<sup>42</sup>. States such as the

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<sup>41</sup> This is not to suggest that it never aligns aspects of its foreign policy. However, it merely suggests that there is not a complete alignment of its entire foreign policy with major players.

<sup>42</sup> It is important to note that Seychelles specifically articulates that it will be non-aligned. This contrasts with Solomon Islands and Fiji, which do not necessarily use the words 'non-aligned'. The latter two islands, however, do not align their foreign policy with major players, often mentioning that they will not be forced into sides.

US have been staunch supporters of Ukraine, China has arguably adopted a strategic ambiguity policy, where it neither condemns Russia nor supports Ukraine, so that it can maintain strategic relations with Russia, while Japan and Australia have condemned Russia (Haddah 16 February 2023). This contrasts with Seychelles' position. During a Press Meeting in 2022, President Ramkalawan (Seychelles News Agency 25 March 2022) asserted that Seychelles would remain a non-aligned sovereign nation with regard to this conflict. In another speech, he emphasised this stance, aligning Seychelles with the African Union's position and calling for an immediate ceasefire and negotiations to prevent global conflict:

*The Republic of Seychelles strongly supports the call of the Chair of the African Union and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission urging the parties concerned to establish an immediate ceasefire and to resume negotiations in order to preserve the world from the consequences of planetary conflict and to find a permanent and mutually acceptable solution to the Conflict (Ramkalawan 21 September 2022).*

This highlights Seychelles' prioritisation of African solidarity over aligning with major players like the US. A few years prior, at the Opening of the African Shipowners Associations, Danny Faure highlighted this alignment with Africa explaining that Seychelles would work together and collaborate "as strong African partners" where they should, as a collective entity, strive to achieve "a bigger portion of the global pie" (24 April 2018). This non-aligned stance was reiterated in a December 2022 speech, where President Ramkalawan firmly stated:

*We speak to everyone, we talk to everyone but we say to them we are non-aligned we are not aligned keep your keep your geopolitics to yourself [sic] (Ramkalawan 14 December 2022).*

In a statement by Ramkalawan on an interview available on YouTube, Ramkalawan explicitly stated that neither China nor India would build a military base in Seychelles. Rather, he asserted that "it's very clear our sovereignty is sacred, there will never under my watch be a foreign military base" (Ramkalawan 20 November 2020). Thus, central to Seychelles' foreign policy is the clear emphasis that Seychelles "is a proud and independent nation" (Radegonde 17 February 2023).

However, it is important to note here that while Seychelles does not align its foreign policy with major players this does not imply complete disengagement from global powers (if this were to be the case, Seychelles would be pursuing a counter-dependent foreign policy). On the contrary, Seychelles collaborates with major players, as

evidenced by its early participation in the UK-led Global Ocean Alliance, while simultaneously pursuing South-South, North-South and triangular cooperation to diversify its partnerships (Faure 3 June 2020; Ramkalawan 14 February 2023). In fact, Ramkalawan reaffirms an approach of multiple engagements as opposed to alignment or adopting an anti-core sentiment toward major players when he states that Seychelles receives military training for their soldiers from the US and India, while they accept patrol boats from China and India (14 December 2022).

The policy of non-alignment remains consistent as of 2024, with Foreign Affairs Minister, Sylvestre Radeconde (23 February 2024) reiterating that Seychelles embraces non-alignment while upholding principles of independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. He perspicuously states that positioning Seychelles in this way allows it to be unfettered by allegiances to any particular bloc or alliance. Additionally, a more subtle indication of this non-alignment can be found at the India Seychelles Business Forum in 2018, where Danny Faure mentioned that in Seychelles' waters it is very likely that there are numerous valuable commodities or resources that could be exported. However, an emphasis was placed on not only exporting to India but "to the rest of the world" (Faure 26 June 2018). The mention of "not only to India but to the rest of world" could be interpreted as a signal that Seychelles wished to remain flexible with its trade partnerships and does not want to align itself solely with a major player.

Additionally, a further indication that Seychelles is prone not to align its foreign policy with major players is its ardent support for multilateral institutions. On numerous occasions, Seychelles refers to its close partnership with multilateral institutions such as SADC (Faure 10 July 2017), the Commonwealth, l'Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (Ramkalawan 19 November 2020), AOSIS (Faure 23 September 2020), the AU, EU, IOC and the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) (Radeconde 9 May 2023). Seychelles further elaborates that it "gives utmost importance to multilateral cooperation" (Faure 25 September 2018). This suggests that Seychelles prioritises multilateral principles over alignment with major players.

A prominent theme that emerged in the analysis of the speeches was that Seychelles plays an innovative role in environmental issues. It has been at the forefront of marine conservation, being the first country to establish a marine protected area in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) and developing the world's largest Marine Spatial Plan

after Norway. This is also one of the first created by SIDS. As explained by Faure (21 September 2017):

*From small islands come big ideas. Last year Seychelles reached an agreement with the Paris Club and others on a first-of-its-kind \$21 million debt- for-adaptation swap to protect 30 per cent of our 1.37-million-square-kilometre exclusive economic zone, partly as an ecosystem-based adaptation to climate change. Also, by the end of this year, we aim to launch the world's first blue bonds to raise another \$15 million for sustainable fishing practices in our waters.*

In this same speech, it was furthermore emphasised by Faure (21 September 2017) that:

*As President of a large-ocean developing State, I would like to reiterate Seychelles' commitment to continuing to play a pioneering role in the search for innovative ways to respond to the Call for Actions and implement SDG 14 as an integral part of all SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.*

In the extract above, Seychelles demonstrates that it is not intimidated by the possible shortcomings of its small size. Rather, it boldly asserts that “no island is too small to be a part of this endeavour, no country too large to claim a monopoly of ideas” (Ramkalawan 21 May 2021). In 2023, Minister Radegonde further emphasised Seychelles' ambition to lead in the Indian Ocean:

*We want to be a leader in the Indian Ocean. We want to be a spokesperson, hopefully one that is listened to, on environmental issues, on the blue economy, and on SIDS issues (Radegonde 13 August 2023).*

Seychelles' confidence extends beyond environmental leadership as the nation has also led the way in innovative financial mechanisms. Faure's speech on November 26, 2018, emphasised Seychelles' success in implementing the world's first Debt Swap for Ocean Conservation and Climate Adaptation, as well as the first sovereign Blue Bonds:

*Seychelles' Blue Economy experiences and successes to date have shown how crucial partnerships can be, especially raising innovative finance and investment. The world's first Debt Swap for Ocean Conservation and Climate Adaptation and first sovereign Blue Bonds attest this.*

It has, furthermore, positioned itself as an innovator, challenging traditional donor-recipient models:

*Seychelles will remain at the forefront of the discourse on climate change. We will fight – with a passionate sense of urgency – against inequalities which directly impact us. [...] Seychelles has challenged the established model of a*

*donor recipient relationship through innovative financing that promotes ocean conservation and climate action (Faure 22 September 2020).*

The drive to challenge the status quo is evident in Seychelles' earlier speeches, where it declares its solidarity with the African continent and specifically emphasises its ambition to become a major and effective actor in the international arena. As President Faure stated on 10 July 2017:

*In this context, Seychelles reaffirms its commitment to the vision, objectives and programmes of SADC towards regional integration. We are undertaking the process of regional integration in order to achieve strong, sustainable economic growth and to become major and effective actors in world governance.*

The statement highlights not only Seychelles' connection to Africa, particularly through its reference to the Southern African Development Community but also its broader aspiration to influence governance at both regional and global levels. This ambition is reiterated in another speech on April 24, 2018, where Faure calls for greater investment in Africa's Blue Economy:

*The time is now for us Africans to grow our market share and invest in maritime sectors and tap into the economic benefits that can be derived from Africa's Blue Economy.*

Seychelles also positions itself as a leader within Africa, particularly in the maritime sectors. Faure's announcement on April 24, 2018, of Seychelles' leading role in the shipbuilding industry further illustrates this:

*On behalf of the Government of Seychelles, I am pleased to announce that we will make land available for the construction of a Pan African Shipping Line Head Office. This will be the centre for all ship owners in Africa, and act as a hub for all activities related to the shipping and maritime sectors. It is said that 'We cannot direct the wind but we can adjust our sails'.*

Other instances of an innovative spirit are reflected in the ground-breaking form of collaboration proposed by Seychelles. In partnership with Mauritius, Seychelles is developing the framework for the only joint management of the Extended Continental Shelf<sup>43</sup> as mentioned by Faure on November 26, 2018.

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<sup>43</sup> The extended continental shelf of a state is the portion of its continental shelf that extends beyond 200 nautical miles from its coastline. Under the 1982 UNCLOS, a state retains exclusive sovereign rights over this extended area beyond its EEZ (Ministry of Fisheries and Blue Economy Republic of Seychelles 2025).

Finally, at the 78<sup>th</sup> UNGA on 20 September 2023, President Ramkalawan of Seychelles reaffirmed the country's innovative role in marine conservation, emphasising its leadership in championing nature-based solutions:

*Nature-based solutions, exemplified by Seychelles' pioneering of Blue Bonds and the Blue Economy, showcase the potential for sustainable development [...] Seychelles remains committed to its pioneering role in marine conservation, protecting vast areas of our ocean and marine ecosystems. But we cannot succeed alone.*

One final domain in which Seychelles positions itself as a leader is in the moral domain. At the 72<sup>nd</sup> UNGA on the 21 September 2017, Danny Faure explicitly emphasised that:

*I believe that small island developing states such as mine can serve as the moral barometers for what is right. We do not shy from accepting and learning from the experiences of others but, in that regard, we also have valuable lessons to share with others. The path that we are charting in our country can serve as an example to all for the sake of tolerance and a global lasting peace.*

Through these various initiatives, Seychelles continues to assert its leadership, not only in the Western Indian Ocean or in Africa, but also on the global stage, especially in fields related to maritime governance, environmental protection, and innovative financial strategies.

#### **4.4.3. Foreign policy orientation assessment**

Seychelles, despite being a SIDS and facing the typical constraints associated with such nations, defies the conventional foreign policy classifications put forth by Breuning. A thematic analysis of 40 speeches revealed key findings that contest the notion of Seychelles adhering to either a compliant or counter-dependent foreign policy. In essence, while it does not align itself with major players, it also does not exhibit an anti-core sentiment. This perspective was echoed in an interview with the Minister of Agriculture, Climate Change and Energy, Mr Flavian Joubert, who remarked:

*Seychelles has always been pushing this line of friends to everyone and enemies to none [...] We are friendly with China, we are friendly with India, we are friendly with the United States and Europe and Russia (personal communication, 23 February 2024).*

The analysis identified specific themes illustrating that Seychelles charts its own course, particularly in the environmental domain. Rather than conforming to the positions of major players, Seychelles is involved in spearheading new norms and practices. A notable example of this is its initiation of the world's first Debt Swap for Conservation and Climate Adaptation. Simultaneously, Seychelles remains open to collaboration with major players, as evidenced by its partnership with Mauritius in managing the Extended Continental Shelf – a project made possible only with the support of the Commonwealth.

Beyond environmental leadership, Seychelles also seeks to position itself as a leader in the shipbuilding industry, positing that it would become a regional hub. In this instance, Seychelles seeks to disrupt conventional norms and practices, where small island states are hardly expected to play such a significant role. Its advocacy is further exemplified by its proactive stance on addressing the challenges faced by SIDS, particularly by leading the global discourse on climate change. Furthermore, Seychelles is pushing to reshape how financing is allocated to SIDS, pushing for more equitable solutions. It has expressed its desire to become a “leader in the Indian Ocean” and a “spokesperson”, striving to ensure that other African countries can play a significant role in global governance.

While Seychelles does not pursue a compliant foreign policy, it also does not adopt an anti-core sentiment. In the analysis above, it was demonstrated that Seychelles continues to participate with major players through the UK-led Global Ocean Alliance, which aims to protect 30 per cent of oceans by 2030. It furthermore collaborates with major players, evidenced by the support it receives from the US and India on training soldiers and the support it receives from China and India for patrol boats.

## **4.5. Mauritius**

### **4.5.1. Country overview**

The Republic of Mauritius is an archipelago<sup>44</sup> situated in the southwest Indian Ocean, approximately 2,000 km off the coast of East Africa (see Figure 5 below) (Republic of Mauritius 2020). The main island, known as Mauritius, spans 1,864 square kilometres, with additional territory comprising smaller atolls such as Saint Brandon and Agaléga.

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<sup>44</sup> An archipelago is a group of islands that are closely scattered in a body of water (National Geographic 2024).

Mauritius also claims sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago (including Diego Garcia)<sup>45</sup> and Tromelin (Nairobi Convention n.d.). Beyond its landmass, Mauritius boasts an EEZ exceeding 2,3 million square kilometres and a population of over 1,27 million. Given its small population and land area, vulnerability to economic shocks and fragile marine ecosystems, Mauritius is classified as a SIDS (United Nations n.d.).

In terms of its history, Mauritius was first visited by the Malays and Arabs in the 10<sup>th</sup> Century, and the Portuguese established a temporary base on the island in 1507 (Kasenally 2011: 161). Unlike countries that have always had an Indigenous population, Mauritius was initially uninhabited (Monty 2021). Between 1715 and 1810, Mauritius was a French Colony, renamed ‘Île de France’, before being captured by the British during the Napoleonic Wars (Kasenally 2011: 161). The island remained under British control until 1968, when it gained independence through a referendum. In 1992, Mauritius was officially declared a Republic (Government of Mauritius 2020).



**Figure 5.** Map of Mauritius

Source: Government of Mauritius (2024)

<sup>45</sup> Discussed in 6.2.1. and 6.2.5.

Mauritius has strong relations with multiple countries, most prominently India and France. Its ties with India, formalised in 1948, trace back to colonial times when more than half a million Indian indentured labourers were brought to the Island between 1834 and the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Today, 'Indo-Mauritians' comprise about two-thirds of the population (Monty 2021). Tiwari (2020: 99) notes that the Indo-Mauritian community has historically dominated Mauritian politics, partly due to their majority presence in the electoral platform. Reflecting Indian influence, every Mauritian prime minister, except Paul Berenger, has been from the Indian community. (Tiwari 2020: 99). Subsequently, at times, Mauritius is referred to as 'Little India'.

Following independence in 1958, Mauritius's first Prime Minister, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, emphasised the centrality of India in the country's foreign policy (Ministry of External Affairs of India 2023). This relationship is underscored by India's invitation to the Prime Minister of Mauritius to discuss the 2014 Lok Sabha election manifesto, making him the only leader outside of South Asia to attend (Chaturvedy 2017: 171). In March 2015, during a visit to Mauritius, Prime Minister Narendra Modi described the Indian Ocean as a "common maritime home" (Chaturvedy 2017: 174). Such statements have been supported by an increase in funding towards countries in the Indian Ocean Region, such as Mauritius (Bhadauriya & Mishra 2023: 419). Specifically, between 2008 and 2020, Mauritius experienced an upsurge in grants and loans from India (Bhadauriya & Mishra 2023: 424). Such context is essential for analysing whether Mauritius aligns its foreign policy with traditional major powers, like the US, and emerging powers like India.

Alongside its relationship with India, Mauritius maintains strong ties with France, its leading bilateral partner for official development assistance (Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs 2023). Relations between the two states are driven by France's control over the neighbouring island of Réunion. However, with other Western partners, Mauritius's relations have been strained. In particular, the relationship with the UK soured over the dispute over the Chagos Archipelago. In 1965, three years before Mauritius gained independence, the UK purchased the Chagos Islands, allowing the US to establish a military base on Diego Garcia, displacing the Chagossians in the process. Until 2019, the UK government refused to accept the UN General Assembly Resolution that stated that the Chagos Archipelago forms an integral part of Mauritius (Fabricius 10 March 2023). On 2 October 2024, the UK and Mauritius published a joint

statement in which the UK agreed that Mauritius is sovereign over the Chagos Archipelago (Prime Minister's Office 2024). The UK will, however, continue to exercise sovereign rights over Diego Garcia for at least 99 years. Mauritius has, overtime, cultivated relations with the European Union through agreements such as the Lomé Convention and the Cotonou Agreement (Gray 2022: 74).

Mauritius maintains relations with various actors, which reflects in its participation in numerous international and regional organisations. It is a member of several important organisations such as the Alliance of Small Island States, the African Union, the World Trade Organization, the Commonwealth, La Francophonie, the Southern African Development Community, the Indian Ocean Commission, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, and the Indian Ocean Rim Association, the last of which Mauritius played a pivotal role in establishing (Global Security 2017).

#### **4.5.2. Foreign policy analysis**

For Mauritius, a total of 24 speeches from 2017 to 2024 were identified as relevant to this study. Similar to Seychelles and Solomon Islands, Mauritius emphasises the urgent need for an end to hostilities in the Russia-Ukraine war, advocating for the resolution of conflicts through peaceful means (Jugnauth 23 September 2022). While not downplaying the severity of the war, Mauritius highlights the importance of addressing broader global challenges<sup>46</sup>:

*This is the time when we should be seriously thinking of saving our planet, slowing down the effects of climate change, preventing a worldwide recession and most importantly preventing a nuclear catastrophe.*

This statement underscores a recurring theme in the foreign policy discourse of island nations: the view that geopolitical conflicts, such as the Russia-Ukraine war, are not the most pressing threats they face. Indeed, Mauritius asserts that “current geopolitical tensions should be de-escalated” (Jugnauth 23 September 2022). In this sense, although major players all call for a de-escalation of tensions, the reasons are different. Mauritius arguably approaches it from the view that it will relegate other important concerns to the periphery, while the major players are mainly concerned with

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<sup>46</sup> This echoes the point made by Solomon Islands, highlighting that more resources are allocated to wars than to combatting climate change (see 4.2.2.)

geopolitics and strategy. This demonstrates a divergence in views and implies there is no clear alignment between Mauritius and major players.

As seen with Seychelles, a prominent theme in Mauritius' speeches is its close affinity with the African continent. This indicates that Mauritius is more inclined to position its foreign policy in support of regional organisations, such as the AU, rather than major global powers. For example, Mauritius has consistently aligned itself with the African Continent and the Ezulwini Consensus<sup>47</sup> and Sirte Declaration<sup>48</sup> in terms of expanding the Security Council. Jugnauth has passionately implored:

*The historical injustice done to Africa must be corrected. Africa should have its rightful place in an expanded Security Council which should also include a seat for SIDS (14 September 2021).*

While not aligning with major powers, Mauritius neither adopts an anti-core sentiment towards them. For example, even though Mauritius and the US do not share a common stance on Palestine and Israel, with Mauritius rather expressing “full solidarity with the Palestinian People” and therefore “strongly condemns the senseless acts of violence against its vulnerable population” (Jugnauth 23 September 2022), this does not mean that Mauritius adopts an anti-core or hostile position towards the US. In fact, Mauritius still supports the US military presence on Diego Garcia:

*Mauritius has no intention of seeking the disruption of the security arrangements currently in place in Diego Garcia, the largest island of the Chagos archipelago [...] Mauritius, as sovereign over the Chagos Archipelago, which includes Diego Garcia, stands ready to enter into a long-term arrangement with the United States in respect of Diego Garcia (Jugnauth 21 September 2017).*

The agreement reached on 3 October 2024, reinforces this, with Mauritius agreeing that Diego Garcia can be utilised by the UK for a further 99 years (UK Government). In another instance, Mauritius reiterated its good relations with the US despite not necessarily aligning its foreign policy, with Jugnauth explaining that they want “to build on the legacy of the excellent bilateral ties which unite Mauritius and the USA” (22 July 2021).

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<sup>47</sup> The Ezulwini Consensus is Africa's common position on reform of the UNSC to rectify Africa's exclusion from permanent membership (Africa 2024: 3). It calls for two permanent seats and three non-permanent ones for the continent.

<sup>48</sup> The Sirte Declaration was adopted in 1999 and called for the establishment of the African Union (Moffat 8 September 2022).

Mauritius' approach of not aligning with major players but neither adopting an anti-core sentiment towards them is also evident in the friendly relationships it has with numerous states. On 27 December 2021, Jugnauth explained that Mauritius had entered multiple trade agreements, namely the Mauritius-China Free Trade Agreement, the UK-Eastern Southern Africa Economic Partnership Agreement, the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement with India and the start of trade under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). This attests to this multiple-actor engagement with what Mauritius calls, 'friendly countries'.

Furthermore, as with Seychelles, Mauritius emphasises the importance of operating together with international organisations as opposed to aligning with a major player, with Jugnauth asserting that "our membership to the AU, SADC, COMESA, IOC and the IORA has played a vital role" (Jugnauth 27 December 2021). He further contends that "we can no longer afford to be fractious. We need to promote, preserve, and strengthen multilateralism" (Jugnauth 14 September 2021). This indicates a preference for multilateralism.

Despite articulating this cooperation, Mauritius, like other island states, asserts its independence in addressing pressing issues. For example, the Prime Minister stated that:

*As a large ocean state that respects the rule of law and international law, Mauritius has taken the lead in the Western Indian Ocean region in combating piracy and other transnational organized crimes and in keeping its territory and surrounding areas safe (Jugnauth 28 September 2018).*

and

*Mauritius continues to spearhead the fight against drug trafficking and other maritime crimes (Jugnauth 28 September 2018).*

Closely linked to spearheading the fight against crime is Mauritius discussing the launch of a Security Exchange in Mauritius. Jugnauth explains that:

*The setting up of a pan-African Securities Exchange in our country espouses my vision to consolidate the attractiveness of our jurisdiction as a leading International Financial Centre of substance (25 October 2021).*

Additionally, Mauritius positions itself as a pivotal player in climate change management:

*The Bank of Mauritius has set up the Climate Change Centre in 2021, to spearhead efforts in measuring, analysing, managing, and mitigating climate change risk (Jugnauth 9 December 2022).*

Mauritius aims to develop Environmental, Social, and Corporate Governance frameworks to establish itself as a sustainable international financial centre, encouraging investments compliant with environmental, social, and governance standards.

Moreover, another recurring theme in Mauritius' speeches is its pursuit of partnership beyond traditional allies, demonstrating its multi-actor engagement. The Prime Minister noted:

*Whilst maintaining and strengthening our bilateral relations with our traditional partners, our friendship with Arab countries has grown significantly over the course of this decade, leading to the recent opening of a Consulate General of Mauritius in Dubai. My Government will continue to enhance its cooperation with Arab countries through cultural, tourism, trade, and other exchanges (Jugnauth 27 December 2021).*

Mauritius, like other island states, also challenges the actions of major players. For example, it openly criticises the UK's continued administration of the Chagos Islands. On 23 September 2022, Prime Minister Jugnauth asserted

*It ill behoves to the UK to call on Mauritius and other African countries to respond to other allegations of illegal occupation when it illegally occupies a part of Africa. The new Government of the United Kingdom has an opportunity to place itself on the right side of history and bring to a close this dark chapter of history involving the last colony in Africa and the last colony it ever created as well as the shameful forcible displacement of people [sic].*

Moreover, Mauritius also advocates for a new financing structure, emphasising the need for a Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI), particularly, in light of the significant debt distress faced by SIDS, starting well before the Covid-19 pandemic:

*Mr. President, Before the pandemic, Small Island Developing States were already facing significant levels of debt distress. While we welcome the G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative, we believe this facility should be extended to include Small Island Developing States, in particular the Middle-Income Countries as well. A new global financial architecture focusing on fiscal space and debt sustainability is urgently needed for SIDS (Jugnauth 14 September 2021).*

Mauritius emphasises the importance of access to climate finance, highlighting that it is the responsibility of states to ensure that "our own futures and that of our children are secure and refrain from any action that is tantamount to ecocide" (Jugnauth 23

September 2022). This once again highlights the importance of advocacy for Mauritius and not merely complying with the status quo.

#### **4.5.3. Foreign policy orientation assessment**

The thematic findings outlined above reinforce the argument that Mauritius does not align its foreign policy with any major players. At the UNGA, Mauritius consistently takes positions that diverge from those of major players, such as the US's stance on the Israel-Palestine conflict. In another instance, Mauritius diverges from major players' stances when it emphasises that while it is important to address war, this should not lead to states deprioritising climate change threats. Mauritius, therefore, takes the position that slowing down climate change needs to be treated with as much severity as wars. Furthermore, the thematic analysis demonstrated that like many other states, Mauritius persistently advocated for reform of the UNSC. Mauritius' calls for reforms of the UNSC show that it does not passively align its foreign policy; rather, it challenges major players.

However, this does not imply an anti-core or anti-major sentiment; for instance, Mauritius continues to support the US as a security provider<sup>49</sup> through its military presence on the Chagos Islands as mentioned in Jugnauth's speech on 21 September 2017 and reinforced in October 2024. The former Prime Minister also emphasised that Mauritius and the US wanted to expand on the legacy of strong ties between the two states. In other instances, Mauritius continues to work together with major players, evident though the multiple trade agreements it has with actors such as China, the UK and India. Furthermore, Mauritius promotes a 'friend to all' foreign policy approach, evident in its relationships with the US and India and an increasing engagement with Arab states, which reflects its broader strategy of fostering diverse international partnerships. Mauritius also highlights the importance of international and regional organisations and maintains that multilateralism needs to be strengthened.

Additionally, the thematic analysis showed that Mauritius frequently aims to lead initiatives in the region, which challenges the notion that they merely seek compliance in their foreign policy with major players. For example, Mauritius claims to 'spearhead'

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<sup>49</sup> This does not imply any official support in the sense of a formal military agreement between the two states, but rather that Mauritius recognises that Diego Garcia – especially its proximity to international shipping lanes – is vital to maintaining regional and global stability.

efforts against maritime crimes and asserts that it has taken the ‘lead’ in the western Indian Ocean concerning maritime issues. The term ‘spearhead’ is notably repeated in discussions about the Climate Change Centre established in 2021. Moreover, Mauritius seeks to position itself as a hub for sustainable international finance, highlighting its commitment to challenging existing financing practices. It aims to pioneer new approaches, particularly by advocating for the inclusion of middle-income countries in the Group of 20 (G20) Debt Service Suspension Initiative.

The above demonstrates that Mauritius’s foreign policy is not characterised by alignment with major players or adopting an anti-core stance towards them, two of the categories of orientation proposed by Breuning. Rather, Mauritius positions itself as a leader with emphasis placed on spearheading multiple initiatives, spanning the maritime security domain to climate initiatives and financial reform.

#### **4.6. Conclusion**

In concluding this chapter, it is vital to take note of a few things. Firstly, it is important to note that while each of these islands being examined challenges what is known about the foreign policy orientations of small states and SIDS, this does not mean that their foreign policy orientations are completely uniform. In fact, in each case, although they challenged the traditional literature on small states, each behaves in a slightly different and unique way (to be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5). Secondly, even the interpretation of the speeches and their respective articulation demonstrate that there are unique features between each island state. In the case of Solomon Islands specifically, the government was much clearer in its articulation of its stance on matters, which stood in contrast to the case of Mauritius, where there was often a need for the researcher to ‘read into’ the foreign policy speeches.

Having said that, despite variations in the clarity of the articulation, a recurring theme across the foreign policies of the selected states suggests that Breuning’s emblematic framework – which categorises states as pursuing either a compliant or counter-dependent foreign policy – fails to adequately capture the orientations that Solomon Islands, Fiji, Seychelles and Mauritius pursue.

Solomon Islands strategically manoeuvres between major players, neither adopting an explicitly anti-core sentiment towards major players nor fully aligning itself with major players. Meanwhile, Seychelles positions itself as a leader, especially in the

environmental domain, where it actively seeks to establish new norms and practices especially as it relates to climate financing. Similarly, Fiji and Mauritius also assert themselves as leaders, specifically in environmental governance and maritime security, as they endeavour to position themselves at the forefront of global and regional initiatives. Notably, Fiji also challenges major players, particularly regarding their insufficient responses to climate change, which indicates that Fiji is not pursuing a compliant foreign policy orientation. Likewise, Mauritius seeks to position itself as ‘spearheading’ and ‘leading’ efforts to address maritime insecurity, once again underscoring the absence of a compliance-based foreign policy approach.

While these four states do not align their foreign policies, it is evident that they do not pursue a counter-dependent orientation. In each case, they continue to emphasise the importance of collaboration with major players and uphold a strong commitment to multilateralism. This reinforces the notion that their foreign policy approaches transcend the binary classification of compliance and counter-dependence. Having established that these states’ foreign policies cannot fully be captured by the binary classification of compliance or counter-dependence, the following chapter examines the specific nature of their foreign policy orientations, seeking to identify the distinct orientations they adopt.

## **Chapter 5: Towards an alternative conceptual framework**

### **5.1. Introduction**

Ocean States are pursuing foreign policies that demonstrate alternative role orientations, which the researcher labels as ‘pioneer’ and ‘activist-challenger’ (see 3.4.4.). The first part of this chapter discusses these alternative role orientations, defining them and outlining their key indicators. Following this, the second part of this chapter will challenge the underlying assumption inherent in Breuning’s emblematic framework, namely that the relationship between small states (and Small Island Developing States in this study) and major players should be conceived of in terms of a dependence of the former on the latter. Rather, this chapter will challenge Breuning’s assumption, drawing on the findings of Chapter 4, arguing that there is a need to move from the notion of ‘dependence’ to the notion of ‘interdependence’. It is through the introduction and discussion of interdependence and its subsequent discussion that this study probes the concept of ‘power’ more extensively and how it needs to be reconceptualised as it relates to the foreign policy of these states.

The full explanation of these ideas is covered across both Chapters 5 and 6<sup>50</sup>. As a result, certain points may only briefly be touched upon in this chapter, with an indication that they will be explored more thoroughly in the following chapter. The third and final part of this chapter demonstrates how the role conceptions of ‘pioneer’ and ‘activist-challenger’ inherently contain a form of power. This study will locate the ‘power’ in the role conceptions of ‘pioneer’ and ‘activist-challenger’. Doing this is central, since it allows the study, in the following chapter (Chapter 6), to demonstrate the extent to which Ocean States (to be introduced in 5.2.3.) do in fact have power.

### **5.2. Introducing and defining the ‘pioneer’ and ‘activist-challenger’ roles**

This section introduces and defines the indicators of the newly introduced roles of ‘pioneer’ and ‘activist-challenger’. These indicators are characteristics based on the analysis conducted in Chapter 4. The roles of ‘pioneer’ and ‘activist-challenger’, contrast sharply with the orientations proposed by Breuning (2007: 152), where a compliant foreign policy involves aligning closely with major players, thus emphasising

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<sup>50</sup> Chapters 5 and 6 specifically address the third and final sub-question of this study, namely ‘How do the selected states challenge traditional understandings of power, dependence, and the foreign policy options available to SIDS?’

dependence and a counter-dependent foreign policy involves rejecting this dependence, often adopting a distinctly anti-core or anti-major power foreign policy.

### **5.2.1. Pioneer**

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2023e), 'pioneer' as a noun can be defined as "a person or group that originates or helps open up a new line of thought or activity or a new method or technical development" and in its verb form means "to open or prepare for others to follow". Based on the analysis conducted in Chapter 4, this study identifies multiple characteristics that indicate when a given state is enacting the role of a 'pioneer' in international affairs.

First, such states assume sectoral leadership and explicitly ascribe words such as 'spearheading' or 'leading' to their initiatives in specific domains. For instance, as discussed in 4.5.3., Mauritius repeatedly mentions the term 'spearheading', especially as it discusses the Climate Change Centre established in 2021. Additionally, Mauritius also articulates its desire to take the lead in the Western Indian Ocean in combatting piracy and other transnational organised crimes (see 4.5.2.). Such states also emphasise their aspirations to lead in regional and global initiatives. Seychelles, for example, asserts that it wants to be a leader in the Indian Ocean, reinforcing its commitment to a pioneering role.

Second, states that enact a pioneer role engage in norm entrepreneurship, global advocacy, and policy innovation. For example, Seychelles has actively promoted new norms relating to the preservation of oceans and climate financing, while it has come up with innovative new policies, such as becoming the first country worldwide to introduce a 'debt-for-nature-swap' in the maritime domain (for more see 5.5.1.). This demonstrates its capacity for policy innovation. Moreover, Seychelles is vocal about climate change, positioning itself at the forefront of climate discourse, advocating for stronger international action and challenging structural inequalities that impede effective responses to climate change (see 4.4.2.).

Third, pioneering states actively seek to redefine priorities, moving beyond traditional security concerns to emphasise non-traditional threats such as climate change. Both Mauritius and Solomon Islands, for example, have consistently articulated that global priorities should not only be aimed at addressing war but also at combatting climate change. Both of these aspects refer to the fact that states that enact the role of pioneer

typically show characteristics of innovation and disruption of established structures. A pioneer actively shapes international norms and policies rather than simply following the existing frameworks or abiding by the status quo.

Fourth, states enacting a pioneer role consistently engage in multilateral diplomacy, making multilateralism a key indicator of this foreign policy orientation. Both Seychelles and Mauritius prioritise the African Union in their foreign policy and also emphasise the importance of multilateralism in addressing issues such as climate change. Multilateralism is a means for states to refrain from siding with major players and rather assert their own independent path.

Multilateral engagement is closely linked to the fifth indicator, namely multi-actor engagement. This refers to the tendency of states not to align with major players but rather engage with multiple partners. Mauritius, for instance, engages with both its traditional partners while also expanding relations with Arab states. Seychelles pursues South-South, North-South and triangular cooperation to diversify its relations and broaden its international engagement.

The pioneer role conception is theoretically distinct from traditional foreign policy orientations prescribed by scholars such as Breuning. Rather than conforming to binary classifications of compliance or counter-dependence, this role emphasises leadership, norm entrepreneurship, global advocacy, redefining priorities, multilateralism and multi-actor engagement. States like Mauritius and Seychelles predominantly enacted the role of pioneer, although there were also instances where Solomon Islands and Fiji demonstrated similar tendencies, such as redefining priorities (see 5.2.2.).

### **5.2.2. Activist-challenger**

The role conception of ‘activist-challenger’ can be deconstructed into its two constituent components: ‘activist’ and ‘challenger’. ‘Activist’ implies something akin to “a person who uses or supports strong actions (such as public protests) in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2023a), while ‘challenger’ can be traced to the word ‘challenge’ which means “to dispute especially as being unjust, invalid, or outmoded” and “to confront or defy boldly” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2023b). These two words have been deliberately paired since they imply not only the behaviour of supporting strong calls to action, but

specifically in the context where something is unjust, invalid or outmoded. Among the four states examined, Solomon Islands and Fiji emerged as key exemplars of the activist-challenger role conception<sup>51</sup>. Similar to the pioneer role conception, the activist-challenger role exhibits several defining characteristics.

First, at the core of this role is the consistent challenging of major players, a feature which may be conceptualised as issue-based assertiveness. Fiji, for instance, actively confronts the reluctance of major players to take meaningful action on climate change, frequently critiquing states that failed to meet their climate commitments. Likewise, Solomon Islands has challenged major players on multiple fronts, including its opposition to Japan's release of nuclear wastewater and North Korea's ballistic missile testing (see 4.2.2.).

This is closely linked to a second characteristic, namely that these states engage in principled critique, wherein states ground their challenges in moral arguments. For example, when Fiji critiques major players, it explicitly links this to matters of principles, suggesting that major players do not have the moral authority to call themselves allies of the ocean while simultaneously failing to curb carbon emissions. Similarly, its critique invokes the lived realities of communities facing existential threats due to sea level rise. Solomon Islands, in turn, has framed its opposition to Japan's nuclear wastewater discharge as a matter of protecting the well-being and dignity of its people.

Third, activist-challenger states engage in shifting support within a framework of having multiple friends. For instance, Fiji vacillates between seeking support from Australia, China and the US, depending on which actor best addresses its needs and concerns. Similarly, Solomon Islands emphatically states that it has a foreign policy of 'friends to all', which allows it to cooperate with diverse partners on various issues.

Fourth, activist-challengers reject narratives that emphasise small states as passive. Fiji, for example, states that regardless of power asymmetry in international politics, it remains unafraid to condemn any warring nations. Furthermore, it also challenges assertions that solutions to climate finance can only come from developed nations.

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<sup>51</sup> As with the role conception of 'pioneer' this is not to suggest that the 'activist-challenger' role is exclusive only to Solomon Islands and Fiji. In fact, Seychelles also challenges the system by introducing novel climate financing mechanisms. However, this can be accounted for in Seychelles by referring to 'leadership' and 'policy innovation'. Furthermore, the 'activist-challenger' role was more salient in Fiji and Solomon Islands and therefore was discussed mainly in relation to these two states.

Similarly, in 2017, Solomon Islands was resolute in standing up for the West Papuans in their fight for self-determination, even though this was a contrasting stance to the US and China. Integral to this rejection of passivity is an emphasis on island agency, wherein states do not wait for solutions but rather create solutions. Fiji, for example, introduces the 'Ocean of Peace' concept as a direct response to the geopolitical rivalry in the region and broader patterns of conflict worldwide. It has also stated it is working on creating the world's first Climate Catastrophe Response Force.

As was the case with the pioneer role conception, the activist-challenger role conception is theoretically distinct from the compliant and counter-dependent foreign policy orientations proposed by Breuning. States enacting this role do not conform to the dichotomous framework of compliance or counter-dependence but rather demonstrate a combination of issue-based assertiveness, principled critique, shifting support, and rejection of narratives positioning islands as passive.

### **5.2.3. Introducing Ocean States**

Considering the distinct roles that these states adopt in the international arena, this study proposes a shift in terminology: rather than referring to these islands as Small Island Developing States (SIDS), they should be known as Ocean States (OS) from this point forward. The designation of SIDS inadequately captures their agency in the international arena. It implicitly reinforces a narrative of vulnerability and marginalisation, framing these states primarily in terms of their smallness (linked to their land size). However, as was demonstrated above, these states do not conform to passive or even reactive roles. The pioneer role conception exemplifies this agency by positioning these states as frontrunners in environmental governance and climate advocacy. The activist-challenger role underscores their willingness to confront and critique major players and recalibrate partnerships based on their own interests. The term Ocean State more accurately encapsulates their identity and strategic orientation. By reframing these states as OS, the discourse shifts from focusing on their vulnerability and apparent smallness to emphasising their leadership, agency and innovation. This terminology also better aligns with the roles they assume, whether as pioneers or activist-challengers.

This reconceptualisation challenges the assumptions of the traditional theorising about small states. Indeed, as was stated in 2.2.2., theory is never neutral, but always for

someone and for a specific purpose (Cox 1995: 31). Theory is not 'above' reality but rather evolves alongside it, articulated in Cox's (1995: 31) assertion that "theory thus follows reality". The geography of SIDS previously positioned them as isolated and peripheral. However, geography can be changed, even if only marginally, as noted by Hill (2016: 179). With the advances of science and technology, resources that were previously unexploitable have become exploitable. The importance of resources like minerals, water, and fish stocks is determined principally by the value assigned to them by the international system at any particular time (Hill 2016: 181). Thus, while historically the geography of these Ocean States has rendered them of little concern, the reemergence of the Indo-Pacific has repositioned them to the centre.

Furthermore, the terminology of an Ocean State is particularly relevant when considering the vast maritime territories of these island states. While these islands tend to have relatively small land areas, their EEZ extends far beyond their shoreline, granting them significant maritime territory. For instance, Solomon Islands has a land area of 28,466 square kilometres, yet its EEZ spans an impressive 1,58 million square kilometres – an expanse comparable in size to the EEZ of the Philippines (Lowy Institute n.d.). Similarly, Fiji, with a land area of just 18,274 square kilometres, controls an EEZ of over 1,29 million square kilometres, an area roughly equivalent to Iran, the world's 17<sup>th</sup> largest country by landmass. These figures reveal just how misleading the term 'small' can be.

Seychelles presents a further example. Despite having only 455 square kilometres of land, its EEZ stretches across 1,3 million square kilometres – placing it on par with states like Chad or Peru in terms of their land mass. In the case of Mauritius, it has a landmass of only 2,040 square kilometres but an EEZ of 2 million square kilometres. To put this in perspective, if Mauritius's land and maritime territories were combined, they would be large enough to accommodate the entirety of Greece, Bulgaria, Germany, Italy, France, Spain and the United Kingdom (Intercontinental Trust n.d.). In all these cases, the ratio of land area to maritime territory is exceptionally high, highlighting the significance of the Ocean State designation. For instance, the ratio for Solomon Islands is 43:1, meaning that its maritime domain is more than 40 times the size of its landmass. The term Ocean State is therefore not merely symbolic but also highlights the economic, geopolitical and environmental interests these states have in

the maritime domain. Ocean State aptly captures the unique geographical and strategic realities of these states.

In the next section, the implications of the introduction of these two roles of pioneer and activist-challenger, which define the foreign policy orientations of Ocean States, will be discussed.

### **5.3. Moving from ‘dependence’ to ‘interdependence’**

Breuning’s framework assumes that small states necessarily pursue a dependent foreign policy (see 2.3.1). The central argument made by this study in Chapter 4 was that Ocean States – a type of small state – do not necessarily pursue a dependent foreign policy. Rather than adopting compliant or counter-dependent foreign policies – both forms of dependency – these states are acting as ‘pioneers’ and ‘activist-challengers’. This subsection will explore why these roles do not reflect a dependent foreign policy and how this subsequently implies a shift from ‘dependence’ to ‘interdependence’.

The roles of ‘pioneer’ and ‘activist-challenger’ stand in contrast to these two types of foreign policy orientations. In the case of ‘pioneer’, the notion of ‘dependence’ is intentionally negated. The term ‘dependence’ refers to “the quality or state of being influenced or determined by or subject to another” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2023c). Given this definition, it becomes apparent that ‘pioneer’ and ‘dependence’ are inherently contrasting concepts. By definition, a pioneer leads rather than follows, and this leadership role negates the passive nature of dependence. Similarly, ‘activist-challenger’ as a role stands in contrast to a dependent role, since the ‘activist-challenger’ is fundamentally about challenging the current structures of dependence rather than accepting them.

At this stage, it is worth responding to two possible refutations that might arise. Firstly, the argument could be made that the role conception of activist-challenger may be similar to pursuing a counter-dependent foreign policy. However, this study points out that a counter-dependent foreign policy is characterised by a strong anti-core or anti-major player sentiment (see 2.3.1.), which is not necessarily intrinsic to the ‘activist-challenger’ role. To be an ‘activist-challenger’ does not imply that one needs to be anti-major player. In fact, as was made evident in the thematic analysis of the four states

(see Chapter 4), Ocean States do not outright adopt an anti-core sentiment toward major players but rather diversify their relations with these powers.

For example, while Solomon Islands enacted the role of activist-challenger, it still pursues relations with a variety of actors even in the same field of interest. This is evident in the manner in which Solomon Islands expressed the need to review the current security treaty between Australia and itself, even though it signed a security agreement with China in 2022 (Al Jazeera 2023c). In terms of its trade agreements, Solomon Islands, in 2020, acceded to the interim Economic Partnership Agreement between the EU and the Pacific (Delegation of the European Union to the Pacific 2021) while at the same time having a non-reciprocal trade arrangement with China (Solomon Islands Government 2022a) and signing the US's 11-point declaration on sustainable development and trade (VOA News 4 October 2022). Furthermore, in their address at the 79<sup>th</sup> Session of the UNGA, Solomon Islands discussed its engagement with numerous, diverse development partners, such as China, New Zealand, Australia and Japan, all in the field of infrastructure development (Agovaka 27 September 2024).

In 2023, Solomon Islands hosted the Pacific Islands Games for the first time in the nation's history. The preparations for the games exemplified Solomon Islands' 'friends to all' or 'multiple engagement' approach. In the build-up to the games, China's contribution to financing was significantly highlighted (and problematised)<sup>52</sup>. However, in reality, Solomon Islands also received significant support from Japan (who aided in infrastructure development for roads and the airport), Indonesia (who funded the construction of the multi-purpose indoor sports facility call the 'Friendship Hall'), New Zealand and Australia (Diamana, personal communication, 24 November 2024).

In this sense, Solomon Islands is not outright adopting an anti-core sentiment toward major players but rather diversifying its relations with them. Labelling Solomon Islands foreign policy as counter-dependent would confer labels such as 'anti-major power', which frames its foreign policy as being in opposition to major players. This would imply that Solomon Islands distances itself from major players such as the US, Australia or China when in reality, their foreign policy demonstrates a more nuanced

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<sup>52</sup> See for example Piringi (2023).

and strategic approach that involves engaging with major players on a range of issues, at differing times and dependent on the context. Therefore, Solomon Islands foreign policy would be oversimplified if it were reduced to simple counterdependence.

Secondly, it may be argued that if a state challenges a major player, it is pursuing an 'independent' foreign policy, one of the foreign policy orientations that Hey (1993) originally proposed (see 2.3.1.). If such a critique were sustained, it would imply that the study's findings are redundant. However, this study proffers that a more nuanced understanding is required. Challenging major players does not necessarily imply *independence* but could imply *interdependence*. That is, there is still some degree of dependence, but this manifests as 'interdependence', rather than pure 'dependence' on the one hand, or pure 'independence' on the other.

To elaborate on this, economist Albert Hirschman's (1970: 30) concept of 'voice' and 'exit' is particularly relevant. In the case of an 'exit' strategy, states abandon a relationship, much like consumers or members of an organisation leaving a relationship to join the competition. In contrast, a 'voice' strategy symbolises an approach where there is recognition of interdependence between two actors, and rather than abandoning the relationship altogether, the actors attempt to alter practices or policies. Hirschman (1970: 30) specifically describes the voice strategy as "any attempt at all to change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs". In this instance, Ocean States are pursuing a 'voice' strategy – they are not challenging the major players by seeking full independence and exiting the relationship or severing ties. Instead, they employ a 'voice' strategy – working within the existing interdependent relationship to influence the practices and policies.

For example, while Fiji expresses its disappointment and dissatisfaction with the world's current debt architecture, it does not independently seek to reform it but rather acknowledges the role of actors such as the US in reforming the World Bank and helping low and middle-income countries gain access to finance. This demonstrates an understanding of the interdependence that exists. In another instance, Solomon Islands expresses its dissatisfaction with the fatalistic narrative on climate change and while it calls out the G20 for being responsible for 80 per cent of global emissions, it clearly stipulates that the group must take a stronger leadership role (Agovaka 27 September 2024). This demonstrates once again the understanding of the

interdependence that exists between Ocean States and major players, as well as the fact that climate change is a global issue that cannot be solved by one state alone. However, most importantly, Solomon Islands, though confronting the major players, does not seek to play an independent role. Therefore, referring to the foreign policies of Ocean States as 'independent' would eclipse the fact that these states can use interdependence to their advantage when engaging with major players (this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6).

### **5.3.1. A multi-faceted interdependence**

The role conceptions of 'pioneer' and 'activist-challenger' suggest that the foreign policies of Ocean States are not necessarily defined by a sense of dependence; they challenge this dependence. This study positions the foreign policies of Ocean States within a framework of interdependence, where the actions of one state affect the other and vice versa. As Joseph Nye (2007: 210) explains, interdependence refers to:

*Situations in which actors or events in different parts of a system affect each other [...] simply put, interdependence means mutual dependence.*

Essentially, this study challenges the traditional assumptions in IR that 'small'<sup>53</sup> states are inherently dependent on major players, a view historically advanced by scholars in the field. Breuning (2007: 152), for instance, argues that small developing states in the global South have a foreign policy that is constrained by their dependence, which is based on asymmetric relations between the smaller state and the more powerful state.

However, in the contemporary international system, this study contends that relationships between Ocean States and major players are better understood as interdependent rather than unidirectionally dependent, or as Keohane and Nye (1989: 11) would call the latter, 'pure dependence'. It is crucial to clarify that interdependence does not imply equal or symmetrical relations in all instances<sup>54</sup>. In some areas of a relationship, the relationship may indeed be asymmetrical, which could be interpreted

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<sup>53</sup> Small is written between inverted commas since this study argues that these states are not necessarily 'small' especially when one considers their vast EEZ. Thus, the label of 'small' is being problematised.

<sup>54</sup> Keohane and Nye (1989: 9) specifically explain that if there are reciprocal transactions between states, there is interdependence, although this reciprocal transaction does not necessarily imply it is symmetrical. Therefore, they argue that care should be taken not to interpret interdependence in terms of evenly balanced mutual dependence (Keohane & Nye 1989: 10).

as instances of dependency. The central argument advanced here is that interdependence exists across multiple domains, ranging from economic, strategic, and environmental. Therefore, while a state may be dependent in one domain, it may simultaneously exert influence in another, thereby preventing a reduction of the overall relationship to one of unilateral dependence. Long (2022: 46-47) aptly describes that “an actor that is relatively weak in one issue area, or in the context of a particular relationship, might be strong elsewhere”.

This dynamic exists between Ocean States and major players and is best described through Wrong’s (1968: 673) notion of ‘intercursive power’. According to Wrong (1968: 673-674), intercursive power refers to a situation where there is recurrent interaction between two parties, which results in the emergence of a pattern where one actor controls the other with regard to a certain situation, while the other actor controls the other in a different area<sup>55</sup>. As will be made clear in Chapter 6, Ocean States may depend on major players for aid, and therefore exhibit dependence in the economic sphere, while major players may be dependent on Ocean States for their strategic location and therefore exhibit dependence in a different field. When viewed holistically, these relationships constitute a system of interdependence where the actions of one impact the other.

Nye (2007: 216-217) further illustrates the fact that dependence is not purely confined to one field. Rather, interdependence could be linked to states playing not one, but multiple poker games. In one such game, a state may be on the receiving end of asymmetrical dependence; however, in another game, it may hold the majority of chips (Nye 2007: 216). The main argument made in this section, therefore, is that Ocean States are not perpetually trapped in a dependent relationship, but there are instances in which major players themselves are dependent on Ocean States (as will be discussed in Chapter 6). The relationship between Ocean States and major players is therefore one of interdependence and not unilateral dependence.

To further deepen this argument, it is necessary to refer to Keohane and Nye’s (1987) *Power and Interdependence*, in which they introduce the concept of complex

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<sup>55</sup> Wrong (1968: 674) gives a simple example to illustrate this dynamic: a wife may control a kitchen, while the husband controls the family income. Wrong argues that if power relations are seen purely as unilateral, then an entire class of relations is overlooked, namely, instances where the control of one group or person over the other is balanced by the control of the other in a different scenario.

interdependence. Keohane and Nye (1987: 731) point out that there is a significant distinction between ‘interdependence’ and ‘complex interdependence’, with the latter incorporating other domains of interdependence, which can exist when non-state actors such as international organisations are considered. According to Keohane and Nye (1989: 37), organisations will set agendas, for example, and espouse norms such as social and economic equity. Thus, whereas interdependence is a good starting point for understanding the relationship between Ocean States and major players, complex interdependence allows this study a more nuanced analysis. By referring to complex interdependence, it is possible to understand that international and regional organisations also form a part of the interdependent relationship.

For example, in the Pacific region, Australia has explicitly acknowledged the significance of regional organisations, stating “strong regional organisations contribute” to a “peaceful, stable, and prosperous Pacific region” (Australian Government n.d.). From Australia’s perspective, institutions play an essential role in addressing the pressing issues facing the region. A tangible example of this is the Pacific Resilience Facility in 2023, which serves as the first Pacific-led and managed climate and disaster resilience financing mechanism (Pacific Islands Forum n.d.). This underscores the notion that major players and Ocean States are not only dependent on each other, but also reliant on international and regional organisations. However, this dependence is not only restricted to the practical benefits that these organisations provide but also encompasses a dependence on the norms and principles that these organisations espouse.

To further this argument, it is valuable to turn to Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as proposed by Latour, Callon and Law. ANT refers to a highly networked world, where connections transcend human interaction. In ANT, various elements – such as people, machines, technologies and organisations all exist within a network (Law 1999: 8; Latour 2005: 10). Importantly, these networks are not static but dynamic in the sense that they are constantly constructed and reconstructed through interactions (Latour 2005: 159, 243). While Keohane and Nye (1987) suggest that interdependence exists between state and non-state actors, ANT extends this to include abstract entities, such as nonhumans (Callon 2001: 63). This study thus asserts that in this interdependent world, dependence extends beyond state actors, to include an interdependence between actors and nonhuman entities such as norms, principles and rules (Krasner

1983: 186). This creates a highly networked world, which encompasses abstract entities such as norms and laws. In the context of Ocean States, it is not only international organisations but also the values and principles which they espouse that form this relationship.

In this network, interdependence is found between the Ocean States, the major players and abstract entities such as norms and principles. Krasner's (1983) concept of regimes, comprising principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures, provides a framework through which these interactions can be contextualised. Ruggie (1975: 59; 1998: 56; 97) describes these regimes as "a set of mutual expectations, rules and regulations, organisational plans, energies, and financial commitments that have been accepted by a group of states", which guide, inspire and justify the behaviour of states. Indeed, Keohane and Nye (1989: 36) explain that norms of an institution, although not always legally binding, can make an actor look more harshly self-interested and their stance less defensible if the norms are not upheld.

The 2015 Paris Agreement is a practical illustration of a regime that governs the behaviour of states. The Paris Agreement was adopted during the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in France in 2015, where COP is a decision-making body of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (UN n.d.). The UNFCCC, in turn, was created by the UN in 1992. The Paris Agreement establishes mutual expectations for states (e.g., limiting global temperature rise and rules) and rules (e.g., the submission of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to monitor the progress of states). The US's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement in both 2017 (and more recently in 2025) demonstrates that even though the US was able to withdraw from the Agreement, it incurred reputational damages, showing how the Paris Agreement can influence state behaviour. For example, the image of the US as a responsible country was tarnished and relations between the US and EU strained since European leaders lost faith in the US (Zhang *et al.* 2017: 216) (for more on reputational damage, see 6.2.5.).

By adopting these various insights, this study suggests that Ocean States are not solely dependent on major players but both Ocean States and major players are entangled in a network of interdependence that involves international and regional organisations and the regimes, norms and principles they espouse. This

interdependence transcends a single domain and manifests in diverse and issue-specific domains such as the environmental or economic fields (Wendt 1999: 345). Conceptualising interdependence in this way, this study argues for an understanding of Ocean States as existing in multidimensional and dynamic relationships.

### 5.3.2. Interdependence implies power

By framing the relationship between Ocean States and major players through the lens of complex interdependence (as discussed above), it is possible to incorporate a more nuanced understanding of the power that Ocean States hold – power that is not based on traditional military or economic power but rather on non-traditional, intangible bases (as will be outlined in what follows and Chapter 6). Writing specifically on the connection between interdependence and power, Baldwin (1983: 19) suggests that ‘interdependence’ always “implies mutual potential power of some kind”. That is, without interrogating a relationship, by virtue of the fact that it is interdependent, there is reasonable ground to suggest that both parties may have a degree of potential power. Consequently, power no longer resides exclusively in the hands of the major players; Ocean States now also potentially hold some power because of the interdependence inherent in the relationship. This is one preliminary reason that suggests Ocean States have power.

Apart from what has been mentioned above, there is a further reason to suggest that Ocean States have power. Consider the following extract taken from an article written by Janeway (1975) titled, ‘On the Power of the Weak’:

*The powerful regard the weak with contempt, as a population of suckers and boobs, easily fooled and manipulated. This seems highly rational, on the face of it. But the powerful are also afraid of the weak. Why should they be, if power is nothing but dominance and submission? If the world model of power as dominance and submission is true, one possible answer is that the powerful are crazy. They should have nothing real to fear, since they are already dominant. In a cognitive world, that answer is tempting. But what if the powerful do in fact have reason for fearing the weak? What if we live in a not-absurd world and the guilt of the powerful is not merely neurotic but based on the existence of some real capacity which is in the possession of the weak?*

In this extract, Janeway suggests that the powerful often regard the weak as manipulable. However, at the same time, there is also a certain fear that exists in the powerful that the weak may, in fact, have some influence to wield. Applied to the

context of the Indo-Pacific, it may be asked: why do the major players consolidate influence if they already have power? Why does the US ramp up its diplomatic efforts in the Pacific if it has power? Surely this may imply that the weak, that is, the Ocean States in this context, have some kind of power. Hayward (2020: 450) reinforces this, explaining that:

*It is not simply the case that people who are subordinate depend upon, and are vulnerable to, people who are dominant [...] Dominant people also depend upon the subordinate to cooperate in an ongoing manner [...] this makes them vulnerable to threats by subordinate people to withdraw their cooperation.*

This interdependence suggests that power is not always one-sided, but rather, relational and bi-directional. In the case of the Indo-Pacific, major players such as the US depend on the cooperation of Ocean States to, for example, secure trade routes. Should these states withdraw their cooperation, they leave the major players in a precarious position. For example, the security deal signed by Solomon Islands with China in 2022 raised concerns about potential vulnerabilities for Australia, particularly regarding the possibility of a Chinese military installation in what Australia considers to be its neighbourhood (Martin 20 April 2022). Although the Solomon Islands' Prime Minister assured their Australian counterparts that it would not allow a military installation to be established, this situation highlights the potential risks Australia could have faced. These two observations suggest that there are reasons to believe that Ocean States do have power. Considering this, the next section further investigates this aspect and presents an argument to support the claim that Ocean States do indeed have a type of power.

#### **5.4. Towards an alternative conception of power**

In the opening chapter of Knorr's *Power, Strategy and Security* (1983: 5), Baldwin discusses power and focuses specifically on the question of how it is that 'weak powers' are able to influence large powers. Baldwin (1983: 6) presents two possible answers to this question:

- (1) Small states are able to influence the large states because in the operation of their foreign policy, large states suffer from a malfunctioning of power conversion.
- (2) Large powers suffer from the mistaken belief that power in one sphere will automatically imply power in another sphere.

In the case of the first explanation, this can be likened to a poker player who had the cards but played them poorly, whereas in the case of the latter a player had a great bridge hand but happened to be playing poker (Baldwin 1983: 6). These ‘mistakes’ or ‘shortcomings’ of the large power are what allow small states the opportunity to affect change or to resist the power of the large powers. While such explanations hold merit, the problem that this study finds with such explanations is that they still focus on the large powers as opposed to the small states. That is, according to such explanations, it is not necessarily that small powers may actually hold power, but rather the fact that large powers may fail to effectively utilise their power, making it possible for small states to have a measure of power.

To attribute power to Ocean States only when large states fail to effectively use their power is to commit a great disservice to Ocean States. Similarly, to suggest that Ocean States only have power when there has been a misjudgement by large powers overlooks the possibility that Ocean States may hold power on their own terms. In the section below, the aim is to demonstrate that Ocean States do have power, and they have power not only in situations where major players fail to effectively utilise their power. Specifically, this section begins by locating the power in the two respective role conceptions, namely: ‘pioneer’ and ‘activist-challenger’.

### **5.5. The power of Ocean States**

If this study is to successfully claim that Ocean States are not necessarily characterised by a power deficit, then it needs to demonstrate, at a minimum, how the role conceptions of ‘pioneer’ and ‘activist-challenger’ are linked to ‘power’ or how they are a manifestation of power. This is vitally important since rival explanations of power suggest that typically, states have power if they have a large military or vast resources. As was discussed in Chapter 2, Realists, for example, espouse that states hold power if they have a significant industrial base, vast natural resources, and a large population since these attributes allow them to become militarily strong (Morgenthau 1948: 91; Rothgeb 1993: 1). In this case, military might equates to power. Barnett and Duvall (2005b: 8) point out that despite the numerous efforts to revise or expand the Realist conception of power, the Realist conception remains the industry standard. In their view, this is problematic since it constrains IR scholars’ capacity to analyse how global

outcomes are shaped and how some actors may be differentially enabled (Barnett & Duvall 2005b: 8).

Other schools of thought have proffered that power is based on economic might. Scholars such as Rosecrance (1986) and Mueller (1989) have, for example, suggested that economic power is increasingly important in international affairs, especially where the use of force is costly or undesirable. To this end, Nye (1990: 154) explains that “today, however, the definition of power is losing its emphasis on military force”. Dependency theorists hold that those who control capital and the means of production are in possession of power, reinforcing its economic dimension. However, this study suggests that there are alternative explanations – perhaps more in line with constructivist thought – that account for how a state may have power, and in this case, how an ocean state may hold power.

### **5.5.1. Locating the ‘power’ in the ‘pioneer’ role**

The first explanation is that Ocean States hold power since they are pioneers. Although a brief definition has been provided earlier, it is necessary to consider a few other definitions of a ‘pioneer’. According to the Collins Dictionary (2023a), a ‘pioneer’ can also be defined as:

- (i) a person who goes before, preparing the way for others*
- (ii) one who is first or among the earliest in any field of inquiry, enterprise, or progress*
- (iii) a person who is among those who first enter or settle a region, thus opening it for occupation and development by others*

Considering the definitions above, and if one takes the definition of power as the ability to get another actor or actors to do what they would not ordinarily do (change their behaviour) or the ability to change the environment in which they exist (manipulate the environment) (Rothgeb 1993: 18-19) then being a ‘pioneer’ can result in a form of power.

By being a pioneer, a given state is able to manipulate the environment in which it exists because it is “among the earliest in any field of inquiry, enterprise, or progress” which allows it to shape its environment. Whereas rival explanations may suggest that a state can manipulate its environment through the use of its military, this study proffers that Ocean States shape their environment by being pioneers. Before demonstrating

how they shape their environment, it is necessary to point out how these states, specifically Seychelles and Mauritius, are pioneers.

Various examples demonstrate the assertion that Seychelles and Mauritius are pioneers. The first case is the role that Seychelles has played in promoting the concept of the 'blue economy'. The blue economy, a concept derived from the 'green economy', was most vigorously promoted by former Seychellois president James Michel, who institutionalised the concept by creating a blue economy government department (Michel 2023: xix). The Blue Economy acknowledges and emphasises that the ocean is an under-utilised resource that, however, needs to be exploited in a sustainable manner (Michel 2023: 5).

Along with the pioneering of the 'Blue Economy', the Seychellois Blue Economy department also spearheaded a 'debt-for-nature-swap' and the Blue Bonds initiative. The 'debt-for-nature-swap' was the first of its kind – the swap redirected a part of Seychelles' debt payments to finance the creation of the second-largest Marine Protected Area (MPA) (Rambarran 2018: 262). In particular, this swap was pioneering in several senses. First, it was the first time that a debt swap had been implemented in the context of ocean conservation. Traditionally, debt-for-nature-swaps have focused on terrestrial conservation efforts. In this case, Seychelles' deal was groundbreaking because the concept was extended to ocean conservation. Second, it was the first debt swap for the expansion of marine protected areas (MPA). By redirecting debt payments, Seychelles created the second largest MPA, which created a precedent for other island states. Third, it was the first time that a debt swap was supported by the Paris Club. Fourth, it was the first debt swap designed specifically for climate adaptation and to include impact investments – that is, investments that are aimed at generating an environmental impact and a financial return (Rambarran 2018: 280; 286).

While in previous debt swaps, conservation has been the broad goal, the swap in the Seychelles case was focused specifically on climate adaptation, which implied that funds could also be used to address the impacts of rising sea levels and ocean acidification. Alongside the 'debt-for-nature-swap', Seychelles, in 2018, became the first state to launch a sovereign Blue Bond. The proceeds from the bonds are channelled to support the expansion of marine protected areas, improve the

governance of fisheries and further development of Seychelles' blue economy (World Bank 2018). In other words, the proceeds support sustainable marine projects<sup>56</sup>.

Apart from being a pioneer in the environmental domain, Mauritius and Seychelles have also played a pioneering role in the domain of maritime security. Mauritius has articulated in its speeches that it aims to take the lead in combating maritime crimes in the WIO. In 2022, the Prime Minister of Mauritius announced that its jurisdiction was selected to launch the "first Edition of the Regional Judicial Colloquium" (Jugnauth 26 June 2022). In May of the same year, Mauritius was selected as one of the first three countries to take part in the UNODC-Global Maritime Crime Programme. These are two practical examples that demonstrate Mauritius' commitment to leading the fight against maritime crimes in the WIO.

Furthermore, both Mauritius and Seychelles played an instrumental role, as part of the Indian Ocean Commission, in establishing the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC) in Madagascar (Edy 17 March 2023). The centre is responsible for sharing and exchanging maritime security intelligence, particularly vessels that are under suspicion of having committed crimes such as drug smuggling, illegal human migration and illegal fishing (ADF 14 March 2023). Its sister organisation, the Regional Centre for Operational Coordination (RCOC), is based in Seychelles and is the first of its kind in Africa.

The RCOC, as a multinational institution, is unique in the sense that it has no operational capacity itself, but should a threat arise (as reported by the RMIFC), it can inform the participating coastal states and conduct joint operations based on the available resources (Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK 2019). Furthermore, there are only a few centres globally that have a setup that includes both aspects of operational coordination and information fusion between different states. Generally, centres worldwide have their own patrol capabilities; however, these two centres are tailored to the context of the WIO, where having a permanent fleet would be costly and unsustainable for member countries. In this sense, these two centres

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<sup>56</sup> It is also worth noting that Seychelles has marketed itself as a testing ground for innovative financing under the notion that its small size provides a "manageable space for experimental governance" (Saddington 2023: 6). Seychelles is seen as an attractive location for experimenting with new initiatives because these initiatives are small enough to not incur massive repercussions should they fail.

supported by Mauritius and Seychelles are the result of a pioneering approach to maritime security that is grounded in the realities of the states in this ocean region.

Having outlined how Mauritius and Seychelles, in particular, are pioneers, it is necessary to demonstrate how this provides them with the ability to shape their environment, in other words, how it provides them with power. In the following section, it will be demonstrated how pioneering confers power by showing how knowledge is the link between pioneering and power. The core argument is that Ocean States can manipulate their environment, not through force, but through shaping norms and setting precedents based on the knowledge they generate through their pioneering role. To contextualise this, it is worth taking a brief detour to examine how power has historically, and in contemporary days, been derived from bases other than material resources.

#### *Knowledge as a source of power: historical perspective*

At the core of this argument is the claim that power is not based on military resources or economic power alone but can rest on knowledge. That is, by being a pioneer, Seychelles and Mauritius have accumulated knowledge, which serves as a source of power. The idea that knowledge is a source of power is originally found in the works of scholars such as Liebknecht (cited in Adolf & Stehr 2017), who suggest that certain classes seize knowledge and use it as a means of power over other classes, and Foucault (1977: 15), who argues that it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power. While the previous scholars focus on power in the context of political theory, class struggle and social theory, Susan Strange's (1988) discussion is framed more specifically within the context of international relations. She contends that knowledge-based forms of power are one of the most overlooked and underappreciated forms of influence (Strange 1988: 119).

#### *Illustration of knowledge-based power*

Strange (1988: 123) demonstrates how power is derived from knowledge by referring to Medieval Christendom, where the Church derived power not from military might or material wealth, but from the possession of knowledge that was critical at the time – how individuals could reach salvation. The knowledge the Church had endowed them with the ability to impose behavioural constraints not only on ordinary people, but also on kings and princes. In this instance, having knowledge that was valued by people

gave the Church the ability to influence society. Further below, it will similarly be demonstrated how Seychelles and Mauritius, through their knowledge of maritime governance and environmental vulnerability that is based on their unique experiences, have been able to influence international norms and frameworks.

Furthermore, knowledge also confers power when it creates a strategic advantage. For example, Strange (1988: 126) details how during the First World War, the Germans had the upper hand over Russia since they had field telegraph systems which allowed them to communicate in a way that the Russians were unable to do. Similarly, in other instances, the British forces were able to obliterate the numerically superior Mahdi forces by introducing the gunboat for the first time in history. Holsti (1995: 76) contributes to the discussion by pointing out how advancements in Chinese chemistry, applied to cannons, rendered the fortified medieval walls of European cities obsolete. These examples illustrate how knowledge can result in a competitive edge in warfare. In this case, knowledge as a base of power is not limited to intellectual control but can also be acquired by leveraging information to gain an upper hand.

#### *Contemporary insights on knowledge and power*

Zacher (2016: 38-39) adds another dimension to Strange's knowledge-based power, suggesting that knowledge can confer power since it may grant certain actors more insight than others. Writing specifically on technology, Zacher (2016) suggests that leadership in the technological domain can provide numerous advantages. On a very practical level, Zacher explains that if a given actor is a leader in a certain domain, others may be more dependent on them since it may be the case that the technology that the actor has is protected by patent policies, intellectual rights regulations and government's policies (2016: 36). Consequently, countries that are leading in technology<sup>57</sup> may be able to benefit from technology export, control technology trade and dissemination, and attract people from other countries (essentially, causing a brain drain) and create a competitive advantage (Zacher 2016: 48).

Additionally, technologically leading countries, according to Zacher (2016: 43), often have more to say in a given field and could attempt to make others dependent, through the above-mentioned measures. Although Zacher is referring specifically to

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<sup>57</sup> This supports the much earlier point made by Holsti (1995: 76) where he states that "today the bases of national strength, wealth and prestige reside less in territory than in science and technology".

technology, this study suggests that the same logic can be applied to knowledge, since knowledge undergirds technology. States with more knowledge on a certain topic may be in a more influential position than others and can influence the behaviour of other actors. They may be able to set precedents or create frameworks that others will have to follow, which consequently puts them in a position to influence their environment. As summarised by Szkarlat and Mojska (2016: xii), scientific and technological potential as well as resources of knowledge become the key attributes of power. Denis Matatiken (personal communication, 20 February 2024) touches on the importance of knowledge, reflecting on one of the experiences he recently had attending a marine programme:

*I recently attended a marine program, and one of the philanthropists there was very interested in our work. Especially when we talked about the 30% protection area and the ethical initiatives we're implementing—both in terms of human impact and financial sustainability. They said, "We'll help you at no cost. Just tell us how we can contribute or what you need". There are people out there who want to collaborate with you, especially if you're introducing something new or groundbreaking. And once you've proven yourself, the recognition and support you get can be remarkable.*

Finally, it is worth pointing out that knowledge provides states with the opportunity to look after their own affairs, rather than be dependent on other actors entirely (Michels 1949: 93). Michels (1949: 94), in his analysis of oligarchic tendencies in large formal organisations, suggests that those lacking knowledge rely on experts to attend to their matter. Applied to the behaviour of states, it may be argued that Seychelles and Mauritius, through their pioneering roles, are not simply the passive recipients of international rules and norms but rather active contributors to the production of knowledge, specifically in the environmental and maritime domain, which in turn can shape these rules and norms. Seychelles and Mauritius are contributing to defining and prioritising what constitutes knowledge. By doing this, they are impacting the perceived reality and therefore shaping their environment, which is one of the definitions of power in this study, as expanded on below.

#### *Leveraging knowledge for advantage*

One of the definitions for power provided by this study is the ability to manipulate or shape one's environment (see 2.2.6.). The case of Seychelles exemplifies this form of power, since it has successfully been able to reform the conditions under which it

would have had to repay its debt. Traditionally, debt repayment frameworks are viewed through a more terra-centric lens, which fails to consider the unique conditions of maritime countries. However, Seychelles advocated for an ocean-centric perspective, which recognises the significance of maritime resources. By promoting this shift, which manifested through the introduction of Blue Bonds and ‘debt-for-nature-swap’, Seychelles was able to reconceptualise its financial obligations that suited its realities as an Ocean State. Essentially, Seychelles manipulates its environment to ensure that its maritime assets are incorporated into debt negotiations.

Another manner in which Seychelles and Mauritius have been able to shape their environment is through their decades-long advocacy for the MVI, which was adopted on 13 August 2024 without a vote by the UNGA (SDG Knowledge Hub 4 September 2024). Traditionally, the vulnerability of a country, which determines how much funding and support a country is allowed access to, is measured according to the Gross National Income (GNI) per capita (Bonnelame 1 February 2023). However, countries such as Mauritius, and specifically Seychelles, which are no longer considered low-income countries but still face the same vulnerabilities as other SIDS, no longer have access to development assistance.

To address this, Ocean States advocated for the introduction of the MVI, which takes into consideration the structural vulnerabilities of Ocean States beyond GNI per capita or gross domestic product (GDP) (ZAWYA 6 April 2023). In particular, the MVI measures two components: firstly, structural vulnerability, which considers the risk of a country’s sustainable development being affected by recurrent adverse exogenous shocks. Secondly, it measures structural reliance – the inherent capacity of a country to withstand, absorb and recover from the adverse shocks (Wilkinson & Panwar 2023).

The adoption of this MVI index allows these states access to concessional financing for their development needs, which is pivotal since the current structure means that Ocean States are punished for making economic progress. Fiji and Seychelles were especially welcoming of the MVI’s adoption, calling for its pilot testing to begin without delay.

The MVI is a result of Ocean States and the other SIDS pushing for over three decades (through the Barbados Programme of Action, Mauritius Strategy and SAMOA Pathway) for better assistance for their sustainable development and demonstrates

the manner in which they are pursuing innovative ways to address the challenges they face (Relief Web 24 September 2021). Essentially, Seychelles and Mauritius have leveraged the knowledge of their unique circumstances to advocate for a system of international financial governance that is more attuned to their realities. By advocating for the MVI, both countries have been able to contribute to a conceptualisation of vulnerability that includes vulnerability to environmental risks. This introduces a new way of thinking about vulnerability and allows them to access resources that were previously unavailable to them.

### *Power beyond domination*

Above, reference was made to Zacher's argument that knowledge can confer power. While Zacher's analysis focuses on using knowledge to create an advantage, this study suggests that in the case of Ocean States, it is not always about gaining dominance to the detriment of others but rather about using knowledge to reshape the environment to eliminate disadvantages. Seychelles' efforts and successes at incorporating the ocean domain into debt repayment are a testament to this. Considering this, it is unnecessary to always describe the effects of power in negative terms, where power excludes, represses, conceals or censors others, as explained by Foucault (1978: 194). In fact, for Foucault, when power is exercised in a repressive, unidirectional and rigid manner, then it is known as domination, rather than power (Adolf & Stehr 2017: 1). Essentially, Ocean States do not use knowledge as power over other states, but rather to level the playing field so that oceanic, or maritime realities are considered within global governance. Levelling the playing field does not diminish the influence of Ocean States but reconfigures structures and processes of global governance in favour of these states, which qualifies as power.

### *Global influence of Ocean States*

Cumulatively, Ocean States are advocating for governance that is informed not only by larger, land-centric players but also includes the needs and contributions of Ocean States. Globally, the initiatives pushed forward by these states are also impacting the policies of other states, which demonstrates that Ocean States are setting precedents. For example, both the 'debt-for-nature-swap' and Blue Bonds that Seychelles introduced have become models for other countries with Belize adopting a similar arrangement in 2021 (Michel 2023: 27). In May 2023, Indonesia issued its first Blue Bond in the Japanese debt capital market (UNDP 2023a), while Fiji announced the

issuance of its first ever Sovereign Blue Bond a few months later (UNDP 2023b). The spearheading of the 'blue economy' has:

*Enabled Seychelles to become a big fish in the Blue Economy very quickly, locally, and set us apart internationally so we were then viewed differently... we were perceived as being fairly advanced on the idea (Interview in Saddington 2023: 4)*

In summary, despite lacking traditional power resources, such as military might or vast economic wealth, Ocean States, and in this case, Seychelles and Mauritius, hold power. Their power derives from the specialised knowledge they hold in key domains, including ocean governance, environmental governance and maritime security. Through their expertise, they develop innovative initiatives, positioning themselves as pioneers. By enacting the pioneering role, they can shape international norms and influence policy frameworks, thereby influencing the behaviour of their environment and other actors.

### **5.5.2. Locating the 'power' in the 'activist-challenger' role**

Having located 'power' in the 'pioneer' role conception, the next step is to determine where the 'power' resides in the activist-challenger role. That is, what is it about enacting this role conception that justifies the assertion that the ocean state has power? As was already explained earlier on, the role conception of 'activist-challenger' means something akin to supporting actions to address something that is perceived as being unjust, invalid or outdated. In the same way that the Ocean States discussed have power because they are 'pioneers' which means they possess knowledge that allows them to exert control and manipulate the environment in which they exist, Ocean States in being 'activist-challengers' have power because they disrupt the status quo, allowing them to manipulate their environment and control actors. In what follows, particular attention will be paid to how disruption is the link between the activist-challenger role conception and power, by specifically discussing disruption through withdrawing attention and disruption through appeal to authority.

#### *Disruption through withdrawing attention*

To understand how disruption brings about change, which can then be understood as power since it manipulates the environment in which Ocean States exist and operate, it is necessary to draw on the work on disruption as discussed in the fields of Sociology and Political Sciences. In this regard, one scholar, who discusses disruption in the

context of social movements and political activism, is vitally important, namely Frances Piven.

Firstly, it must be noted that the word ‘disruption’ is not meant to be understood as something negative. Piven (2006: 23) explains that often the term ‘disruption’ is used to refer to an act that is noisy, disorderly or violent. However, if one looks at the dictionary definition, it quite simply refers to the action of breaking or interrupting “the normal course or continuation of some activity, process, etc” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2023d). Importantly, however, is the fact that ‘disruption’ “rather than a passive act – something that happens to people and places” is a deliberate act aimed at refusing to accept what the countries understand as an unjust system (Chua 2023: 38). In this sense, disruption is, according to Piven (2006: 23), a ‘power strategy’; it is about ‘constructive destruction’, where the aim of those disrupting is to dismantle, alter or deconstruct that which is unjust and rebuild it to be more equitable.

Piven (2006: 26) posits that disruption is effective because a “group of political actors coordinate to withdraw cooperation from a power relationship in which they participate”. In the context of this study, these political actors are Ocean States. However, here it is important to note that a mutual or interdependent relationship does not a priori imply that a withdrawal of cooperation will be a successful strategy. He emphasises that “this capacity depends on other features of those relations beyond the fact of interdependence” (Piven 2006: 26). For disruption to be successful, there needs to be a sound understanding of how the withdrawing party’s contribution to the relationship is valuable and has a significant role in keeping the system functioning. Once there is an understanding of this, a return to cooperation can be used as leverage. That is, once there is a recognition that their “power consists in their ability to disrupt a pattern of ongoing and institutionalised cooperation that depends on their continuing contributions” (Piven 2006: 21), then there can be what Piven (2006: 21) refers to as a withdrawal of attention.

A withdrawal of attention, in turn, disrupts the agenda-setting schemes of those in power, in this case, the major players, and forces them to consider and address issues they would prefer to suppress<sup>58</sup> (Piven 2006: 104). Here, it is worthwhile to remember

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<sup>58</sup> This can also be linked to Long’s (2022: 65-66) explanation that small states can pursue a strategy of blocking or slowing down actions in international organisations. They may, for example, gain support from other small states and block certain actions within international organisations.

that ensuring cooperation amongst those who are ‘dominated’ is vital to preserve the status quo (Hayward 2020: 450). A political party, for example, may ordinarily keep certain items off the agenda – either because they are divisive or because they are not within the interest of the party to address. However, there may be a withdrawal of attention from voters due to these issues not being addressed.

This withdrawal of attention can be likened to sociologist James Scott’s idea of bringing ‘hidden transcripts’ into the public domain. Hidden transcripts are the transcripts that reflect what the dominated feel – the anger, the revenge, the frustration at the situation; they are a critique of the dominant, which are usually, however, kept out of the public domain (Scott 1990: xii, 18). When these hidden transcripts enter the public domain and contrast with the public transcript, this study argues, those in power are forced to address them, since they are now in the spotlight, and failure to address them could lead to the failure of the political party. Evident here is this highly interdependent relationship. To prevent voters from defecting, the political leaders need to attend to the concerns raised by the political movement. New issues that were previously suppressed are now propelled to the agenda. It is exactly in this sense that disruption then provides the opportunity for the status quo to be changed. By bringing hidden transcripts into the public domain through disruption, the marginalised group compels dominant actors to confront these issues. To demonstrate how this manifests in the Indo-Pacific region, the cases of Fiji and Solomon Islands are discussed.

Fiji has been disruptive in the manner in which it has called out the major players over their inaction regarding climate change and then played them against one another. In Chapter 4, various instances were highlighted where Fiji confronted major players, bringing out its ‘hidden transcript,’ to use the words of Scott. Fiji expressed its deep disappointment when the US, for example, withdrew from the Paris Agreement. It also critiqued India, Australia and China’s reliance on coal<sup>59</sup>. Furthermore, Fiji rejected what it labelled as Australia’s neo-colonial prescriptions, where Australia suggested that the solution to high sea level rise was simply to move islanders to Australia. Fiji’s vocalness on this topic served as an attempt to disrupt the status quo.

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<sup>59</sup> This study does not contend that every instance in which Fiji challenges a major player leads to a successful disruption of the status quo or a shift in the distribution of outcomes. Rather, these examples are presented mainly to illustrate Fiji’s consistent efforts to challenge major players, which aligns with its role conception of ‘activist-challenger’. In the following paragraph, however, a successful case is outlined in which Fiji demonstrably influenced Australia.

By being disruptive (calling out the major players), Fiji has been able to manipulate the environment in which it exists and alter the distribution of results. That is to say that by being disruptive, Fiji is able to:

*[s]hift the public political discourse, by compelling a subset of members of the public to pay attention to things that they are demotivated to ignore (Hayward 2020: 449).*

There is one specific example that is exemplary of this. For example, Fiji's actions towards Australia, where it calls out the latter's inaction regarding climate change, led Australia to eventually change the manner in which it approaches climate change (see 6.2.5.). Fiji criticised Australia, withdrew attention from its relationship with Australia, and then shored up relations with China, something that, this study argues, forced the Australians (and broader Western allies) to reevaluate their approach to countries in the region. In 2018, the Australian government pulled out of contributing to the Green Climate Fund (GCF), which was set up specifically to help poorer countries cope with global warming (Jackson 5 October 2023). However, in 2023, the government announced that it would re-join the fund, explaining that it has:

*[t]aken on board feedback from our partners in the Pacific on the best ways to direct our climate finance efforts and ensure elements deliver for Pacific priorities (Reuters 5 October 2023).*

Similarly, Solomon Islands has, through its enactment of the 'activist-challenger' role conception, displayed tendencies to challenge the existing security environment in the Pacific. While traditionally, actors such as Australia and earlier, the US, provided security support to islands such as Solomon Islands, there has been less assistance over the years. Subsequently, Solomon Islands expressed its discontent with the inadequacy of the current security assistance provided to the country, especially considering the recurring law and order challenges it faces within the country (Solomon Islands Government 2022b). In 2006, Honiara City experienced immense international instability, with the capital also being looted and subject to civil unrest in 2019 and 2021.

In the aftermath of these upheavals, there was a recognition by the government that more attention needed to be paid to boosting the police capability. Sogavare explicitly mentioned that if the island continues to operate under the current status quo, then it would not be able to address all the critical security gaps (Solomon Islands Government 2022b). Following this, Solomon Islands withdrew attention from its

traditional partner, namely Australia, and rather focused on China, which led to the signing of a security pact with China in 2022.

This shifting in attention forced those in power, namely Australia and the US, to address a region they had begun to neglect. In October 2022, there was a meeting between the prime ministers of Australia and Solomon Islands (Khairunnisa 2024). Australia committed to providing essential infrastructure to the island, such as the construction of border posts, while it also provided support to Solomon Islands' preparations for the 2023 Pacific Games. From the side of the US, in response to the security deal, it dispatched a high-level delegation to the island, arguing that it would intensify its engagement with the region (Cefkin 2022). It also reemphasised that it would be opening an embassy in Honiara, while other measures of renewed support were also addressed, such as the delivery of COVID vaccines, initiatives to address climate change, programmes to develop maritime domain awareness and an increase in people-to-people ties.

The above two cases demonstrate how withdrawing attention is a strategy that can be used to disrupt the status quo and therefore set the agenda, which changes the environment in which these islands exist. Ocean States have been able to shift a system that focuses mostly on traditional security challenges to also consider non-traditional security challenges. In this way, Ocean States have power. In particular, this dynamic suggests a deliberate strategic manoeuvre in which Ocean States withdraw their attention, redirect their engagement toward alternative actors, thereby galvanising a reaction and reattraction of action from the states they momentarily distanced themselves from.

#### *Disruption through appeal to morality*

Apart from Piven's explanation of disruption, Clarissa Hayward (2020) provides an alternative explanation of how disruption constitutes a form of power. According to Hayward's (2020: 450) reading of McAdam (1996), successful political disruption occurs when political actors stage a conflict, "which they calculate will be widely perceived as a contest between good and evil". This moral framing is designed to win the sympathetic support from the public and pressure those in power to respond. However, creating a contest between good and evil does not necessarily imply that those in power will feel pressured to choose the good.

To address this limitation, it is worthwhile to combine Hayward's model of disruption with the work of Keck and Sikkink (1998). Keck and Sikkink (1998: 23-24) point out that activists attempt to gain moral leverage by placing the behaviour of the target actors under international scrutiny. This strategy hinges on the assumption that actors value the positive opinion of others, and by questioning their actions, activists hope to "jeopardize its credit enough to motivate a change in policy or behaviour" (Keck & Sikkink 1998: 24). If a government, has, for example, committed itself to certain values, such as human rights but its actions contradict this, then the activists may try to highlight such inconsistency or hypocrisy. In this case, a government may feel compelled to react to reputational damage and save face by meeting the demands of the activists.

This tactic is essentially what Keck and Sikkink (1998: 24) refer to as accountability politics. Activists exploit the accountability of states to certain values, principles and frameworks to evoke change. In this case, international scrutiny can become a force that is used by activists to change the behaviour of those they are protesting against. While these tactics are not always successful, especially in cases where the government is not concerned with the image it projects<sup>60</sup>, they can be particularly successful in instances where the actor depends on maintaining legitimacy in the international arena.

This explanation can be used to analyse how Fiji has been able to disrupt the system, specifically in the way that it frames climate issues. For example, in one instance, Fiji's Attorney-General, Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum (2022), explained that:

*No developed nation, including the United States, Australia, Russia, India, the EU, the United Kingdom, and China, has the moral authority to call themselves allies to the ocean if they are not urgently making deeper and faster cuts to their emissions.*

In this case, Fiji is implicitly creating the conflict between good and evil, which Hayward refers to. Fiji seems to imply that developed nations that are not addressing their emissions in an adequate manner are in no position to exude any moral authority. By

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<sup>60</sup> For example, the current Trump administration is arguably not as concerned with its image as a good international citizen. Therefore, this study acknowledges that the strategy of disruption through appeal to morality may have limited traction in cases where states deprioritise their international image. This strategy is specifically effective when states are norm sensitive. However, it should also be noted that accountability politics does not only need to influence a direct target. It could also aim to influence civil society, international institutions or the media, which may then place pressure on the given state.

framing this as a contest between good and evil, Fiji places these states in a position where they can either choose to act morally or face global scrutiny. In another instance, Fiji labels the decision by the international community not to cap global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius as “grossly irresponsible and selfish” (Sayed-Khaiyum 2019). By framing the major players as being “irresponsible and selfish” and the Ocean States as being in a “grave situation [...] through no fault of [their] own”, Fiji creates a further conflict between good and bad, where major players need to decide which side to take.

In this case, Keck and Sikkink’s (1998) accountability politics come into play: Fiji challenges the moral standing of these states, which could jeopardise their credibility. These states are forced to acknowledge the concerns expressed by Fiji in order to avoid reputational damage. Consequently, Fiji can force the agenda of climate change onto the agenda. This is not to suggest that such a tactic is always successful. However, one example pointing to its success is when Fiji was successfully able to problematise Australia’s commitment to climate change and influence Australia to adopt climate change action more saliently (Moore 2024: 294) (see 6.2.5.).

Similarly, Solomon Islands uses moral framing to disrupt the global discourse by specifically creating a dichotomy between climate action and climate inaction. At the 78<sup>th</sup> UNGA in 2023, Solomon Islands Prime Minister explained that:

*I am morally and ethically obliged to speak for humanity, the voiceless, and our children’s children. We are the ocean, it is our past, our present, our future. It is the foundation of our very existence, it is our identity. Please stop the discharge of nuclear treated water or history will judge us.*

In this instance, the Prime Minister’s call to stop the discharge of nuclear-treated water, or face the judgement of history, echoes Hayward’s concept of creating a conflict between good and evil. The discharge of nuclear-treated water by Japan is labelled as morally wrong, which allows Solomon Islands to leverage international scrutiny to hold the major players accountable. Keck and Sikkink’s (1998) accountability politics features yet again, as they expose the inconsistency between what a state stands for and its actions.

In the case of Japan, its plan to release nuclear-treated water is especially contentious given its painful history of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the Fukushima disaster. This is further compounded by the history of the region, where

the island specifically has a legacy of being impacted by nuclear testing. It could be expected of Japan, considering its unique nuclear history, to have a greater sensitivity to these issues. The shared nuclear legacy between Japan and the Pacific Islands arguably provides these islands with the potential to utilise this as moral leverage and pressure Japan into reconsidering its decision.

While it is important to recognise that Japan did ultimately proceed with releasing the nuclear-treated water, this should not render Solomon Islands' advocacy on the issue ineffective. In fact, their efforts resulted in the Pacific Islands Forum decision to seek independent expert advice on the safety of Japan's plan (Pacific Islands Forum 3 July 2021). Additionally, they influenced Japan's diplomatic engagement with the Pacific Leaders, where Japan showed a recognition of the importance of addressing the concerns of the Islands rather than acting unilaterally. This is evident in official statements made during the Pacific Islands Leaders Meetings, where Japan has explicitly committed to transparency and consultation with the Islands. In 2021, for example, the Japanese Prime Minister affirmed that Japan would "continue to provide the PIF Members with explanations based on scientific evidence, in a highly transparent and timely manner and in close cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2021). This statement suggests that Japan is aware that there are diplomatic and reputational costs involved in simply disregarding Pacific concerns and therefore underscores the broader dynamics of accountability. Although Solomon Islands could not prevent the release, they were successful in reinforcing the principle that major players cannot simply act without considering smaller, affected states. Furthermore, although this moral advocacy did not yield immediate material outcomes, it may generate normative pressure, where in the future, such behaviour becomes more difficult to justify.

In another instance, Solomon Islands Minister of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, Agovaka (2019), stipulated that "the twin fights against climate change and NCDs are ideas whose time has come. Let us do that now and be on the right side of history". Most recently, at the 79<sup>th</sup> UNGA, Solomon Islands continued this moral framing, arguing that the "Paris Agreement is failing humanity" (Agovaka 27 September 2024). In these cases, Solomon Islands presents a dichotomy between good and evil – that is, failure to address the environmental concerns, such as nuclear discharge and inability to meet NDCs, is labelled as being morally reprehensible. Through this

framing, it disrupts the existing status quo and potentially forces the major players into action.

Specifically, compelled by their moral obligations (further discussed in 6.2.5), major players are forced to consider the concerns expressed by Solomon Islands. Ultimately, Solomon Islands is able to create an environment where their concerns are at least considered on the agenda. For example, Solomon Islands' consistent advocacy that climate change is the single greatest threat contributed to the Pacific Islands Forum adopting the Boe Declaration on Regional Security in 2018 (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2019), which argued for a broadened concept of security to include climate change. The Boe Declaration helped inform the PIF's 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, which persistently framed climate change as the single greatest threat facing the region (Pacific Islands Forum 2022).

This strategy was successful in bringing climate change to the attention of major players. In one instance, the US's US-Pacific Partnership significantly prioritised the interests of the Pacific region and aligned with PIF's 2050 strategy (Australian Institute of International Affairs 2023). In another instance, in a bilateral meeting between Japanese Prime Minister Kishida and Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manele, the Japanese Prime Minister stated that Japan wishes to discuss cooperation between the two states in line with the Pacific Islands Forum 2050 Strategy for Blue Pacific Continent (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2024). These examples highlight how Solomon Islands has successfully used moral arguments to influence the behaviour of major players.

Both Solomon Islands and Fiji shape their environment by emphasising the moral inconsistency in the conduct of major players. This strategy demonstrates how disruption, which is central to the 'activist-challenger' role conception, can serve as an alternative source of power. Importantly, disruption, in this context, is not about creating chaos but a strategic method to force powerful players into action. The critique of major players and subtle assertions that they lack moral authority force major players into defensive positions, which compels them to at least consider issues that might otherwise be evaded. This effectively legitimises the calls from the Ocean States. In essence, disruption is fundamentally about constructive destruction, where the aim is to break down outdated norms and replace them with a new framework that

reflects the values of the vulnerable states. This demonstrates that states are not solely reliant on traditional forms of power, such as economic or military power, to exert influence.

## 5.6. Conclusion

Chapter 5 discussed what orientations Ocean States pursue. Two main orientations, manifesting as roles, emerged from the analysis conducted in Chapter 4, namely: 'pioneer' and 'activist-challenger'. The primary attributes of the former include an emphasis on leadership, norm entrepreneurship, global advocacy, the redefinition of priorities, multilateralism and engagement with multiple actors. The main attributes of the latter involve issue-based assertiveness, principled critique, shifting of support, and the rejection of narratives that position islands as passive.

The role conceptions of 'pioneer' and 'activist-challenger' inherently challenge the notion that Ocean States are solely dependent on major actors. Continuing to view the foreign policy orientations of small states as defined by a one-way dependent relationship fails to capture the reality. Ocean States do have power. However, it is only possible to understand this if one understands that they exist in a highly networked, complex, interdependent world. In other words, not only are Ocean States interdependent with major players, as Nye and Keohane's concept of 'interdependence' would suggest, but they are also embedded in a complex interdependent world that includes international organisations in the equation.

Moreover, it is not only the international organisations that make up this complex interdependent world, but also their norms and principles, which is what ANT suggests when it argues that society exists in a highly networked world where connections between humans and non-human entities exist. Here, the study takes non-human entities to refer to elements such as norms and principles. Once there is an understanding of this highly networked, complex, interdependent world, it is possible to argue that Ocean States have the potential to exude power. As a result of this networked relationship, it is also possible to identify and demonstrate how 'power' resides within the 'pioneer' and 'activist-challenger' roles.

States such as Mauritius and Seychelles are not necessarily defined by a power deficit. Rather, through their pioneering roles, manifesting in initiatives such as the blue economy, they have redefined power beyond conventional military and economic

metrics, demonstrating that power is also rooted in knowledge, which provides the ability to manipulate one's environment. Similarly, states such as Solomon Islands and Fiji are not defined by a power deficit. The power in the 'activist-challenger' role conception of Ocean States is derived from their ability to disrupt the status quo and challenge injustices. States disrupt by deliberately withdrawing their attention and appealing to moral imperatives which compel those in power to confront issues they would ordinarily ignore. In doing so, Ocean States are able to shape the international agenda and influence the discourse towards their interests.

Ultimately, the central argument this chapter made was that Ocean States hold a form of power which emerges from the complex interdependence of their environment. Considering this, the next chapter, as the second part of the theoretical contribution that this study makes, aims to further build on this and expand on the various sources of power of Ocean States.

## Chapter 6: Alternative conceptual framework

*Failure to recognise that power may rest on various bases, each with a varying source, has confused and distorted the conception of power itself [...] in particular it is of crucial importance to recognise that power may rest on various bases.*

- Lasswell and Kaplan (1950: 85)

### 6.1. Introduction: dissecting the power of Ocean States

This chapter expands the concept of Ocean State power, and the sources or foundations of this influence are explored. That is, the sources of power that allow these role conceptions to emerge are discussed. It is important to emphasise that in order to develop an alternative conception of power which accounts for the influence of Ocean States, there needs to be a shift away from conceptions of power based largely on the possession of tangible resources – a perspective identified at the outset as being the dominant lens through which power has traditionally been viewed. This is not to negate the role and importance of such resources but to acknowledge that influence can arise from varying sources, including intangible ones, such as knowledge, as noted at the start of this chapter.

### 6.2. The key foundations of the power of Ocean States

This section outlines and discusses the five key foundations that grant Ocean States the power discussed in this study. Each foundation refers to resources or mechanisms that Ocean States possess or leverage to derive power. ‘Power through position’ and ‘valued possessions’ refer to tangible and intangible assets that Ocean States own and can utilise to exert power, while ‘power through international and regional organisations’, ‘influencing the narrative’ and ‘moral suasion’ represent mechanisms that Ocean States leverage to exert influence and shape outcomes<sup>61</sup>.

#### 6.2.1. Power through position

The first foundation of the power of Ocean States is their position. Long (2022: 62) refers to power through position as ‘particular-intrinsic’ resources. Such resources need to be exercised or applied for them to transcend being mere potential bases of power (Long 2022: 62). Ocean States have emphasised (and therefore exercised) the importance of their geographic position by reframing themselves from Small Island

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<sup>61</sup> These two ways of viewing power are in line with the definition of power proposed in 2.2.6.

Developing States to Large Ocean States (see also 1.2.3. and 6.2.4). Importantly, by referring to themselves as Large Ocean States, Chan (2018: 540) explains that they remind “neighbours and conventionally large states of their sovereign rights” under UNCLOS and highlight the fact that the international legal maritime regime provides “quasi-territorial rights over a considerable proportion of the world’s oceans to a handful of small states”. In the section below, various interviews will be discussed that underscore how Ocean States emphasise and ‘operationalise’ their geographic position<sup>62</sup>.

Further to the above, it is also important to discuss how Ocean States have a strategic position in two ways: in the ideological sense<sup>63</sup> and the material sense. The current geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific illustrates this duality, where major players are engaged in a rivalry to secure the ideological support of these islands and gain access to the physical territory of the islands. On the ideological front, major players are vying for the influence of the Ocean States because the backing of these states ensures they remain committed to the values of the major players and align with their respective visions of world order. This is particularly evident in the rivalry between the US and China in the Indo-Pacific, where the US has stated in their declassified security documents that they are fighting against a repressive world order that would deny the region a free and open space:

*Inter-state strategic competition, defined by geopolitical rivalry between free and repressive world order visions, is the primary concern for U.S. national security. In particular, the People’s Republic of China, under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, seeks to reorder the region to its advantage by leveraging military modernization, influence operations, and predatory economics to coerce other nations (Department of Defence 2019).*

In this context, the referral to the ‘position’ of the state is less material and more about the symbolic importance of the state in world affairs. The position of Ocean States is prized by major players since their support means that states can establish ‘outposts

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<sup>62</sup> Repositioning themselves as ‘Large Ocean States’ rather than ‘Small Island Developing States’ demonstrates a paradigm shift in geopolitical interpretation. This transition embodies a departure from the conceptualisation of ‘prisoner[s] of geography,’ as referenced by Briffa (2021: 139), where the ocean is seen as a constraining factor. Instead, these states are now strategically drawing on the ocean as an asset.

<sup>63</sup> To the extent that ocean states derive power from their ideological positioning, this reflects a more intangible form of influence. The ideological dimension is not only about the material control of territory but about the symbolic importance of these states, as they can act as promoters of the values of major players.

of influence' in terms of promoting values such as democracy or human rights in the case of the US, or alternative visions of development for China. Furthermore, these Ocean States are important because they account for a large portion of the states in international organisations, which makes their support invaluable when it comes to voting. Ocean States wield considerable diplomatic weight. The Alliance of Small Island States, for example, comprises 20 per cent of the votes at the UN, making them a considerable 'voting bloc' to consider (discussed in more detail in 6.2.2.). The recognition of the strategic importance of these states is evident through the increasing diplomatic attention towards these islands.

The US has been expanding its diplomatic presence in the Pacific Ocean. In 2023, the US announced that it would open a new embassy in Tonga, while talks were in place with Vanuatu and Kiribati to open new embassies in those states too (Al Jazeera 2023b). The US also reopened its embassy in Solomon Islands after being absent from the country for over thirty years. In September 2023, (now former) US President Joe Biden announced that the US would be establishing diplomatic relations with the Cook Islands and Niue (Madhani 24 September 2023). The US is not the only state that is seeking to open more embassies in these islands. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of July 2023, the People's Republic of China officially opened its embassy in Solomon Islands (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China 2023). In the Indian Ocean, the US reopened its Embassy in Seychelles in June 2023 after a 27-year hiatus (Blinken 1 June 2023). The intensifying diplomatic activity underscores the ideological significance of these islands.

Furthermore, Ocean States have a strategic importance due to their physical position. They are located in a prime position because they are geographically found along important SLOCs, as well as offering the major players the ability to potentially project military power. The Prime Minister of Fiji emphasised the importance of their position stating that:

*Our Island states are acutely aware that in international geopolitics their area has high strategic value. The superpowers America and China are competing within it for influence (Rabuka 26 February 2024).*

The above statement seems to echo what Alfred Mahan (1898: 32-33) writes in *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*:

*If [...] nature has so placed a country that it has easy access to the high sea itself, while at the same time it controls one of the great thoroughfares or the world's traffic, it is evident that the strategic value of its position is very high.*

A case in point is Seychelles. Seychelles has been recognised as holding immense strategic value due to its location along important SLOCs, which facilitate trade between Asia and Africa and provide a linking point between Africa, India and West Asia (Barot 25 July 2023). Morgenthau (1948: 82) suggests that during times of war, maintaining open sea lanes is essential for securing the transport of vital food supplies. In the contemporary context, this principle remains highly relevant, as the uninterrupted operation of SLOCs is critical for global trade, upon which many major players are heavily reliant. Given the strategic positioning of Ocean States along these maritime routes, Ocean States play a pivotal role in facilitating and safeguarding trade, making them indispensable partners for major players.

Ralph Agrippine, Seychelles' permanent liaison office to the IOC, stresses the centrality of Seychelles' geographic position, explaining that "Seychelles is in the middle of the Indian Ocean" (personal communication, 19 February 2024). Historically, Seychelles was in a prime position as a refreshment station for those travelling to India. It has retained this strategic position. Agrippine notes that "if you have Seychelles, then you can control all of the space" and "till nowadays, all the powers, they want to be friendly with Seychelles, because when you are in Seychelles, basically you are in the middle of the Indian Ocean" (personal communication, 19 February 2024).

Dennis Matatiken, Principle Secretary of the Department of the Environment in Seychelles, notes that Seychelles':

*Position is very strategic for the international [...] you see a lot of interest here [...] there was the idea of having an Indian military base on Assumption [island] [...] you even find for example, before there were the Americans at the old tracking station, and they were out and now they are coming back (personal communication, 20 February 2024).*

He further explains that Seychelles "welcomes the interest because it means you can use it to your advantage" (Matatiken, personal communication, 20 February 2024).

Seychelles' strategic position has resulted in the Island receiving much attention from major players in the region, such as India<sup>64</sup>. Central to India's SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision, for example, is securing relations with their neighbours and island states, and the importance of Seychelles is highlighted in this vision (Sarangi 2019). Establishing good relations with these islands would potentially allow the navies of major players to patrol these important SLOCs and ensure that they remain free and open (Baruah 2018).

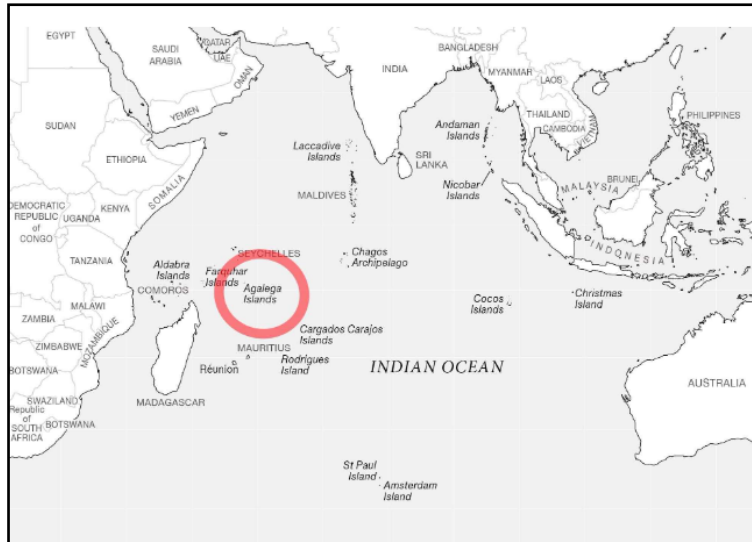
Furthermore, the recognition of the power that comes with their position is evident in Australia's actions towards Fiji. In 2018, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced that Australia would take its engagement with the Pacific Islands to a new level through its 'Pacific Step-up' policy (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2019). This was characterised by an increase in the defence and military spending in Fiji and Solomon Islands as well as the funding of a new regional military facility in Fiji (Morgan 2022: 57). In early October 2023, Australia also supplied Fiji with 12 Australian-made Bushmaster military vehicles which was followed by the signing of the renewed Vuvale Partnership between the two states to strengthen economic and trade cooperation (Barton 20 October 2023).

Another country that has an important position is Mauritius. It is made up of four islands, which include the main island of Mauritius and then Rodrigues, Saint Brandon, and the Agaléga Islands. In particular, Agaléga has gained attention (see Figure 6 below). Since signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Mauritius, India has been developing infrastructure on the island to increase its surveillance of the southwest Indian Ocean. India has constructed a runway as well as a jetty and port facilities. These new developments will allow India to stage its new P-8I<sup>65</sup> fleet and patrol the Mozambique Channel (Naval Technology 2021).

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<sup>64</sup> It is also worth noting that in March 2025, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi conducted his second state visit to Mauritius, his second since 2015, which underscores the growing significance of the island (Roy 11 March 2025). During this second state visit, Modi also announced that the India-Mauritius partnership has been elevated to an 'Enhanced Strategic Partnership' (Government of India 12 March 2025).

<sup>65</sup> The P-8I fleet is an Indian maritime patrol aircraft manufactured by Boeing (Naval Technology 2021).



**Figure 6. Mauritius’ Agaléga Islands**

Source: The Interpreter (2021)

The Chagos Archipelago<sup>66</sup> is an important asset of Mauritius since, in the same manner as the Agaléga islands, it draws attention from the major players. The Indian navy has, for example, acquired rights to access the US base at Diego Garcia, where for the US, Diego Garcia is vastly important considering “[i]ts strategic location between Africa and Indonesia and 1,000 miles south of India gives the U.S. access to the Middle East, Central and South Asia, and the vast Indian Ocean” (Malik 2020: 144). These islands give Mauritius a specific type of power since their position is of much interest to the major players<sup>67</sup>. Shakuntala Jugmohun, former Special Advisor to the Mauritian Minister of Foreign Affairs, notes that Mauritius “holds a really envious place in the Indian Ocean [...] China came to us with the Silk Route and India came to us about Agaléga [Islands]” (personal communication, 3 July 2024). Jugmohun further states that “Mauritius has always been geographically significant. Historically, Mauritius has always been on the trade routes. When ships were damaged in Cape Town or faced delays, there was no Suez Canal yet, so they came to Mauritius” (personal communication, 3 July 2024). In this regard, Jugmohun suggests that:

<sup>66</sup> The Chagos Archipelago will be discussed in more detail in section 6.2.5.

<sup>67</sup> With tensions increasing between Iran and the US, the significance of Diego Garcia is heightened for the US military. The US has recently deployed one-third of its B-2 stealth bombers to the strategic archipelago. These stealth bombers can strike Houthi positions in Yemen or target underground nuclear facilities in Iran. The capability which these bombers provide is crucial for the US, especially in light of Iran’s increased naval presence near the Strait of Hormuz. Consequently, Diego Garcia is regarded as a critical deterrent against potential Iranian aggression (Ahlawat 2025).

*The approach should be to open up and let everyone come in, and in the meantime, take the best from each of them. Is that wrong? No, because this island has always been geographically significant. The geopolitics of the region has to be viewed from that angle (personal communication, 3 July 2024).*

Turning to the Pacific, Walter Diamana (personal communication, 2024) notes that Solomon Islands has also received attention from India. While India is not a new partner according to Diamana (2024), what is new is the level of engagement between the two states. Evidence of the increased level of engagement is Solomon Islands presenting their first High Commissioner to the Republic of India on 6 September 2024 (Government of Solomon Islands 12 September 2024). This comes off the back of India's initiation of the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIIC) in 2014. According to the Government of India's Ministry of External Affairs, India's focus has largely been said to be based on the Indian Ocean but recognising that the Pacific Islands "may have large exclusive economic zones"<sup>68</sup> has prompted India to equally turn its attention to the Pacific (Government of India n.d.).

In this sense, power through position can be understood in two ways: (i) ideological support – Ocean States can provide value-based support that major players depend on to execute their strategies in the region and legitimise their policies; (ii) geopolitical support – Ocean States can provide the 'tangible' support that major players depend on by providing them access to important land or waters which they can use to build military infrastructure. Importantly, in this study, it is postulated that power through position does not arise from traditional military strength but rather from the unique ability of Ocean States to capitalise on their location<sup>69</sup>. This source of power is relational. Without actors to value the importance of the island's strategic position, it would not be valuable. However, since there are other actors who value the position, the islands are able to capitalise on their strategic position<sup>70</sup> and shape their environment by controlling access to these resources.

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<sup>68</sup> This links to the first paragraph of this section where it was noted that Ocean States are reminding other actors in the international arena of the large maritime zones that fall under their jurisdiction. India's recognition of this demonstrates how ocean states are successfully drawing on their geography to highlight their importance.

<sup>69</sup> An important aspect of 'capitalising on their location' is reframing their territory from consisting of only a small land area to highlighting that, in reality, it includes vast oceanic spaces.

<sup>70</sup> Ultimately, this section emphasises that geography is a source of power, which contrasts the claim made by Nye (1990: 154) that "the factors of technology, education, and economic growth are becoming more significant in international power, while geography, population and raw materials are becoming somewhat less important".

## 6.2.2. Power through international and regional organisations

Organisations, whether international or regional<sup>71</sup>, are a further mechanism that Ocean States utilise to shape their environment. Long (2022: 64) explains that small states specifically target joint action through multi-actor forums as a means to minimise the costs of conducting foreign policy. Here, reference can be made to Abbot and Snidal (1998: 13), who suggest that these organisations are “vehicles for pooling activities, assets or risks”. One clear example of this is the establishment of the RMIFC and the RCOC under the auspices of the IOC<sup>72</sup>. As discussed in 5.5.1. the RMIFC is specifically responsible for sharing and exchanging maritime security intel. However, apart from just being a cost-saving mechanism, these organisations are important since they “facilitate access to a broad audience”, which includes major players (Long 2022: 64). In the instance of the IOC, this broad audience has been established through granting observer status to China, India, and Japan, as well as entities such as the EU, and the UN (Indian Ocean Commission 2023: 5).

The utility of regional and international organisations is based on Hannah Arendt’s (1958: 30) assertion that “power springs up among men when they act together”. Here, it is important to note that while Arendt speaks of IOs specifically, Ocean States have demonstrated the ability to work effectively through IOs and regional organisations (ROs). In fact, these two types of organisations often complement each other, and using them in tandem may enhance the ability of Ocean States to influence their environment. For example, Ocean States first act together in ROs, where they define common positions and formulate strategies. This can be likened to Archer’s (2001: 73) conceptualisation of IOs acting as instruments and arenas. In the case of instruments, IOs (which can also be regional in nature and, therefore, regional organisations) are used by member states as tools to pursue particular ends (Archer 2001: 68). ROs are used specifically to further the national interest of individual states. For example, they may be used to address pressing issues such as climate change and rising sea levels in the context of Ocean States. Additionally, ROs play the role of an arena or forum in

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<sup>71</sup> Regional organisations are defined by Engel (2020: 235) as a geographically defined sub-type of international organisations.

<sup>72</sup> The IOC is the only regional organisation in Africa that is comprised solely of islands. One of its great advantages is that it is an inexpensive organisation “that mobilises significant resources for the benefit of its member States” (IOC 2023: 507).

which action takes place, enabling member states to convene to discuss, argue or cooperate (Archer 2001: 74).

A notable example<sup>73</sup> of this collaboration occurred in 2009 when Kiribati proposed the 'Pacific Oceanscape' concept, which was formulated into a Framework and approved by PIF leaders in 2010 (Anggadi 2022: 23). The framework specifically addressed members' concerns about changing maritime zones as a result of sea-level rise. In 2010, the PIF leaders explicitly mentioned this issue in their Forum Communique, as explained by Anggadi (2022: 23), and in 2014, the PIF Leaders reemphasised the importance of the issue, calling for strengthened regional efforts. In both 2017 and 2019, the issue was deliberated, with leaders specifically discussing the possibility of developing international law to achieve the goal of fixing maritime zones notwithstanding sea-level rise (Anggadi 2022: 24). In 2021, the PIF Leaders officially endorsed the Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the Face of Climate Change-related Sea-level Rise (Morgan 2022: 52). In this instance, the PIF was used to define common positions and come up with a unified strategy.

After this, Ocean States take these regional positions to IOs such as the UN during climate negotiations (Morgan 2022: 53). In this case, the issue was taken to the 79<sup>th</sup> UNGA, where various states referred to the declaration in their speeches. They successfully brought the issue to the attention of major players, with the US stating that:

*The United States believes that sea-level rise driven by human-induced climate change should not diminish the maritime zones on which island States and other coastal States rely, including for food and livelihoods. We are committed to preserving the legitimacy of lawfully established maritime zones and their associated rights and entitlements. As we have stated, the United States will not challenge lawfully established baselines and maritime zone limits that are not subsequently updated despite sea-level rise caused by climate change. We encourage others to adopt a practice consistent with this approach (United States Mission to the United Nations 2024).*

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<sup>73</sup> An alternative example is Fiji's advocacy for the concept of an 'Ocean of Peace'. The Prime Minister first introduced the concept at a regional level, namely at the Pacific Islands Forum in 2023. Rabuka, specifically, thanks the PIF for its support in embracing the vision. He then mentions that the concept was introduced at the UNGA. In February 2024, Rabuka also raised the concept at the IMF Pacific High Level Conference, where he specifically requested that those states with great power and influence "use [their] authority to spread [the] Ocean message of peace" when they return home (Rabuka 26 February 2024). This case is significant since it demonstrates how regional and international organisations are used in tandem to promote certain visions.

Australia similarly mentioned that it welcomes the PIF's declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the Face of Climate Change-related Sea-level Rise (Australia Mission to the United Nations 2024). This demonstrates how ROs and IOs are used in tandem to influence the environment of Ocean States.

To the extent that ROs and IOs are considered capable of influencing their environments, they can be viewed as aligning with Archer's final role of IOs, which is that of an actor. In this final instance, IOs are seen as having the potential to become independent entities that possess agency, influence, and the ability to make decisions. In this sense, they are not passive structures, that is arenas where member states can convene to deliberate on matters, or merely instrumentalised by (some of their) members but rather have the ability to affect the international system (Archer 2001: 80). Drawing on the work of Wolfers (1962) and Claude (1971), Archer (1971: 79) suggests that IOs can enact the role of an actor when the resolutions or recommendations emanating from the organ compel other governments to act differently than they would have originally acted, and when the organisation is a distinct entity from its member states. Archer (1971: 79) also notes that IOs can be said to function effectively as actors when they achieve more collectively as an organisation than member states could accomplish independently. The following paragraphs will highlight several instances in which the Alliance of Small Island States<sup>74</sup> and the Pacific Islands Forum are seen as distinct entities, have compelled others to change their actions, and where they have achieved more together as IOs or ROs than if states were to act individually.

Archer (1971: 79) explains that an example of an IO being perceived as a distinct entity capable of acting is assertions such as "the UN should do something" or "OPEC has increased petroleum prices". Similarly, the PIF has been described in ways that highlight its identity as separate from its members and capable of action, when for example, it was noted that the "Pacific Islands Forum [...] call[s] on all countries and non-state actors to join with the Blue Pacific in taking bold, decisive and transformative action to address the ever-present challenges of climate change" (Pacific Islands Forum 2019). This demonstrates that the PIF is not only a platform where states

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<sup>74</sup> Although AOSIS and PIF have been defined earlier, the researcher occasionally spells them out in full to remind the reader.

negotiate but rather, the PIF is seen as an autonomous actor that can make decisions and take action.

One of the prominent ways in which Ocean States use international organisations as a mechanism to influence others is through their collective numerical strength. As was mentioned in 1.2.3., Ocean States, when acting as a unified bloc under AOSIS, comprise 20 per cent of UN membership (Morgan 2022: 52). This significant presence enhances their appeal as strategic partners for major players, who may see them as pivotal actors in terms of gaining support for particular issues and agendas. Ocean States can leverage their votes to negotiate reciprocal support for issues of importance to them. Graham and Nagar (2024: 240-241) highlight these dynamics, noting that small states can provide “democratic international support” in multilateral settings where votes count.

The Pacific Island Countries (PIC) exemplify this strategy, with 14 full members of the UN. This numerical advantage enables them to exert substantial influence, especially when voting as a bloc with the PIF. As Morgan (2022: 52) explains, “the 14 PIF member countries have substantial muscle as not only are they united in character, but also because they vote in blocs”. When IOs such as the PIF vote in blocs, they demonstrate their ability to be actors in world politics and not merely passive structures. They are able to shape the environment in which they exist. In this regard, Morgan (2022: 52) points out that “by aggregating common positions, island states have disproportionately shaped international cooperation to reduce emissions”.

A representative from the Multilateral Affairs Section of Seychelles’ Foreign Ministry, emphasised the importance of lobbying:

*We use our position as a member of a grouping to make one small voice become big by having 70 other voices alongside us. We have the OACPS. It’s the organisation for African, Caribbean and Pacific SIDS. And we have lots of seats in the OACPS [...] We will use those groupings in order to ensure that we have the numbers with us. And then we become a powerful lobby as well, internationally and within these organisations (anonymous, personal communication, 19 February 2024b).*

By congregating together through international organisations, Ocean States can use these IOs as actors and reshape the discussion on issues that are critical to them, such as climate finance. IOs, therefore, become a source of power for Ocean States.

Apart from the PIF, there are several other regional organisations that have been established by Ocean States specifically for the purpose of furthering their strategic interests and therefore establishing change. These include the Indian Ocean Commission, the Alliance of Small Island States, the Pacific Islands Forum, and the Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS). Flavian Joubert, Minister for Agriculture, Climate Change and Energy in Seychelles, underscores the strategic reliance on group representation:

*Rarely would we go out on our own, of course, our president or the head of state or others would make statements individually, but you are not making statements individually, but as members of a group (personal communication, 23 February 2024).*

This collective approach has yielded tangible results. For example, in 2017 the PSIDS endorsed Sweden's candidacy for a temporary seat on the UNSC in return for Sweden's support on two specific issues: (1) oceans and (2) including a discussion about climate change and security on the UNSC agenda (Corbett *et al.* 2022: 2). In 2017, Fiji and Sweden also jointly chaired the Ocean Pathway Partnership, which is an international commitment aimed at prioritising ocean issues within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (Shiiba *et al.* 2023: 2). A member of the Seychelles Ministry of Foreign Affairs affirmed the strategy of exchanging votes stating that:

*We do that as well. We do that in negotiation [...] We negotiate in terms of candidatures. They want our vote. They desperately need our vote. So yes, we have power. We are a member of the United Nations organisation. We have power (anonymous, personal communication, 19 February 2024a).*

The above claim was supported by a representative of the Multilateral Affairs Section of the Seychelles' Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who similarly noted that Seychelles often pursues the strategy of supporting candidates. They explained that:

*We get a lot of requests for candidates [...] so sometimes, yes, we do use the candidate process in order to get the outcome we would like to have. If a few countries are advocating for the same position and they approach us, we will definitely choose the most preferable candidate that will support us on an issue which is important for us (anonymous, personal communication, 19 February 2024b).*

Beyond vote trading, Ocean States have successfully introduced new frameworks and policies within global governance, which demonstrates their ability to manipulate the environment in which they exist. This point has been discussed in 5.1.1. However, it

is necessary to mention it under this section again since it attests to the power of Ocean States in relation to IOs. One prime example of this is the manner in which Ocean States, through AOSIS, were able to secure international recognition and support for the introduction of the MVI. In 2020, the UN Secretary-General officially acknowledged this call from Ocean States, and the UN General Assembly mandated the UN “to produce an MVI for SIDS and present options for its use and requested the UN Secretary-General to report on the matter one year later” (Climate Ambition Support Alliance 17 August 2021). On 13 August 2024, the UNGA adopted a resolution on the MVI, which marks decades of advocacy from SIDS (IISD 2024).

Another major policy success was the introduction of the ‘Loss and Damage’ framework as a key policy area that needs to be addressed within climate change negotiations. This concept was originally introduced in 1991 by Vanuatu and AOSIS and emerged as a policy area for the UNFCCC thirty years later. At COP27 in 2022, it was agreed that a Loss and Damage Fund would be established. As explained by an Oxfam (2023: 5) report, “this decision was hugely significant, as it establishes loss and damage as the key third pillar of climate finance” alongside adaptation and mitigation.

A strategic aspect of this success was the identification of key leaders within the island group. One official noted that while islands always “navigate as part of a group”, they also have to “identify champions who can lead that group or particular subject and find the best country for whatever we have put forward” (Matatiken, personal communication, 23 February 2024). Mia Mottley, the Prime Minister of Barbados, has been very vocal on the review and reform of the global financial infrastructure. In this instance, islands

*should not go out and try and compete with her. We should encourage that champion and work with that champion within the group who carries forward that message* (Matatiken, personal communication, 23 February 2024).

Through international and regional organisations, Ocean States have been able to reshape global governance, particularly on issues related to climate finance. This demonstrates how these organisations are mechanisms for Ocean States to shape their environment.

### 6.2.3. Power through valued possessions

Along with the power that Ocean States have as a result of acting through international organisations, another source of power lies in their possession of the object of value. Denis Matatiken, the Principle Secretary for the Environment in Seychelles, explains that a key element in determining power is uniqueness, or that which makes you different from others. Matatiken further explains that:

*If I have something you do not have, then I am powerful. I can define power as this, because if I have a resource, you do not have, I own this, and you are coming to work for me. So, it means I am a very powerful person” [sic] (personal communication, 20 February 2024).*

This assertion can be linked back to the theory, where Thibaut and Kelley (1959: 124) assert that “an individual's power over another derives from the latter's being dependent upon him”. In the context of international relations, this study suggests that the geographic location (as discussed in 6.2.1.) creates a form of leverage for Ocean States. While Ocean States can seek support from multiple players, major players have fewer alternatives when it comes to securing interests in critical maritime regions, since there are limited islands with which relations can be established<sup>75</sup>. This dynamic implies that major players may have to rely on Ocean States for access and influence, but the reverse is not always necessarily true. Consequently, Ocean States can exert a degree of influence over major players because their location makes them strategically significant.

Blau (1964: 124) further explains that “power depends on people's needs for the benefits those in power have to offer”. In the case of Ocean States, they negate the power of the major players because they are not as dependent on the benefits of the major players<sup>76</sup>. In the case of the major players, they affirm the power of the Ocean States because they need the benefits which the Ocean States have to offer, namely the strategic location<sup>77</sup>. In this instance, Ocean States have power because they possess that which is of value at this specific point in time, namely a strategic position.

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<sup>75</sup> Some actors, such as China have resorted to building artificial islands. These islands allow for the surveillance of neighbours, refuelling stations for naval and air assets, the development of long-range missile systems, and bases for submarines (Leone *et al.* 2024: 314).

<sup>76</sup> This is not to imply that ocean states are completely independent of major players. Rather, as was shown in the previous chapter, ocean states often diversify their relations so that they are not dependent on any single major player (see 6.3.1.2.).

<sup>77</sup> This can be linked to Holsti's (1995: 123) explanation of 'needs'. Holsti explains that when a country needs something from another state, it is vulnerable to its influence.

Jugmohun, for example, explains that in the case of Mauritius, “if we count Diego Garcia and all the surrounding islands, we are the largest island state in the biggest ocean in the world” (personal communication, 3 July 2024).

Furthermore, in the Pacific Ocean, Solomon Islands possesses power since their location is highly valuable to the major players, representing an ‘outpost of influence’ for them. The immense value of Solomon Islands is visible through the actions towards the island as it prepared to host the Pacific Island Games in 2023 (Reuters 8 November 2023). China donated the main sports stadium for the Pacific Games and mentioned that it would provide security for the event. In response to this, Australia sent 100 officers to boost security in what has been interpreted as an attempt to remain the primary security provider for the island. This is one example that demonstrates that while Solomon Islands can look to various partners for security needs, the major players cannot, for example, look to an Ocean State in the Atlantic Ocean to exert influence in the Indo-Pacific. This speaks to the idea that power is not solely derived from material capabilities but also from strategic geography and relational dynamics. Islands, such as Solomon Islands, wield influence not because of their intrinsic strength but because their location is indispensable to major players.

Along with this, Janeway (1975: 105) writes that there are several ways in which the ‘weak’ can exercise power, namely through:

*A withdrawal of attention, a lack of interest, a concentration on other areas, and finally, a turning to other prophets preaching other explanations of the world.*

It was especially in the case of Solomon Islands where the first expression of power was pertinent, namely ‘a withdrawal of attention’. When the traditional partners of Solomon Islands failed to provide sufficient attention to the needs and concerns of the island, Solomon Islands simply looked elsewhere. For example, Solomon Islands shares an active border with Bougainville, PNG, which requires border control (Canyon 2020: 4). However, lacking the resources to maintain law and order along the border, Solomon Islands requested support from its traditional partners for a second patrol boat. When Australia failed to provide this support, Solomon Islands withdrew its attention from its traditional Western allies and leaned towards China to fill the gap in security infrastructure (Canyon 2020: 4).

In the case of Fiji, it was able to express power by demonstrating a ‘lack of interest’ in the affairs of the major powers, simply asserting that climate change was its largest issue and not geopolitical competition. In 2019, at the Shangri-La Dialogue, Fiji’s Minister for Defence, Inia Secuiratu asserted that:

*In our blue Pacific continent, machine guns, fighter jets, grey ships and green battalions are not our primary security concern [...] The single greatest threat to our very existence is climate change. It threatens our very hopes and dreams of prosperity.*

In this case, for the major players to ‘win over’ Fiji, they need to respond to what Fiji considers to be its primary concerns and not what the major players think should be their major concerns. When the ‘weak’ (in this case Fiji) no longer respond to the powerful it is in fact an expression of power. Reflecting this, Janeway (1985: 105) writes that:

*By doing so, they leave the powerful stranded in a world where the old tried and true causality no longer predicts anything at all. The absence of response frightens the powerful, for it tells them that the power relationship has dissolved. Whether they ever consciously were aware that it existed, they know on the nerve ends when it is gone.*

In these cases, the object of value is the attention of the Ocean States. As has been mentioned previously, Hayward (2020: 451) writes that “elites depend on the masses to cooperate in their agenda-setting schemes [...] that makes them vulnerable to the withdrawal of such cooperation”. Ocean States have power because they can compromise the ‘agenda-setting schemes’ of the major players by withdrawing their attention.

#### **6.2.4. Power through influencing the narrative**

A further manner in which Ocean States exert influence and shape outcomes is through the mechanism of influencing<sup>78</sup> the narrative. The section below discusses how narratives are used to shape their environment (which is a manifestation of power as discussed in 2.2.6.) and then provides multiple examples where Ocean States have successfully brought climate change to the forefront of global discussions.

One way in which Ocean States have been able to influence the narrative is by elevating climate change to the forefront of legal discourse. In particular, the agenda

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<sup>78</sup> Influence is used specifically in the context of narratives, since using the word, control, may imply propaganda, which is not what the researcher means.

on climate change and climate action, for example, is being influenced by Ocean States' push for opinions on climate change-related issues from the International Court of Justice (ICJ). A review of all the judgments, advisory opinions, and orders of the ICJ from 1948 to 2022 revealed that the phrase 'climate change' appeared for the first time in 2018 in a Judgement on the Costa Rica v. Nicaragua case (Codification Division 2024). However, the first time an advisory opinion has been explicitly sought in relation to climate change occurred on 29 March 2023, when the UN adopted the ICJ climate resolution, which requests the ICJ "to provide an advisory opinion on the obligations of States under international law to protect the rights of present and future generations against the adverse effects of climate change" (Vanuatu ICJ Initiative n.d.). This initiative was led by the Small Island Developing State of Vanuatu, which lobbied 132 nations to adopt the resolution by consensus.

Bringing such matters to the ICJ not only creates global publicity but, at the same time, forces major players to engage with these issues. While advisory opinions are not legally binding, they serve a crucial agenda-setting function, shaping customary international law and influencing state behaviour. In the case of the former, non-binding decisions are valuable, since they may reinforce claims for binding decisions elsewhere by signalling international consensus (Princen 2007: 28). In the case of the latter, failure to acknowledge advisory opinion risks damaging the reputation of major players (to be discussed in more detail in 6.2.5.), which may compel them to action. By securing an ICJ advisory opinion, Ocean States may exert additional pressure on major players to align with evolving norms and legal expectations.

This strategy of bringing issues of climate change to the ICJ aligns with the concept of 'venue shopping' proposed by Baumgartner and Jones (2009: 35) or 'Forum Shopping' proposed by Karns and Mingst (2004: 265). In the case of the former, states decide to strategically select institutional arenas where they believe they can best secure favourable outcomes. In particular, by bringing climate change to the ICJ, Ocean States aimed to shift the debate from a purely political issue to a legal matter. In the case of the latter, states deliberately choose which forums to use to raise issues, especially if other forums are not able to yield desirable results. By bringing the issue to the ICJ, the issue of climate change was given legitimacy and visibility that may have been lacking in other forums.

Another example of methods used by Ocean States to influence narratives is by reframing the global development agenda to ensure that maritime interests are incorporated and considered. A notable case is the argument put forth by Ocean States that if the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) did not have a stand-alone ocean goal, then there would be a “terrestrial bias in the UN’s vision for sustainable development” (Morgan 2022: 51). To counter this, the Pacific Island states lobbied for the inclusion of a stand-alone ocean goal in the UN’s 2030 SDGs (Morgan 2022: 50). In particular, SDG 14 is aimed at conserving and sustainably using the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs n.d.). In this sense, Ocean States have been able to force the dominant narrative, not only to link security to the climate but also development to the ocean.

Additionally, Ocean States have been able to influence the narrative by engaging in agenda-setting, understood in this study as the capacity to elevate specific issues to salience within the hierarchy of international concern (Livingston 1992: 313). This has been achieved, in part, through the strategic introduction and diffusion of novel terminologies, such as the ‘blue economy’, into global discourse. The blue economy has been predominantly pioneered by SIDS, with Seychelles in particular emerging as an early adopter and advocate of the blue economy (Benzaken *et al.* 2024: 3). Seychelles’ promotion of the concept has influenced the agenda both regionally and worldwide.

In 2014, the Foreign Minister of Seychelles was invited to sit in on a high-level Indian Ocean Rim Association panel focused on discussing maritime security and the development of the blue economy. Specifically, the Minister was invited because “of Seychelles’ high interest and leadership in promoting the blue economy concept” (Seychelles Nation 2014). Since then, the concept has been progressively mainstreamed, entering the lexicon of major players. For instance, the blue economy is explicitly mentioned in the US’s Ocean Climate Action Plan of 2023 (The White House 2023) and features prominently in Australia’s Draft Sustainable Ocean Plan of 2024 (Commonwealth of Australia 2024). This is a further example demonstrating the ability of Ocean States to exert influence, not through material dominance, but by shaping the language and priorities of global ocean governance.

Lastly, a key manner in which Ocean States have been able to influence the narrative is by strategic self-identification. Ocean States have shifted attention away from only focusing on the terrestrial aspect of states to recognising the value of the oceans and their marine resources<sup>79</sup>. Morgan (2022: 51) explains that through the 1982 *UN Convention on the Law of the Sea*, Pacific Island states were able to secure recognition of their large Exclusive Economic Zones<sup>80</sup> which meant that:

*Island states suddenly became large ocean states and gained control of significant marine resources, including one of the world's largest tuna fishery and valuable reserves of seabed minerals.*

Instead of being viewed as small islands in a blue void or lawless space between the important terrestrial spaces, Ocean States have been able to emphasise the fact that they live in “vast and interconnected seas of islands” (Morgan 2022: 48). In 2017, Mauritian Prime Minister Jugnauth referred to his state as a “Large Ocean State”. In 2022 the Fijian Prime Minister Bainimarama articulated that “as a Large Ocean State, our ocean is the beating heart of our way of life”, while in 2023, the Deputy Prime Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation from Fiji reiterated this, referring to Fiji as a “Large Ocean State” (Kamikamica 2023). The President of Seychelles, Wavel Ramkalawan echoed this at COP27 in 2022, describing Seychelles as a “Large Oceanic State”, while in 2021, Solomon Islands Prime Minister, Sogavare, emphasised that “Solomon Islands is a Large Ocean State”.

This self-identification of SIDS as ‘Large Ocean States’ reflects an intentional shift in the portrayal of these islands. Ocean States emphasise the centrality of oceans to their existence, which positions them not as small, helpless entities in a void, but rather as crucial players in the global maritime arena.

There are multiple examples that demonstrate that Ocean States have successfully been able to influence the narrative. A central example is how climate change has now been accepted by the major players as part of the discourse on security in the region,

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<sup>79</sup> Former Seychellois President, James Michel writes that “at a more prosaic level, the ocean has for long been dismissed as a residual part of the world – a vast area over which to cross from one country to another, a place to dump waste and treat with impunity. While it has for millennia provided a valuable source of food, there has, until recently, been little realisation that the supply of fish is exhaustible” (Michel 2023: 29).

<sup>80</sup> If Seychelles is only viewed according to its landmass, then it is resource-poor. However, if its EEZ of 1,4 million square kilometres is considered, then it opens up a range of resources such as fisheries, aquaculture, gas and oil exploration.

whereas for a long time, issues of high politics dominated the agenda<sup>81</sup>. A case in point is Australia and the US:

**Table 4.** Defence documents published by Australia

<b>Document name and year</b>	<b>Mention of the phrase ‘climate change’ in relation to security</b>
Review of Australia’s Defence Capabilities (1986)	No mention of ‘climate change’.
Australian Defence Force Posture Review (2012)	No mention of ‘climate change’.
Australian Defence White Paper (2016)	‘Climate change’ was mentioned eight times.
Australian National Defence Strategic Review (2023)	‘Climate change’ was mentioned fourteen times.  Climate change was also declared a ‘national security issue’.

**Table 5.** Defence documents published by the United States

<b>Document name and year</b>	<b>Mention of the phrase ‘climate change’ in relation to security</b>
The National Security Strategy of the United States of America (2002)	‘Climate change’ was mentioned once.
The National Military Strategy of the United States of America (2011)	‘Climate change’ was mentioned once.
United States Quadrennial Defense Review (2014)	‘Climate change’ was mentioned eight times.
United States Description of the National Military Strategy (2018)	‘Climate change’ was mentioned no times.
United States National Defense Strategy	‘Climate change’ was mentioned fifteen

<sup>81</sup> It is by influencing the narrative that ocean states are able to shape their environment and make it more responsive to their needs, such as the impact of climate change.

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(2022)

times.

Importantly, climate change is to be taken into consideration for threat assessments.

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What becomes evident in the above tables is how ‘climate change’ has gradually been included in the discourse of the security documents of both Australia and the United States. In the case of Australia, in its 1986 Defence Review, no mention was made of climate change, while by 2023, climate change was mentioned 23 times and declared a national security issue. In the case of the US, there was also a marked increase in the number of times that climate change was mentioned, with it only being mentioned once in 2002 and 2011, eight times in 2014, not at all in 2018 and then 15 times in 2022<sup>82</sup>. The above-mentioned demonstrates the point Tarte (2022: 35) makes:

*Pacific states have thus gradually succeeded in pushing climate change to the forefront of the regional security narrative and paradigm, where it is now defined both as an existential threat and as a threat multiplier.*

Major players with a vested interest in the Indo-Pacific no longer have the option to simply ignore the concerns of the Ocean States. Rather, they have been forced to incorporate climate change into their defence policies. In 2015, China acknowledged that SIDS are experiencing non-traditional security threats, while in 2017, Russia departed from seeing security primarily in terms of hard security and recognised the broader role that climate change can play in generating regional conflicts, such as in Lake Chad (van Schaik *et al.* 2018). This attests to the manner in which island states have shaped and controlled the narrative and thus hold power<sup>83</sup>.

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<sup>82</sup> The case of the US is slightly complex since the mention of the word ‘climate change’ is intimately linked to whether Donald Trump is in power or not. In 2018, there was no mention of climate change, which can be attributed to Trump being in power. In contrast, Joseph Biden’s presidency mentioned the phrase 15 times. This study treats Trump’s presidency as an anomaly, suggesting that it deviates from the norm. It is evident that there has been a growing consensus in the US about the importance of addressing climate change in recent years. For example, although Trump withdrew from the Paris Agreement in 2017, numerous governors from states like New York, California and Washington continued to express their commitment to climate goals. This is exemplified by the formation of the United States Climate Alliance, after Trump withdrew from the Paris Agreement, which consists of US states dedicated to reducing gas emissions by 26 to 28 per cent from 2005 levels (Georgetown Climate Center 2017).

<sup>83</sup> States, such as New Zealand, have also expressed their recognition of non-traditional security issues, stating that “New Zealand Defence has a clear priority to align our approach more fully with the Boe Declaration’s expanded concept of security” (New Zealand Government 2019: 7).

In summary, Ocean States possess a form of power. By linking climate change to security, and reframing themselves as Large Ocean States, these islands are able to influence the dominant narratives and change the environment to make it more responsive to their needs. They have also demonstrated power by compelling major players to incorporate oceanic and climatic issues into their policies. This demonstrates how Ocean States do not exert power through traditional military means but rather through influencing the narrative.

### **6.2.5. Power through moral suasion**

Building on the source of power discussed above, this study identifies moral suasion as an additional and significant source of power for Ocean States<sup>84</sup>. Moral suasion refers to the ability to shape the behaviour of other states by appealing to ideas, values and principles (Franceschet & Knight 2001: 63) or by invoking notions of proper behaviour (Chamberlain 2018: 57). It is fundamentally a form of persuasion that calls for altruistic behaviour from other states (Romans 1966: 1221). This is particularly relevant in the case of Ocean States, as the issues they advocate for – such as environmental protection – are not simply technical or economic concerns but, in fact, deeply moral issues<sup>85</sup>. The moral weight of these issues renders them difficult for major players to dismiss<sup>86</sup>, thereby transforming them into a distinct source of power for Ocean States.

A useful point of departure in understanding this argument is DeSombre's (2009: 156) analysis of environmental cooperation, in which she asserts that "a lack of concern about an environmental issue can be a source of power for a state". DeSombre (2009: 157) argues that developing states can leverage their nonparticipation in measures to

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<sup>84</sup> This assertion is supported by Neumann and de Carvalho's (2015: 10) argument that small states tend to seek power along the moral dimension. That is, they will "play on their moral authority" (Neumann & de Carvalho 2015: 11).

<sup>85</sup> It can be posited that environmental protection constitutes a global public good and represents a matter of international justice. In this regard, just as citizens within a state possess legal rights and freedoms that allow them to engage in society, they are also bound by a responsibility to promote the general good. Similarly, states form a part of a global society that is governed by international laws, customs, and norms (Linklater 1992: 23). Environmental protection can be seen as one of these norms, and thus states have an obligation to acknowledge and promote these standards.

<sup>86</sup> Baldacchino (2010: 155-156) suggests that small island states may be particularly effective at pursuing diplomacy when they are able to attain a high moral ground that gains them the support of non-state actors. However, at the time, Baldacchino (2010: 156) states that this strategy has not been so effective since "no larger country has been sufficiently embarrassed by its failure to respond to smaller-state concerns". However, as will be discussed below with reference to Australia, this has arguably changed.

protect the environment as a strategy, as their ability to withhold cooperation grants them bargaining power. Although DeSombre (2009) arguably speaks about developing countries broadly and not specifically SIDS, this study challenges her conclusions, specifically in explaining the behaviour of a specific type of developing state, namely SIDS (or what this study refers to as Ocean States). While it is accurate to assert that Ocean States wield what DeSombre (2009: 157) conceptualises as 'environmental power', this environmental power does not reside in their ability to undermine or obstruct environmental protection. Instead, it is derived from their ability to actively promote environmental protection.

This argument hinges on the idea that it is not the non-compliance of Ocean States with environmental protection commitments that generates leverage for Ocean States, but rather the non-compliance of major players. When major players fail to meet environmental commitments, they expose themselves to reputational costs, compelling them to align with Ocean States to maintain their 'green credibility'. This dynamic resonates with Franceschet and Knight's (2001: 55) argument that "a state's interest in legitimacy will render an ethical foreign policy a matter of public accountability". If a state conducts an unethical foreign policy, it risks losing public trust, may face domestic opposition or undermine its international standing.

This argument further challenges the Realist assertion that states operate solely on the basis of narrow national interest. Graham and Nagar (2024: 238) explain that Realists argue that there "is no room in the jungle of world politics for states to adopt idealistic roles", such as being a good international citizen. However, Franceschet and Knight (2001: 54) contend that states "are affected by larger systemic pressures that render them unable or less willing to create policies" that only pursue their narrow national interest. As discussed in Section 5.3.1., states exist within a complex web of interdependence that extends to include a dependence on norms, principles and rules, which is what Krasner (1983) conceptualises as 'international regimes'. Graham and Nagar (2024: 238), drawing on the work of Evans (2021), make the point that countries tend to have a third national interest, namely being and being perceived as good international citizens.

A crucial theoretical insight underpinning this argument is provided by Scott (1990: 45), who contends that relations of domination are simultaneously relations of

resistance. Once domination is established, it does not continue to persist by its own momentum – it does not persist through inertia alone; rather, domination needs to be reinforced through enactments of power constantly. Furthermore, Wohlforth *et al.* (2017: 528) strengthen this argument, explaining that “all great powers depend on non-great powers to acknowledge their greatness, and so small and middle powers also play a role in constituting great powers”. This notion is highly relevant to this study, as it underscores why major players cannot assume that their influence will remain fixed and unchallenged. As Scott (1990: 70) explains, dominant actors must project an image consistent with their form of domination. Major players cannot afford to appear indifferent to climate concerns without risking damage to their legitimacy.

This phenomenon is evident in the insights provided by Phillianne Ernesta, the Principal Secretary for the Blue Economy in Seychelles, who explained that Seychelles is fortunate in the sense that it has:

*Sort of like a positive public image when we are working for the blue economy. Green is the most attractive deal out there. So our partners from abroad, are quite keen to support the transition towards renewable sustainable development [...] For them it is getting to tick the box, but for us it is a bit more (personal communication, 22 February 2024).*

Ernesta continues to explain that for these external actors, “they get the visibility of the green card or green label”. In another sense, she explained that countries in the global North are realising the detrimental impact that climate change could have on all states, including themselves. However, according to Ernesta (2024), these states do not want to “forfeit the position of power”. Rather, they try and get other states to do the work for you. These states are willing to give money to states in the global South, but they are not yet willing to conserve their own spaces (Ernesta, personal communication, 22 February 2024). Evident in this explanation is once again how Ocean States can leverage the interests of the major players to their advantage. Seychelles is able to

attract<sup>87</sup> external support for sustainable development because this aligns with the interest of major players in maintaining a ‘green image’<sup>88</sup>.

A further example of moral suasion in practice is the case of the Pacific Islands Forum and its impact on Australian climate policy. During the 2019 Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Retreat, negotiations nearly collapsed twice when Australia pushed to have all references to coal in the document removed and displayed a reluctance to commit to limiting warming to 1.5 degrees (Moore 2024: 294). Following the summit, the then-Fijian Prime Minister, Frank Bainimarama, argued that Australia should not be a part of the Pacific Islands Forum after its obstructionist stance. Recognising the reputational damage inflicted by such criticism and that its behaviour was justifying the Pacific Islands’ decisions to turn to other partners for assistance, Australia has attempted, under the Albanese government, to embrace climate policies more willingly and in line with Pacific Island states (Moore 2024: 294). This shift demonstrates how Ocean States can exert influence by framing climate as a moral imperative, thereby compelling major players to act in ways they might not have otherwise considered<sup>89</sup>.

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<sup>87</sup> It could also be argued that Ocean States use what Long (2022: 63), borrowing from Handel, describes as ‘derivative power’. According to Long (2022: 63), derivative power refers to the ability of a small state to exert influence not through its own intrinsic capabilities but by leveraging external actors’ interests, resources or policies to achieve its own goals. In this sense, the power is derived from more powerful states. Applied to the context of this study, Ocean States derive power from “fram[ing] an issue around potential mutual benefits”. Ocean States may frame their interests, such as environmental protection, as matters of mutual benefit.

<sup>88</sup> This study acknowledges that a certain critique may be levelled against this argument, namely that there is a global backlash against green policies. It may then be argued that Ocean States face an uphill battle in terms of advocating for these policies. However, this study cautions against a premature assumption that there is a global backlash against green policies. The suggestion of a worldwide retreat failed to capture the fact that rather than representing a uniform backlash, resistance to environmental initiatives is rather largely confined to particular national contexts – most notably the US under President Trump, during which the country has signalled its intent to withdraw from the Paris Agreement. Contrasting developments in other regions suggest continued engagement with climate diplomacy. For example, Türkiye and Australia are battling it out to host COP31 in 2026, perhaps an indication that states continue to view global climate leadership as valuable (France24 2025). Notwithstanding the slow progress made in combating climate change, states such as China are intent on positioning themselves as key players in addressing climate change. China has, for example, established a South-South Climate Cooperation Fund, which aims to enhance climate change mitigation and adaptation in developing countries. Moreover, climate change has also been incorporated as one of the eight priority areas of the BRI (Chuanhong & Haisen 2024). These examples suggest that while some setbacks are evident, the broader trend does not necessarily reflect a global withdrawal from climate commitments.

<sup>89</sup> It is important to acknowledge the difference between moral suasion and status-seeking, since it may be argued that Ocean States are engaging in status-seeking. While there are overlaps between the two – both invoke moral language – they also differ in their fundamental goal. Status-seeking aims to elevate a state’s position in the international hierarchy, especially in relation to its peers (Wohlforth *et al.* 2017: 528). In contrast, moral suasion, as understood in this study, is not necessarily adopted to change a state’s status or prestige, but rather, in the case of Ocean States, proposed as a mode of influence aimed at appealing to certain values and ethical standards to compel behavioural change of other

Long (2022: 65) explains that in certain instances, major players may override or ignore the concerns of small states. However, this may increase the reputational costs for these major players (Long 2022: 65).

While above moral suasion has mainly been discussed in the context of environmental protection, the case of the Chagos Archipelago presents an alternative example of how an island state – Mauritius – effectively reshaped its environment. On October 3, 2024, the UK and Mauritian Governments released a joint statement in which the UK announced the decision to transfer sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago, including Diego Garcia, back to Mauritius (UK Government 2024). This decision followed a prolonged legal and diplomatic campaign, culminating in an ICJ advisory opinion, demanding the unconditional withdrawal of the UK from the Chagos archipelago. Marggraff *et al.* (2024) contend that the “UK’s move could be interpreted as reaffirming its commitment to the rules-based order”, especially to counter the idea that Western powers invoke such norms selectively when it suits them.

In this instance, it may be suggested that Mauritius demonstrated power by influencing the UK to return the Archipelago to Mauritius by framing the issue as a moral issue. As discussed in 4.5.2. Mauritius frames the Chagos matter as a moral one. It asserts that the UK has the chance to place itself on the right side of history and close the dark chapter of history where it has the reputation as the last colonial power in Africa. In morally framing the matter, Mauritius exercised narrative power and moral suasion, shaping the narratives in ways that heightened the reputational costs of non-compliance for the UK to the extent that the UK may not be seen as fulfilling its duties as a ‘good international citizen’<sup>90</sup>.

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states. In this sense, moral suasion functions as a tool of persuasion, not as a vehicle for status elevation. That said, concepts such as ‘creativity’, which refers to a status-seeking strategy in which small powers reconfigure what status should be based on (Wohlforth *et al.* 2017: 532), could be linked to the behaviour of Ocean States, since they similarly suggest that what matters in international relations is not merely might but also right.

<sup>90</sup> While this study argues that the Chagos Archipelago serves as a significant case through which Mauritius has exercised moral suasion, it is equally important to acknowledge counterarguments that highlight the limitations of this strategy. A possible critique is that, despite Mauritius’ efforts, the UK retains control over Diego Garcia, thereby constraining the success of Mauritius’ influence. Nonetheless, this study contends that Mauritius’ sustained moral pressure has been effective in prompting the UK to renegotiate the status of the Chagos Archipelago. While this influence does not extend to full, unconditional sovereignty – as highlighted in the case of Diego Garcia – the agreement does include numerous significant concessions. For example, Article 5 commits the UK to support Mauritius in the establishment and management of Marine Protected Area in the Archipelago, and to

In sum, Ocean States wield moral suasion as a distinct source of power by elevating environmental protection as a matter of international justice. The matters that Ocean States advocate for have great reputational implications for major players, and therefore, major players are compelled to address the issues advocated for by Ocean States or risk damaging their reputations.

#### **6.2.6. Ocean State power**

Although the sources of power were separately discussed, it is important to note that in reality, they overlap and work together, and it is ultimately understanding how they interlink that makes it possible to understand how Ocean States have power. For example, power through position and power through valued possessions are tightly linked. In fact, in some sense, in this particular instance, power through position (6.2.1.) may fall under power through valued possession (6.2.3.) since that which is valued may be the strategic position of Ocean States. Furthermore, power through international and regional organisations (6.2.2.) is closely linked to power through influencing the narrative (6.2.4.). Ocean States often influence the narrative by using regional organisations to promote certain concepts and ideas. These ideas and concepts are usually normative in nature and, therefore, linked to power through moral suasion (6.2.5.). Therefore, if power for Ocean States is to be understood, it needs to be understood as a complex interplay of the different sources.

Ocean States are not necessarily characterised by a power deficit. In fact, they do wield power, which is made evident through their roles as ‘pioneer’ and ‘activist-challenger’. This power, in turn, rests on various sources as discussed above, which are interconnected. Considering the above discussion, this study puts forward a revised understanding of power within the context of Ocean States. Rather than adhering to a narrowly defined, traditional concept of power as rooted primarily in material capabilities, this analysis foregrounds a more relational and constructivist interpretation:

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cooperate on environmental protection and addressing IUU fishing. Article 10 stipulates that preference must be given to suitably qualified Mauritian companies in the awarding of contracts related to the base’s operations. Furthermore, Article 11 provides for multi-year UK funding of Mauritian development projects over a 25-year period (UK Government 2025). This study therefore holds that such provisions suggest that, although the UK maintains operational control over Diego Garcia, Mauritius has successfully leveraged moral suasion to extract strategic gains.

- **Power is relational:** power exists when there is an interdependent relationship. Power understood in this way extends beyond dyadic state-to-state interactions to include interactions between states, international organisations and prevailing norms. This relationality includes, for instance, the dependence of states on maintaining legitimacy within the international community. Although particular material attributes (such as expansive EEZ) may contribute to a state's capacity to power, power is not reducible to these resources alone. For this to be considered power, it is contingent on the social context in which these resources are made meaningful. Consequently, the significance of such resources is not intrinsic but constructed. However, in this vein, Ocean States have played a pivotal role in reconfiguring what counts as strategically valuable, or what is meaningful, in particular by emphasising their EEZ.
- **Power is found in interdependence:** contrary to Realist theories that emphasise power as a zero-sum game and where dependency is a vulnerability, Ocean State power is based on the understanding that power is rooted in interdependence. Where Realists argue that the powerful actor in the dependent relationship wields the power, Ocean State power is based on the understanding that interdependence, even if asymmetrical, can be manipulated to allow them to be active players. The participation of Ocean States in regional and international organisations, their ability to influence the narrative, amongst other things, allows them to capitalise on their embeddedness in global networks. This links back to Wrong's concept of 'intercursive power' (see 5.3.1.), where one actor may depend on one actor in a specific field, whereas in another field this dependence is reversed.
- **Power is defined by what is valued:** Ocean States derive their power from possessing that which is valued by major players. This could be their strategic locations, their attention or their association with the 'green or blue label'. As such, power is always a social construction that reflects changing global values. This perspective shifts the understanding of power from material considerations, such as the number of resources or military strength, towards other factors such as environmental credibility.

- **Power is based on diverse non-traditional sources:** Ocean States derive power from a variety of non-traditional sources that include intangible aspects such as moral suasion.

### 6.3. The foreign policy orientation of Ocean States

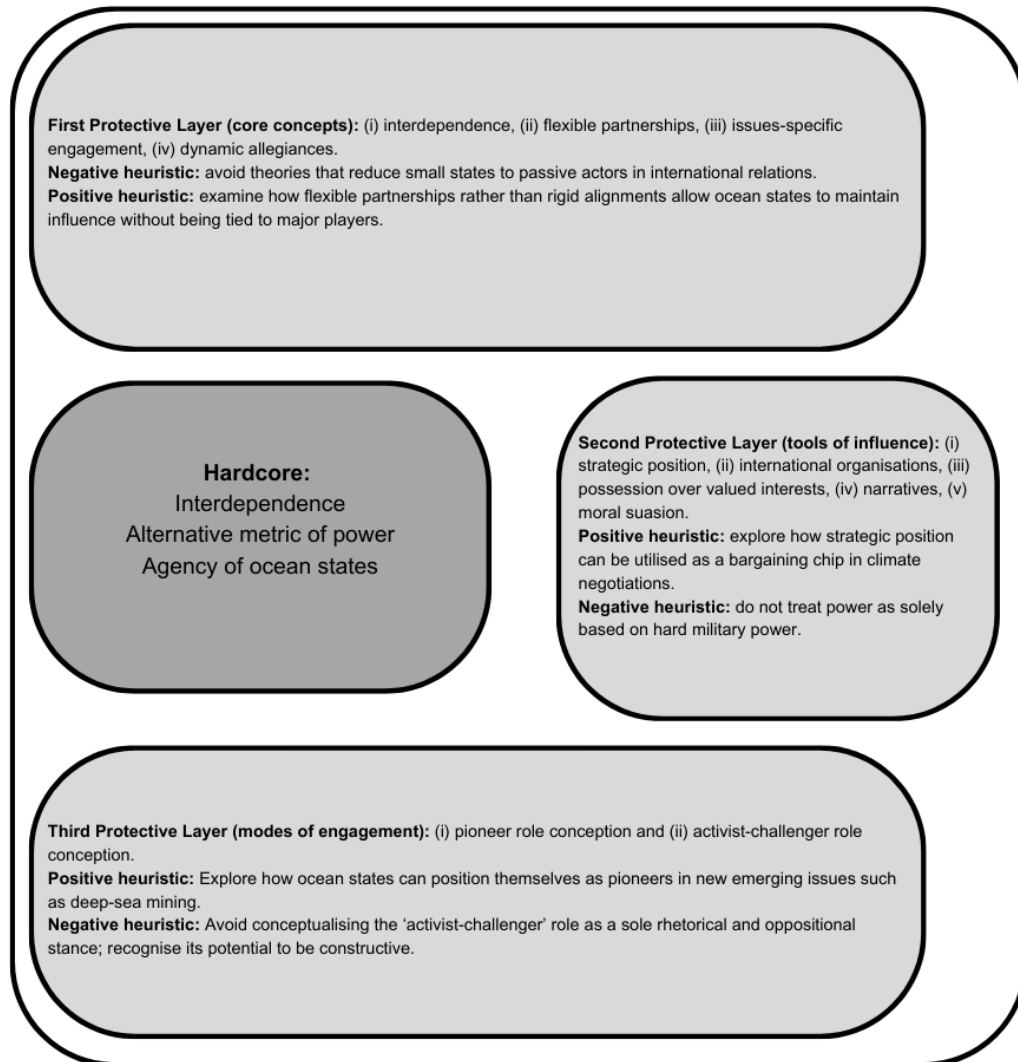
In the preceding section, the argument was made that Ocean States derive power from diverse sources – sources that diverge from the traditional conceptualisation of power. This discussion builds on the findings of Chapter 5, where the central point made was that through their role conceptions of ‘pioneer’ and ‘activist-challenger’, the four states considered in this study are pursuing a distinctly interdependent foreign policy. This reflects a departure from the traditional binary of pursuing either a compliant or counter-dependent foreign policy, both of which are a sub-type of a dependent foreign policy. That said, the ultimate contribution of this study is the proposal of an alternative conceptual framework (see Figure 7 below). This framework synthesises the insights from the previous chapters, notably Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, and provides a structured lens through which the foreign policy orientations of Ocean States can be better understood.

The framework is intentionally inspired by the methodological traditions of Imre Lakatos, specifically his notion of progressive research programmes that are defined by the hard core and the protective belt (including both positive and negative heuristics). According to Lakatos (1978: 4), all scientific research programmes are underpinned by the hard core – the irrefutable, foundational principles that constitute the framework. The hard core is surrounded by a protective belt, which is comprised of auxiliary hypotheses which support the central tenets of the framework.

In the context of this study, the protective belt comprises the core concepts, tools of influence and modes of engagement utilised by Ocean States. Furthermore, the protective belt contains negative and positive heuristics as described by Lakatos (1978: 4). The positive heuristics provide suggestions on how to change or develop the testable variants of the research programme, while the negative heuristics delineate and set the boundaries to safeguard the hard core from potentially undermining ideas (Lakatos 1978: 49). While, ordinarily, Lakatos’ framework applies to sets of theories, this study adopts it specifically as an organising principle to more clearly lay out and structure the conceptual framework proposed. The figure below is

a visual representation of the proposed framework, which is followed by an in-depth explication of the various components and their interrelations.

### 6.3.1. Alternative foreign policy orientation



**Figure 7. Alternative conceptual framework**

#### 6.3.1.1. Hardcore

The conceptual framework illustrated above begins with its hardcore, which is comprised of the principles that are central to its essence and cannot be abandoned without fundamentally altering the identity of the framework. The hard core establishes the core tenets defining how Ocean States navigate their foreign policy within the international arena. The principles outlined below are central to the hardcore:

- **Interdependence:**

Ocean States exist and operate within a complex interdependent world where power is based on this interdependence. Importantly, this interdependence is not unidirectional, where smaller states solely rely on the larger states but rather omnidirectional, where larger states rely on small states for, amongst other things, their strategic position, the reputational benefits derived from cooperation with small states, and their potential ideological alignment. This principle challenges traditional views of the relations between smaller and larger states and rather stresses that power exists in reciprocal relationships. This notion aligns with Nye's (2007: 216) assertion that because interdependence exists in different issue areas, states can choose to link or unlink certain issues. This study suggests that this can be applied to the relations between Ocean States and major players. For instance, Ocean States may wield greater influence in the environmental domain, while a major player may dominate in the economic sphere. Through mechanisms such as moral suasion, Ocean States can leverage their environmental authority and credibility to shape the behaviour of a major player in economic negotiations, thereby demonstrating the ways in which Ocean States can exert influence within an interdependent system.

- **Alternative Metrics of Power:**

Power is not solely defined by military or economic might as traditional literature would suggest. Rather, power incorporates a diverse array of tangible factors (geographic positioning and the reframing of the EEZ as a pivotal resource) and intangible ones (e.g., norms, ideological alignment). Furthermore, power is always understood in the relational sense and as such, power only exists where more than one state is present.

- **Agency of Ocean States:**

Ocean States are not passive pawns, perpetually dependent on major players or mere extensions of the agendas of major players. Through innovative and unique strategies, they may assert agency by influencing their external environment – an aspect that has been neglected in more traditional scholarship.

### 6.3.1.2. *Protective Belt*

The second element of the framework is the protective belt, which is comprised of four layers.

### *First protective layer: strategies*

This **first protective layer** is comprised of the strategies that Ocean States utilise to navigate their external environment. There are four concepts relevant here: manipulation of interdependence, fluid partnerships, issue-specific engagement and dynamic allegiances.

Firstly, Ocean States rely on the **manipulation of interdependence**: there is a recognition that relationships between states are defined by interdependence and as such, while ‘smaller’ states may be dependent on ‘larger’ states, ‘larger’ states are also dependent on ‘smaller’ states. This grants the ‘smaller’ states – the Ocean States – the opportunity to manipulate the relationships. Importantly, this manipulation is not only between states but also between states and norms. For example, an ocean state leverages the major players’ reliance on their reputation in the international arena (such as in the case of the Chagos Archipelago discussed in 6.2.5.). Should a major player not respond to the concerns related to climate change raised by Ocean States, this could result in reputational damage since major players are seen as not abiding by normative commitments. In this way, Ocean States are able to exert pressure on major players and influence the behaviour of these states<sup>91</sup>.

Secondly, Ocean States utilise **fluid partnerships** to respond to the geopolitical environment and maximise the ability to pursue their interests: one way in which they can manipulate the relationships is by playing states off one another. If a ‘larger’ state fails to respond to the concerns of an ocean state, the ocean state may find some space to manoeuvre by giving its attention to another state that is concerned with the concerns expressed by the small state. An example of this is how Solomon Islands signed a security pact with China after it felt that Australia, though speaking about being part of a “Pacific family,” paid little attention to the islands beyond its own immediate security interests (Hollingsworth 21 April 2022). In fact, prior to 2019, the last time Solomon Islands was visited by an Australian Prime Minister was in 2008 (Sas 31 May 2019).

This fluid form of partnership resonates with earlier small state strategies during the Cold War, such as non-alignment. As noted in 2.2.4., Schaufbuehl *et al.* (2015: 903)

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<sup>91</sup> Examples are provided in 6.2.5.

argue that small states can pursue non-alignment as an active strategy, based on their desire to engage with major players on their own terms. Ocean States engage with multiple players, not with the aim of aligning with a major player, but to extract the maximum benefits. If one side fails to provide the necessary support, then Ocean States have the possibility to seek support elsewhere, a strategy that Alam (1977: 173) describes. Such a strategy also echoes the behaviour discussed in Chapter 2, namely, hedging. States that partake in hedging diversify their partnerships, so that they always have, what Kuik (2021: 306) calls a “fall back position”. However, according to Kuik (2021: 306), hedging is a strategy that is silently pursued as it might, if openly pronounced, invite unwanted pushback from competing powers. This study, however, suggests that Ocean States, rather than attempting to conceal their recalibration, strategically signal their dissatisfaction, as Fiji has done vis-à-vis Australia’s inaction towards climate change. This represents a more outspoken form of hedging, where hedging is not perceived as a term that states do not want to associate themselves with, as suggested by Kuik (2021: 301), but rather a strategy that is unequivocally adopted.

Thirdly, Ocean States rely on **issue-specific engagement**: Ocean States may pursue very selective and flexible engagements, that is, engaging on specific issues with particular major players. In this sense, states pursue issue-specific engagement, which allows them to interact with various partners simultaneously. This strategy is important since it allows Ocean States to diversify their external partnerships, thereby mitigating the risk associated with overreliance on a single major player. By engaging with multiple actors across distinct issue areas, Ocean States reduce the likelihood of becoming beholden to any one partner, which allows them to maintain flexibility in the current geopolitical environment.

For example, Seychelles has pursued relations with China specifically on increasing water security by allowing a Chinese company, Sinohydro Corporation Limited, to raise the La Gouge Dam (Mishra 24 December 2022). At the same time, Seychelles has pursued relations with India in the realm of maritime security, where an MoU was signed between the director of the Seychelles-based RCOC and the India-based Information Fusion Centre in 2023, which will promote maritime safety and security collaboration (Seychelles News Agency 22 February 2023). Mauritius similarly engages with numerous partners on varying issues. Through the IOC, Mauritius

engaged with the EU on fishing agreements and was provided tools to track illegal fishing boats, while with Japan, the ocean state collaborates to improve weather monitoring and natural disaster readiness (Jugmohun, personal communication, 3 July 2024).

Such engagements reflect a pragmatic, issue-specific approach utilised by Ocean States to achieve their objectives. Issue-specific engagement can also be linked to Goh's (2013: ix) notion of omni-enmeshment, which is a specific component of hedging strategies that are employed by smaller states to manage great power competition. A key aspect of omni-enmeshment is to distribute dependence amongst several major players to avoid domination by one. In the instance above, Seychelles distributes dependencies to create what Goh (2013: 46) identifies as a hierarchical but multipolar order.

Fourthly, Ocean States seek **dynamic allegiances**: Ocean States pursue dynamic allegiances as opposed to having fixed allegiances, which are based on shifting priorities and circumstances. In this way, states circumvent dependence on one state. For example, in the case of Fiji, there has been significant shifts in its allegiance as the circumstances change. Under the Trump Administration, when little attention was given to concerns of climate change, Fiji shifted its allegiance to rather seek assistance from China (UNDP 2017: 10). However, under the Biden administration Fiji had seemingly shifted its allegiance back to the US in terms of climate financing where it joined the US's Indo-Pacific Economic Framework in 2022 (Reuters 27 May 2022). This strategy demonstrates the flexible approach of Ocean States in avoiding rigid allegiances. An important aspect of dynamic allegiances is the ability of Ocean States to withdraw their attention, redirect their engagement toward alternative actors and by doing so, regalanise the attention of major players that they distanced themselves from originally (as discussed in 5.5.1.).

#### *Second protective layer: tools of influence*

The **Second Protective Layer** identifies the varying tools of influence for Ocean States. These tools include strategic positioning, leveraging international and regional organisations, influencing narratives, possessing valued assets and appealing to

moral imperatives. These diverse and non-traditional tools of influence<sup>92</sup> demonstrate how Ocean States can have power in the international arena despite the assertions in the traditional literature.

Firstly, Ocean States derive power from their **position**. This is both in an ideological sense and a material sense. Ideologically, they are important to major players who want to ensure their ideology prevails in these islands and the broader regions. Materially, these islands are important to major players since they allow major players to establish outposts of influence in the form of military bases or dual-use facilities. This dual significance reflects the indispensable role of Ocean States to major players.

Secondly, Ocean States derive power through **international and regional organisations** where IOs become an actor that allows Ocean States to influence their environment. IOs and ROs become important platforms through which Ocean States can amplify their influence. By participating in these organisations, Ocean States can, for example, exercise power by collectively backing another player's candidacy for key international positions in return for support on issues of importance for Ocean States.

Thirdly, Ocean States can derive power from the fact that they **possess that which is valued by others**. As Emerson (1962: 32) writes, "the power to control or influence the other resides in control over the things he values". While Ocean States can look

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<sup>92</sup> It is necessary to consider a possible counterargument that may arise: while Ocean States possess various tools of influence, they continue to suffer various constraints, such as the inability to control their vast EEZ. A major limitation lies in their limited capacity for maritime surveillance and enforcement, which constrains their ability to counter threats such as IUU fishing. This is a valid and relevant concern. However, it is equally important to recognise that Ocean States, such as Mauritius and Seychelles, have demonstrated innovative and unique initiatives to mitigate these constraints. As discussed in 4.4.2, one such initiative is the establishment of the jointly managed Extended Continental Shelf between Mauritius and Seychelles – the first of its kind in the world – representing a novel approach to shared ocean governance. Furthermore, Ocean States, working through regional organisations such as the IOC have consistently secured funding from external partners. For instance, in 2025, the EU and the IOC signed an agreement to implement the Safe Seas Africa programme, aimed at enhancing maritime security in Africa. This funding builds upon earlier EU-funded projects, such as the Maritime Security Programme (Ministry of International Affairs Republic of Seychelles 2025). Similarly, in the Pacific, parallel developments are evident. In 2025, Fiji inaugurated its new monitoring centre to battle illegal fishing, a practice costing the Fijian economy approximately US\$21.8 million annually. With support from the EU's Pacific-European Union Marine Partnership Programme, implemented by the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency, Fiji received advanced monitoring technology to bolster its enforcement capacity. This establishment supplements domestic action taken by Fiji. In January 2025, Fiji passed the Marine Surveillance Enhancement Act, which increases penalties for IUU fishing violations and expands the mandate of monitoring authorities (Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency 2025). These examples underscore that, while Ocean States undeniably face resource and capacity constraints, they are simultaneously pioneering adaptive strategies and forging partnerships that enhance their maritime governance. Therefore, while the challenges facing these states are real, so is their agency in terms of creatively responding.

for numerous players for support, major players are dependent on the strategic position of Ocean States and cannot easily look elsewhere. Concurrently, and closely linked, is the fact that major players value the attention of Ocean States since it can help them achieve their regional and global interests. However, Ocean States can withdraw their attention and therefore compromise the agenda-setting ability of major players, which endows the Ocean States with a form of power.

Fourthly, Ocean States derive power from **influencing the narrative**. They have successfully been able to compel major actors to take into consideration their concerns, namely climate change, and integrate it into their understandings of security. By framing climate change as a crucial security threat, Ocean States have influenced international discourse and made the global environment slightly more responsive to their needs and concerns.

Fifth and finally, Ocean States derive power from advocating for an issue that is **inherently moral**. If major players fail to address these issues, it can result in reputational damage, which provides Ocean States with a form of 'green' or rather 'blue currency'.

### *Third protective layer: modes of engagement*

The **Third Protective Layer** refers to the specific modes of engagement that define Ocean States or, in other words, capture what role they play in the international arena. These modes of engagement reflect the role that Ocean States enact, allowing them to navigate geopolitical competition. Typically, Ocean States will either assume the role of a pioneer or an activist-challenger, or even a combination of both. Pioneers lead by example and often come up with innovative methods to change their environment. They demonstrate how small states, with limited resources, can influence their environment by leveraging the tools of influence discussed in the preceding section. Their innovative initiatives often challenge the standard manner of engaging with issues, and their initiatives often set benchmarks for other states to follow. By positioning themselves as pioneers, they signal to the global community that they are not passive actors but are and want to be involved in shaping international affairs.

Activist-challengers act as vocal critics, pressuring major players to address their needs. This role conception often relies on calling out major actors on moral issues or

threatening to withdraw their support, which consequently compels major players to be more responsive. In contrast to the pioneer conception, the activist-challenger role is focused more on constructive disruption than innovation. However, in some instances, states may adopt a dual or hybrid role where they embody elements of both pioneer and activist-challenger, thereby both confronting major players and presenting innovative solutions.

This third protective layer of the framework serves to link the hard core, and the first and second protective layer to one another. The layer specifically provides the modes through which the hardcore manifests; that is, it operationalises the agency of Ocean States.

### *6.3.1.3. Utility of the framework*

One of the main reasons why this framework was organised in Lakatosian terms was because it would be able to demonstrate the practicality and value of this framework for future researchers. Lakatos' approach is specifically useful since it highlights both the foundational, immutable principles of the framework (namely the hard core) and the evolutionary potential of the conceptual framework (through modifications of the protective belt). This demonstrates the dynamic nature of the framework and specifically how other scholars can utilise, develop and modify the proposed framework. It also allows for the incorporation of emerging research (since the protective belt can be modified) and lends itself to empirical testing.

Particularly, the protective belt consists of those ideas that can be refined by further studies without undermining the hard core. For example, if future research were to question the validity of one of the tools of influence, such as international organisations as a source of power, the protective belt could be refined to address the critique without challenging the central tenets of the hardcore. The framework provides scholars with the opportunity to investigate alternative or new tools of influence, which allows the framework to be updated to maintain its relevance. Furthermore, the protective belt provides researchers with concepts that can be tested empirically. Under the positive heuristic, for instance, a researcher may want to further test how certain Ocean States have utilised drawing on moral imperatives to influence their external environment. The results of this empirical study would serve to refine the protective belt.

## 6.4. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to consolidate the findings made in Chapter 4 and build on the discussion of Chapter 5 to ultimately create an alternative framework. Pursuant to this, this chapter delved more deeply into the different sources from which these Ocean States derive their power, which include power through position, international organisations, valued possessions, influencing the narrative, and moral suasion.

Geography has reemerged as a pivotal and decisive force in global power dynamics, amplifying the strategic significance of Ocean States. The selected Ocean States derive power from their critical geographic position, demonstrating that power is not solely determined by landmass or population size (see 6.2.1.). Rather, the increasing diplomatic interest in these Ocean States underscores a renewed recognition of strategic geography. These Ocean States, positioned at the centre of geopolitical contestation, wield bargaining power that has previously been underappreciated. The contest unfolds both ideologically and materially – on the one hand, securing their ideological support, which would allow major players to exert influence in these regions; on the other hand, their physical territory (in terms of land and ocean) holds strategic value for military and economic purposes. Ocean States capitalise on the increased attention they receive as a result of their strategic position.

Furthermore, Ocean States leverage both international and regional organisations as a crucial source of power. These organisations allow these states a platform to express their voice and operate collectively. Ocean States use IOs and ROs as instruments and arenas to put forward their national interests and make common positions. IOs then also become actors when they make recommendations that change the behaviour of other states.

Additionally, it was demonstrated that Ocean States do not derive power only from acting through international organisations but also from possessing valuable objects, in this case strategic locations, which major players depend on. Specifically, in terms of strategic location, Ocean States are not dependent on the major players' strategic position. Rather, the inverse is true. Major players are dependent on the strategic position of the Ocean States. This allows Ocean States to diversify their partnerships and vacillate between major players, which reduces their own dependence.

Another source of power for Ocean States comes from shaping narratives, particularly by linking climate change to security and redefining themselves as 'large Ocean States'. This chapter demonstrated that over time, major players like Australia and the US have increasingly incorporated climate change into their defence policies, which reflects the success of Ocean States in agenda-setting. Additionally, Ocean States have driven international legal discussions, such as securing ICJ advisory opinions on climate obligations. Ocean States have shifted the dominant discourse from a land-based perspective to incorporate maritime concerns.

Finally, this chapter made the case that Ocean States possess power by drawing on sentiments of morality. Framing issues, such as environmental concerns, in moral terms makes it difficult for major players to ignore these concerns, as doing so may risk damaging their reputation. Ocean States, furthermore, promote norms such as environmental protection and uphold labels such as 'green' or 'blue credibility', labels which are sought by major players to sustain and enhance their reputation.

Based on the identification of these five sources of power for Ocean States, it was possible to propose an alternative framework for Ocean States which allows a conceptualisation of small state foreign policy that transcends the binary categories of either compliant or counter-dependent. The alternative framework emphasises the agency and power of Ocean States in an interdependent world. Ocean States pursue strategies of manipulating interdependence, utilising fluid partnerships, engaging in issue-specific engagement, and seeking dynamic allegiances. They draw on their strategic positioning, utilise international organisations for influence, possess valued assets, influence the narrative, and utilise moral suasion. This leads to them enacting two modes of engagement, namely that of 'pioneer' or 'activist-challenger'.

Having proposed an alternative framework for understanding the foreign policy orientations of Ocean States, the next chapter, which is the concluding chapter, reflects on the major findings and contributions of this study.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

*That future lies in the hands of our own people, not of those who would prescribe for us, get us forever dependent and indebted because they can see no way out [...] We are the sea, we are the ocean, we must wake up to this ancient truth and together use it to overturn all views that aim ultimately to confine us again, physically and psychologically, in the tiny spaces that we have resisted accepting as our sole appointed places, and from which we have recently liberated ourselves. We must not allow anyone to belittle us again and take away our freedom.*

- Hau'ofa (1994: 159-160)

### 7.1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to reflect on the main findings and contributions of this study. This study sought to challenge the traditional frameworks that have consistently portrayed Ocean States as having a power deficit. Instead, a reconceptualisation of these states that recognises their agency and power has been argued for. Indeed, this study has encapsulated Hau'ofa's (1994) poignant assertion that "we must overturn all views that aim ultimately to confine us again [...] we must not allow anyone to belittle us again".

Adopting this spirit, this chapter begins by reflecting on the research question and outlining the intellectual inspiration of the research. Following this, the summary of the main findings is discussed, detailing specifically the progression of the argument throughout the varying chapters. This leads to a discussion of the significance of the study, focusing specifically on 'dismantling' the six 'traditional assumptions' that prevail in the traditional literature. The chapter also highlights the study's contribution to the field of IR and sub-discipline of FPA, with its central contribution being the development of an additional framework to study small state foreign policy orientations. Finally, this chapter concludes with the identification of some of the limitations of the study, which could be addressed in further research.

### 7.2. Reflecting on the research question

In reflecting on the research question, it is pertinent to begin by revisiting the intellectual impetus that underpinned the identification and formulation of the research question. The genesis of this research lay in the increasing prominence of the Indo-Pacific as a region of strategic significance in international affairs. Indeed, this salience is underscored by the fact that over 40 countries have released Indo-Pacific strategies

or outlooks for the region (Poblete 2023: 102). These include ‘major powers’ such as the US; large powers, such as Germany and France; regional organisations, such as the EU; regional powers, such as India, Indonesia, South Korea and Japan; and even non-Indo-Pacific countries, such as Lithuania and the Czech Republic. However, amidst the proliferation of strategies, visions and outlooks, a conspicuous gap emerged: the absence of meaningful engagement with the perspectives and roles of small states, specifically SIDS, which are an intrinsic part of the region. This notable omission prompted a critical reflection: why is a region, of which these states are an inherent part, being defined and conceptualised as though they have no say?

Motivated by this observation, the research engaged in an in-depth literature review in Chapter 2. This review revealed that traditional scholarly analysis has predominantly characterised small states as defined by a power deficit, relegating them to the status of passive pawns in international relations. More recent scholarship has sought to challenge this narrative, although the traditional paradigm remains pervasive, perpetuating the portrayal of SIDS as mere pawns on the chessboards of major players. Having identified this tension between the traditional portrayal of states and the emerging critiques of this portrayal, the central research question of the study emerged:

*To what extent do the interactions between SIDS and major players in the Indo-Pacific between 2017-2024 reveal the need to rethink traditional frameworks of small state foreign policy orientations and is there a need to reconceptualise concepts such as power and dependence?*

This study found that the interactions between Ocean States and major players in the Indo-Pacific reveal a need to reconsider traditional frameworks for analysing the foreign policy of small states. Indeed, contrary to the traditional perspectives that portray these relations as based on a unilateral dependence, these interactions are rather characterised by interdependence. Ocean States leverage alternative sources of power – non-traditional power – which enables them to effectively navigate the international arena. These insights highlight the limitations of existing theoretical frameworks and point to the necessity of creating an alternative lens. This study proposed an alternative framework as a more nuanced framework for conceptualising the foreign policy orientations of small states.

### 7.3. Summary of the main findings

Having briefly outlined the research question and the response to the research question above, it is necessary to provide a more detailed summary of the main findings of each chapter as well as the central argument. The central argument made in the thesis is that Ocean States, as a type of small state, are not passive pawns but pivotal players and that based on this, there is a necessity to refine the foreign policy orientations that are said to be available to these states. In Chapter 2, the first sub-question, namely ‘how does the traditional literature portray the foreign policy orientations of small states’, was addressed. Here, the case was made that despite efforts from scholars such as Bueger and Wivel (2018), Malik (2020), Hume *et al.* (2021), Morgan (2022); Otto (2022), and Tarte (2022) to challenge the traditional portrayal of small states, the traditional view which sees them as necessarily being defined by a power deficit and as such passive pawns (Fox 1959; Schwarzenberger 1964; Vandenbosch 1964; Vital 1967; Rothstein 1968; Keohane, 1969; Bjøl 1971; Raeymaeker 1974), remains dominant. This has continued to inform the literature on what foreign policy behaviour can be expected by small states, with Breuning (2007) suggesting that the foreign policy of small states is always dependent in nature. That is, small states can pursue either a compliant or counter-dependent foreign policy orientation<sup>93</sup>.

Before applying Breuning’s framework, Chapter 3 outlined the methodology of this study. The study was qualitative and utilised a thematic analysis of government speeches between 2017 to 2024 to assess the utility of Breuning’s framework in Chapter 4. In this fourth chapter, Breuning’s framework was applied specifically to four states, namely, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Seychelles, and Mauritius. This was done to answer the second sub-question, namely: “what type of foreign policies do SIDS, as a sub-set of small states, pursue?” This chapter demonstrated that the states in question pursue neither a purely compliant foreign policy nor a counter-dependent foreign policy.

Since Chapter 4 demonstrated that Breuning’s framework is limited in capturing the foreign policy orientations of Ocean States, Chapter 5 explored the specific

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<sup>93</sup> The reader is reminded that this study made the decision, in 2.3.3., to reduce Breuning’s foreign policy orientations from four to two.

orientations these states adopt. Here, it was argued that Solomon Islands, Fiji, Seychelles, and Mauritius enacted the roles of ‘pioneer’ and ‘activist-challenger’, which, in fact, stand in contrast to dependence. Building on the analysis conducted in Chapter 4 and complementing this with the interviews that were conducted with government officials from Seychelles, Mauritius and Solomon Islands, Chapter 5 as well as Chapter 6 was aimed at answering the third sub-question, namely how the selected states challenge traditional understandings of power, dependence and foreign policy options available to oceans states.

In particular, Chapter 5 advanced the argument that Ocean States have power and are not always caught up in asymmetrical dependence by explaining, firstly, how interdependence characterises the relationship between Ocean States and major players, as opposed to dependence. As a result of reconceptualising this relationship as interdependent, it is possible to suggest that Ocean States have power, since interdependence implies mutual potential power<sup>94</sup>. To substantiate this, it was further demonstrated how the role conceptions that had been identified, namely ‘pioneer’ and ‘activist-challenger’, contained a form of power: it is not enough to merely assume that such role-conceptions may endow them with some sort of power but rather, it is necessary to clearly demonstrate how power is embedded in these roles. In the case of the pioneer, this power stems from knowledge, while in the case of the activist-challenger, this power stems from the ability to constructively disrupt the status quo.

Building on Chapter 5’s foundation, Chapter 6 further dissected the sources of power available to Ocean States. These reside in their: (1) strategic position both in the physical and ideological sense, (2) possession of the object of value, (3) actions in international and regional organisations, (4) ability to influence the narrative and (5) moral suasion. Identifying these bases of power allowed for the construction of an alternative framework that explains the foreign policy orientations of small states, and specifically, Ocean States. This framework is comprised of the hardcore of

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<sup>93</sup> This study emphasises that while it argues Ocean States and major players are in an interdependent relationship, which grants the Ocean State a degree of power, it is crucial not to overestimate their actual power or agency. When discussing the power and agency of Ocean States, it is essential to consider the specific context or sphere in which this applies. For instance, Seychelles may be influential in climate advocacy, but it would be incorrect to claim that, under the guise of interdependence, it also possesses substantial military strength. Accordingly, this study challenges the traditional assumptions that small states are necessarily defined by a power deficit. Instead, it argues that Ocean States can and do, in certain exercise power.

‘interdependence’, ‘alternative metric of power’, and ‘agency of Ocean States’; and a protective belt comprising the core concepts, namely: manipulation of interdependence, fluid partnerships, issue-specific engagement, dynamic allegiances; tools of influence (the various sources of power); and finally the modes of engagement, namely: the role conceptions of pioneer and activist-challenger.

The findings summarised above challenge traditional assumptions about small states and SIDS, and reposition them as significant actors, not necessarily characterised by a power deficit. By demonstrating how these states adopt roles such as ‘pioneer’ and ‘activist-challenger’, this study reveals their ability to influence their environment and exert alternative forms of power. This discussion sets the stage for the following section, which highlights the significance of these findings by directly showing how they dismantle the six core assumptions in the traditional literature on small states.

#### **7.4. Significance of findings**

The findings noted above are significant since they challenge six of the longstanding assumptions in the traditional literature on small states. By challenging these assumptions, the study calls for a revised set of assumptions that more accurately reflect the role of small states in the international system.

##### **7.4.1. Traditional assumption one**

In traditional scholarship, small states are assumed to be ‘system-ineffectual’ actors – they cannot do anything to alter the overall structure of the environment in which they exist. This study demonstrated that this claim is not necessarily accurate. One prime example which demonstrated the ability of Ocean States to alter the environment in which they exist is through the manner in which they were able to change the financing structure. For example, Seychelles was able to restructure how debt is paid off by introducing the ‘debt-for-nature-swap’ (Schutter & Hicks 2019; Saddington 2023). Along with this, it became the first country to issue a Blue Bond. Seychelles' progress in advocating for alternative financing has been so successful that the same concept has now been applied to the Baltic Sea – in 2019, the Nordic Investment Bank issued the first-ever Baltic Blue Bond (Global Centre on Adaptation 3 January 2020). These are two examples illustrating their ability to have a direct influence on global governance.

Furthermore, another prime example of the ability of Ocean States to alter the environment in which they exist is their ability to redefine what is defined as security. While, traditionally, security has mostly been understood in the narrow sense (the military etc.), Ocean States have been able to alter the environment in such a way that major players are now forced to accept that climate change (a non-traditional security threat) needs to be considered as a pivotal security concern in their own security strategies. This was made evident by analysing how the concept of ‘climate change’ has gradually been incorporated into the security policies of Australia and the United States. Along with this, Ocean States have gradually been able to change the excessive focus on terrestrial concerns to include the importance of the oceans. Countries such as Fiji and Solomon Islands have consistently referred to themselves as ‘Large Ocean States’ and drawn attention away from their vulnerabilities, showcasing the investment opportunities available in their large ocean zones. In this sense, Ocean States demonstrated their ability to control and influence the narrative, which this study considered to be a source of power.

#### **7.4.2. Traditional assumption two**

Traditional scholarship assumes that great powers consume almost the entire concern of the small state, while the latter is only a small concern of the great power. One of the main points that this study made was that the above-mentioned claim is not entirely true. In the case of Ocean States (formally known as SIDS), they openly mentioned that the geopolitical rivalry of the large states was not their biggest issue and that rather, climate change was their most pivotal concern. This was especially the case for Fiji, which frequently emphasised that the objectives of the major players in the Indo-Pacific, that is, the increasing militarisation, are not their primary security concern. In contrast, the Ocean States constitute a considerable concern for major players. This was made apparent through various factors, such as the increasing number of embassies opening on the islands, the clear referral to the importance of gaining support from the Pacific Islands in the US’ declassified security document, and other factors, such as the frequent visits by leaders of the major powers, to islands (Harding & Pohle 26 September 2022).

In 2022, for example, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Fiji for the first time in thirty years. In the same year, Biden hosted the Pacific leaders at the White House

for the first time (Harding & Pohle 26 September 2022). In this sense, major players are visibly ‘obsessed’ with getting the support of the islands, whereas the Ocean States look at many different partners and allies. That is, great powers do not necessarily consume the entire concern of the small state. Rather, due to their strategic positioning and their prized location, Ocean States are in the position to diversify their relations and attention to focus on a diversity of actors, while major powers are concerned immensely with gaining the attention and support of the Ocean States.

#### **7.4.3. Traditional assumption three**

A third core assumption in the traditional literature is that small states make foreign policy decisions that align with or are reflective of more powerful states. This study argued that Ocean States do not align their foreign policy with powerful states or have foreign policies that necessarily reflect the needs of the more powerful states. In terms of aligning their foreign policies, Ocean States often insist that they are not going to choose sides. Solomon Islands for example, expressed that they pursue a ‘friends to all’ foreign policy and were not willing to align itself with any external powers, while Seychelles chose to align itself – not with a major player – but rather with the African continent, frequently asserting that it aligns with the African Union’s position on current affairs. Furthermore, Ocean States did not pursue foreign policies that were necessarily overtly reflective of the foreign policies of major players. Rather, their foreign policies reflected their own needs.

For example, leaders of Fiji and Solomon Islands re-iterated the fact that climate change is the highest priority on their agenda and that despite the fact that there are currently many instances of international armed conflict and war, equal attention needs to be paid to climate change. If Ocean States were to pursue a foreign policy that reflected the major players’ foreign policy, this would have been reflected through the prioritisation of similar issues or at least synergy in some areas. However, as mentioned, there were clear instances where they diverged on issues. In fact, considering that the issues that are most important to Ocean States ended up featuring in the foreign policies of major powers, this study may go so far as to suggest that it is the major players’ foreign policies that end up reflecting the Ocean States’ foreign policies.

#### **7.4.4. Traditional assumption four**

The fourth core assumption is that the foreign policy of small states is primarily concerned with withstanding the pressure and interference from major powers. Ocean States are not only primarily concerned with withstanding the pressure and interference from major powers. Rather, they go beyond withstanding pressure and instead challenge them. Fiji, for example, was very outspoken about challenging major powers, calling out the manner in which they did not adequately respond to the needs of the Ocean States. In this sense, the role conception of ‘activist-challenger’ that was most prominent in the foreign policy orientation of Fiji and Solomon Islands demonstrates that resisting pressure is not their primary concern. For these states, creating an environment that responds more effectively to their needs is their priority.

Rather than only attempting to withstand the pressure and interference from major powers, they in fact attempt to change the environment in which they exist, by for example, as mentioned earlier, reforming the climate financing structure. Here it must be noted that this is not to say that Ocean States are not concerned at all with the pressure and interference from major players but rather that this is not their primary concern. As the ‘pioneer’ role conception demonstrated, Ocean States, such as Seychelles are mostly concerned with the issue of ensuring that there is adequate and equitable climate financing, while Mauritius was concerned with becoming a leader in the maritime security domain.

#### **7.4.5. Traditional assumption five**

The penultimate assumption is that small states are unable to contend with major powers on equal terms. The implicit claim that is made in this statement is that major powers have the upper hand when interacting with the ‘small’ states. This study has demonstrated that this is not necessarily the case. In fact, Ocean States find themselves in a great bargaining position since they are in possession of the object of value, namely their strategic position both physically and ideologically. For example, this study pointed out how major players, such as the US and India have expressed immense interest in Mauritius’ and Seychelles’ islands, while China has also steadily been making inroads. In another case, Solomon Islands currently finds itself in a great bargaining position as various countries want to provide it with security. This was made

evident by looking at the recent Pacific Games hosted by Solomon Islands, where numerous powers wanted to provide the island with security forces.

#### **7.4.6. Traditional assumption six**

The final assumption is that small states lack the resources to be proactive in international affairs. If there is a shift towards understanding that oceans make up an important aspect of a state's identity, then it follows that Ocean States do not necessarily lack the resources to be proactive in international affairs. In fact, the role conception of 'pioneer' almost implies being proactive. For example, Seychelles demonstrated its ability to become a leader in constructing an international climate financing architecture by reframing the manner in which its resources are conceived. While its small economy (when compared to other states) could have implied that it has limited resources, this ostensible weakness in fact allowed Seychelles to market itself as a safe testing ground for innovative financing.

Furthermore, by shifting the emphasis away from their small terrestrial landmasses and rather focusing on their large EEZ's, Ocean States were able to demonstrate that they do not necessarily lack resources. Along with this, it can be argued that being proactive is not only contingent on having traditional and mostly tangible resources. Once again, the example of Seychelles marketing itself as a testing ground for innovative financing mechanisms is a case in point. In this sense, this study demonstrated that what constitutes resources needs to be rethought and that resources are not the sole determinant of proactivity in international affairs.

In summary, the findings of this thesis are significant since they challenge six fundamental assumptions in the literature on small states. Contrary to the traditional literature, this thesis argued that small states can influence global structures, are not overly preoccupied with great powers, do not merely align their foreign policies with major players, are not only focused on resisting pressure, have the ability to contend with major players and are not necessarily so resource poor that they cannot be proactive in international affairs. By challenging these assumptions and demonstrating how these assumptions are not necessarily relevant in the contemporary age, a more nuanced and accurate understanding of small states is furthered. Furthermore, these findings are significant since they challenge major player-centric narratives and rather focus on the pivotal role that small states can play. Based on this, in the section below,

the significance of these findings is further elaborated by discussing specifically the contributions made to the field or IR and sub-discipline of FPA.

## **7.5. Contributions**

The first contribution made by this study is to the literature on the foreign policy orientations of small states, which has often been dominated by work that has focused on European states. Although this was not the primary reason why this study was conducted, the findings of this study contribute to addressing the gap in the literature on small states. When considering small states, and specifically SIDS, it is necessary to look beyond just the experiences of European States. As such, this study acknowledges the work done in recent years to strengthen the understanding of non-European small states' behaviour and adds to this endeavour by providing perspectives from the Indo-Pacific.

A second contribution made by this study is concerning the alternative conception of power it provides. Power is a concept that has been revised and reconceptualised numerous times and continues to remain the focus of much academic attention. However, what this study has achieved specifically, is to revise the concept of power in the context of island states in the Indo-Pacific. In doing so, it contributes to the academic discussion by providing a more region-specific understanding of power relations, which is more attuned to the realities faced by states in the Indo-Pacific. Importantly, this not only provides a conceptualisation of power that is different from the generic conceptualisations of power but also provides an understanding of power that is based on the experiences of smaller states, which are often thought to have no power.

Thirdly, this study contributes to an alternative understanding of what foreign policy options small states have by proposing an alternative foreign policy framework. This framework differs from existing frameworks in the sense that it is not based on dependence or independence but rather interdependence. Rather than simply critiquing previous theoretical work, it introduces an additional foreign policy orientation that better accounts for the agency and power of small states – elements that are largely absent from dependence-based frameworks.

Traditional frameworks focus on how the structural constraints on small states cause paralysis, limiting their foreign policy options. This study argues that the structural

constraints create an interconnected world and network of relations that allow Ocean States to manipulate the ties and connections, thereby exerting power. In doing so, this study builds on the emerging literature that argues that these states do have power but takes a crucial step further by consolidating these insights into a cohesive framework.

As such, this framework contributes to providing a more nuanced and context-informed understanding of foreign policy orientations, which accounts for the power that Ocean States can have. In this sense, it also breaks away from frameworks that espouse that small states have severely limited options in terms of their foreign policies and instead positions them in a manner that reflects the agency they have.

Apart from the fact that this framework can be used by other scholars, it also has the potential to inform practitioners. For example, one of the strategies identified is that Ocean States manipulate interdependence. Practitioners can identify areas where major players specifically rely on Ocean States, such as strategic location or moral credibility, and focus on using these identified dependencies in negotiations. Similarly, in terms of the tools of influence proposed, policymakers may want to more intentionally promote the dual ideological and material significance of Ocean States, which, once again, can place them in a better negotiating position. These are two examples that demonstrate how the framework transcends a pure academic contribution and has the potential to be valuable to policymakers and practitioners.

Fourthly, by introducing the notion of 'Ocean States' this study contributes to changing the dominant discourse on island states, which Mangioni (2021: 33) describes as a discourse "concocted by Western media that presents a vulnerability and acceptance of the demise of a Pacific pushed to the brink of habitability". Such discourses are simultaneously coupled with "fatalistic interpretations of Oceanian futurities" (Mangioni 2021: 33). As Long (2017: 5) explains, too often, small states are defined "in terms of what they are not, or what they do not possess, instead of what they are". This study has turned such interpretations on their head, instead focusing on what SIDS are, namely, Ocean States. Ocean States possess power that they derive from their strategic location, action through international and regional organisations, possession of the object of value, control of the narrative, and moral suasion. In this sense, this

study contributes to moving beyond deficit-based definitions of SIDS and towards an affirmative-based definition of Ocean States.

Lastly, from a methodological perspective, this study contributes to demonstrating the efficacy of using qualitative thematic analysis in combination with Holsti's method for deriving role conceptions as a means of understanding the behaviour of states. This study came up with two alternative role conceptions, namely 'pioneer' and 'activist-challenger', roles that had not previously been ascribed to Ocean States. The 'pioneer' role conception refers to those states that portray themselves as leaders or trailblazers. They are often proactive, have innovative tendencies and aim to shape global norms.

The 'activist-challenger' role conception describes those states that actively challenge and constructively disrupt the status quo. Through disruption, they are able to make the environment more reactive to their needs. These roles are particularly valuable since they have not typically been associated with Ocean States. Rather, Ocean States have been perceived as passive or reactive actors in the international arena, usually overshadowed by 'more powerful' nations. However, these alternative role conceptions unveil their agency. Having discussed the central contributions of this chapter, the following section identifies limitations in the thesis that call for further research.

## **7.6. Recommendations for future research**

The central recommendation would be for the continued improvement of the conceptual framework by continually engaging in the positive heuristics of the framework. Admittedly, due to space constraints, this study was unable to include more states beyond the initial four states selected. Furthermore, due to the same reasons, it was not possible to 'test' this framework on other Ocean States in the Indo-Pacific. Consequently, further research could focus on 'testing' and refining the protective belt of the framework. As mentioned, one way in which this could be achieved, is by conducting further research in which this framework is applied to other empirical cases. The researcher has already noted that Vanuatu would be an interesting case to analyse, considering some of the spearheading actions it is currently taking at the ICJ.

A further recommendation would be to investigate the complexities of reconceptualising Small Island Developing States as Ocean States. As has become evident through the thematic analysis, all four islands analysed in this study refer to themselves as 'Large Ocean States'. While the researcher contemplated adhering to this self-conceptualisation and referring to them as LOS instead of SIDS, the researcher simultaneously realised that this would once again reinforce the notion that size equates to power, which is something this study aimed to dismiss. Therefore, the decision was taken to refer to them simply as 'Ocean States' since this emphasises their identity without implying whether they should be considered powerful or not.

However, on this note, the researcher recognises that 'Ocean States' may then be a term that could refer to any states that are surrounded by the ocean, such as the UK or New Zealand. Considering this, the researcher reasons that the concept 'ocean state' should not be taken to represent all island states but rather those whose ocean territory is significantly larger than its land territory and those whose identity is directly tied primarily to oceans as a way of life. In this sense, the UK would not be considered an obvious ocean state since it does not define its identity solely through its oceans – much of its economy is reliant on the terrestrial nature of its being. The concept of 'Ocean State' is more of a construct that has been created specifically to describe the agency and power that SIDS actually have, rather than to provide a strict new category for all states surrounded by oceans. However, the researcher acknowledges that there is insufficient space to deal with this in this study, and as such, exploring the complexities of this argument could constitute further research.

Additionally, there is a need to research the tensions and implications of portraying Ocean States as vulnerable versus powerful. One of the reflections this study makes is on the tensions and implications of portraying SIDS as Ocean States. While it may initially seem a fruitful idea to refer to SIDS as Ocean States since it does not focus only on their vulnerabilities but rather on their potential, it must be noted that it may be argued that Ocean States rely on being conceptualised and portrayed as vulnerable to acquire funding. As soon as Ocean States are no longer conceived of as highly vulnerable – especially in terms of the impacts of climate change – then it may well be the case that they lose that special status that sees them acquire the funding they so desperately need. As such, further research may explore the 'trade-off' between utilising the 'SIDS' or 'OS' label.

On this note, it was equally interesting to observe how the heads of states of these islands referred to their states in differing frequency as ‘small islands’ and ‘Large Ocean States’. Seychelles and Mauritius, for example, only refer to themselves as Large Ocean States once in all the speeches surveyed between 2017-2024, while Fiji and Solomon Islands referred to themselves in this way four and eight times, respectively. Furthermore, it is important to understand the context in which states referred to themselves as ‘Large Ocean States’ versus ‘small islands’. For example, when speaking in the context of the need for climate financing at the G20 in 2023, Mauritius refers to itself as a “small island”, while in the context of speaking about its objectives to take a lead in the WIO region in terms of maritime security, it calls itself a “Large Ocean State”.

The interviews conducted in Mauritius and Seychelles emphasised the point that these states would not like to reframe themselves as Large Ocean States, while the interviews in Solomon Islands suggested that reframing themselves as Large Ocean States was absolutely pivotal. This is one interesting observation that this study makes, and which falls outside of the purview of this study but nonetheless calls for further interrogation. Important questions such as whether island states can be conceptualised of as both Ocean States and Small Island Developing States at the same time could be considered in further research. In fact, it may be postulated that this is a purposeful strategy used by these states. Such a speculation requires intense engagement with government officials, which could be a focus of further studies.

More intensive engagement with government officials could serve other purposes as well. For example, the thematic analysis utilised by this study to determine whether a state was aligning its foreign policy or adopting an anti-core sentiment towards major players was based on speeches. However, there may at times be a difference between what a state says it will do and what it actually does. That is, there may be a difference between the articulation and goals of foreign policy and the actual implementation thereof. While this study specifically stated that it was concerned with the articulation of foreign policy and not necessarily foreign policy as an output, the study could be further developed by exploring the actual behaviour of states beyond official speeches by examining policy outcomes.

A further point of research could be to interrogate the foreign policy options available not only to Ocean States but similarly to major players. There seems to be an assumption that small states are confined by a certain number of foreign policy orientations. This point was demonstrated in 2.2.4. However, it does not appear to be the case that major players are constrained by a limited number of foreign policy orientations. This study proposes that if one accepts the fact that the relationship between Ocean States and major players is defined by a sense of interdependence, then in the same way that Ocean States are constrained by certain foreign policy orientations that they can pursue, major players too, are constrained by certain foreign policy orientations. Future research could delve more deeply into the foreign policy options available to major players. This study did not have the space to do so, but preliminary findings suggest that major players may pursue foreign policy options that could be described as 'responsive engagement'. However, further research is needed to critically interrogate this.

Finally, this study covers two markedly different US administrations – Trump's first (2017-2021) and Biden's (2017-2024) – and thus accounts for a period where there was inconsistency in the US's stance towards the region. Nevertheless, it would be important to continue to track developments in the Indo-Pacific as they evolve. It can already be said that one of the notable developments in the post-2024 era is the US's role in the Indo-Pacific under President Trump. The US has withdrawn from the Paris Agreement, launched a formal review of AUKUS and deprioritised the IPEF (Lee & Sims 2025). These actions represent a departure from his predecessor's policies, where the US was committed to combating climate change, pursuing economic growth through diplomacy, and strengthening security through multilateral alliances. It would be useful to continue examining how Ocean States navigate this uncertain, if not threatening, environment.

In particular, it will be important to observe whether Ocean States are able to draw on moral suasion, especially when used in the context of climate change, given Trump's dismissive stance towards climate change. While this shift in US leadership may pose a challenge for Ocean States – who are now seeking to influence a leader who does not prioritise their core concerns – it may also have the unintended effect of placing greater pressure on US allies, such as Australia, to step up. Whereas Trump may not be moved by normative appeals or moral suasion, and reputational cost may not be

as important to him, other actors in the international system continue to value reputation. These allies may feel compelled to respond more actively to the needs of Ocean States - and Ocean States may well play on this - in order to prevent a vacuum that the West fears could be exploited by China. Continued monitoring of these dynamics will also provide a useful opportunity to assess the extent to which Ocean States are able to draw on dynamic allegiances (see Section 6.3.1.2.) by strategically redirecting their engagement toward other states when support from the US diminishes, especially compared to the support they received from the Biden administration.

Finally, perhaps the greatest challenge Ocean States will face is engaging with a US that prioritises hard power over soft power. As mentioned above, this shift may make it more difficult to engage with the US on moral or normative-driven grounds. However, simultaneously, this may amplify the relevance of one of their sources of power, namely strategic location (see 6.2.1). In a geopolitical environment shaped by a focus on hard power, the US may place renewed emphasis on the location of the islands for military and logistical assets in the Indo-Pacific. This, in turn, may provide Ocean States' leverage to bargain for outcomes that matter to them, such as increased funding for climate adaptation.

## **7.7. Conclusion**

This thesis started with a quote by Robert Keohane (1969), that stated that “If Lilliputians can tie up Gulliver, or make him do their fighting for them, they must be studied as carefully as the giant”. This study has attempted to do exactly this. The researcher studied the behaviour of Ocean States (the ‘Lilliputians’) that have managed to tie up the major players (the ‘Gullivers’). In doing so, this study demonstrated that the traditional literature on small states' foreign policy is no longer able to entirely account for the behaviour of small states. In fact, it ties down small states such as SIDS, by creating a narrative that they are confined and restricted by their size. In reality, and demonstrated in this study, Ocean States draw on various alternative forms of power that transcend the traditional conceptualisations of power. Ocean States are therefore not necessarily defined by a power deficit but are rather powerful in their own right. As such, and in direct response to the title of this thesis,

this study concludes with one final phrase: *Ocean States are not passive pawns but pivotal players!*

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## Annex A. Interview schedule

<b>Seychelles</b>
<b>Questions (Sample 1):</b>
<p><i>Brief intro: My research challenges the prevailing notion that small states, such as SIDS, are inherently restricted and dependent on larger powers. Rather, I make the case that SIDS are pivotal players, as opposed to passive pawns in the games of the great powers. In this first interview, I would particularly like to have your input on affairs related to the foreign policy of Seychelles as well as how it engages with international and regional organisations.</i></p> <p>1. For me, an important part of understanding Seychelles' foreign policy currently, is understanding the history of foreign policy of Seychelles. Until 1903, Seychelles was under British control. During the Cold War it had strong ties with the Socialist bloc. Since the end of the cold war, Seychelles has fostered ties with Western countries again.</p> <p><b>In your view, what were some of the most important events in the history of Seychelles in terms of its foreign policy? Furthermore, how has its history informed with which partners it engages in its foreign policy? [if question is not clear, give example of South Africa]</b></p> <p><b>2. Moving on to its foreign policy in more contemporary times, what are the most important, serious, and urgent issues for Seychelles vis-à-vis its international relations? [probe to what extent major power competition is a major issue for Seychelles]</b></p> <p>3. One of the most prominent scholars who write on foreign policy, Kalevi Holsti, argues that it is not only important how other states view a given state and what the structural constraints are but also how a state perceives its own role in the international environment. Against this backdrop, I pose the following inquiry:  <b>How does Seychelles perceive itself in the international arena? What role does it aspire to play?</b></p> <p>4. I am interested in understanding the importance of terminology and categories. In the speeches of Fiji, Fiji is increasingly referring to itself as a 'large ocean state' as opposed to a 'small island developing state.' However, in the speeches I reviewed on Seychelles, reference was only once made to the idea of a 'large ocean state.'  <b>Could you perhaps comment on the idea of referring to island states as 'large ocean' or 'ocean' states, as opposed to calling them SIDS? Is this shift in the discourse something that is important to Seychelles?</b></p> <p>5. My Agrippine, you are currently the permanent liaison officer to the Indian Ocean Commission. In an article I read, you mentioned that the IOC is looking at the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States' (OECS) as an example of an organisation that already has a procurement mechanism in place. On this note, I have several questions.  <b>Firstly, is there any collaboration between SIDS in the Indian Ocean, with SIDS in other regions such as the Caribbean or the Pacific, apart from AOSIS? Then, perhaps you could expand a little bit on the importance of the IOC for SIDS in</b></p>

the region. What are the benefits of the organisation and what are some of the challenges? Furthermore, building on the idea of international organisations, how important are they to Seychelles?

6. Having touched on international organisations, how do small states exercise influence and power in the international system? For example, does a small country find it more efficient and productive and beneficial to join associations or groups with similar interests when they have to 'confront' powerful states? Do such 'alliances' provide more negotiating power?

#### Questions (Sample 2):

1. The Indo-Pacific contains several important Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) such as the Strait of Malacca, Strait of Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb, the Mozambique Channel etc.

**Are there any particular trade routes that run past Seychelles? From which countries is the trade volume the highest and have you seen any dramatic increases in trade?**

2. One of the challenges that Seychelles faces is that because it is a high-income country it is often excluded from preferential trade benefits and low on the agenda of international donors (in terms of aid).

**Would you be able to expand on this? How does Seychelles navigate this?**

3. SIDS have recently been advocating for developing a multidimensional vulnerability index. It has been argued that the way that things are currently structured, SIDS are punished for making economic progress.

**Would you be able to expand on the role that Seychelles has played in the development of the MVI? What are some of the challenges that it has faced?**

4. Back in 2018, former President Danny Faure explained that the government of Seychelles would make land available for the construction of a Pan African Shipping Line Head office. According to him, this would be the centre for all ship owners in Africa, and act as a hub for all activities related to the shipping and maritime sectors.

**Considering that it is now 2024, and some time since this statement was made, has Seychelles been able to achieve this goal?**

#### Questions (Sample 3):

1. In the description of your department, it is stated that one of the objectives is to promote and pursue the foreign policy of Seychelles through proactive diplomacy.

**In your view, what do you mean by 'proactive' diplomacy and what are some examples where your diplomacy has been proactive?**

2. Considering that you represent Seychelles in terms of bilateral affairs, I am interested in understanding how Seychelles interacts with major powers on a bilateral level, especially amidst geopolitical rivalry. Seychelles is located strategically along important sea lines of communication (SLOCs) which have been

recognised by both India and China. In 2018, efforts were made by India to build a military base on Assumption Island, while China has increased its defense cooperation with Madagascar. This alludes to what could potentially be described as a battle for influence between India and China in the Indian Ocean.

**From the Seychellois perspective, do you perceive an increase in geopolitical rivalry and if so, how do you navigate this? Furthermore, how does the government negotiate the benefits and challenges of this heightened attention? [Does this geopolitical competition impinge on Seychelles' ability to pursue its other foreign policy objectives?]**

**3. In the international system, how do small states effectively wield influence and power to address their own interests while also advocating for similar states facing similar challenges? How does Seychelles navigate power dynamics within larger international organisations to ensure that the unique challenges and priorities of small states are adequately considered?**

4. In a speech delivered by former President Faure in 2020, he stated that it was important for Seychelles to “step up on [its] South-South and triangular cooperation”. **When you refer to triangular cooperation, who do you refer to? Furthermore, why is South-South cooperation especially important to Seychelles?**

5. I am interested in understanding the intricate process of negotiating with other nations and strategically placing agenda items on the global stage. To provide context, the Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS) previously supported Sweden's temporary seat bid on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 2017. This collaborative effort saw Sweden reciprocating the support by aligning its positions with the concerns and priorities of the SIDS. I did also read one publication by your government from 2019, where Vietnam thanked Seychelles for supporting its candidature of the non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. This suggests that Seychelles may be taking part in similar diplomatic engagements.

**In light of such diplomatic manoeuvres, I am curious to know whether Seychelles has engaged in similar instances, trading support for another country at the UN or UNSC in exchange for reciprocal backing on matters crucial to Seychelles.**

6. In India's Blue Economy Draft Framework document of 2020, it is stated that “India should recognise an important emerging economic and strategic axis that spreads from the East Coast of Africa to the Western Pacific Ocean, which can be called the Seychelles-Singapore-Samoa (SSS) axis.

**Would you be able to elaborate on this SSS axis? Is there any collaboration between Singapore, Samoa, Seychelles and India?**

7. Lastly, one of the first things I noticed about your Minister of Tourism and Foreign Affairs is that he is both the minister of Foreign Affairs and Tourism (as the name implies). In South Africa we have a different post for the Minister of International Relations and then the Minister of Tourism. However, considering how central tourism is to the economy and the very existence of Seychelles, I can understand why this position would be one. On this note, my question is:

**Given the critical role tourism plays in Seychelles' economy and identity, could you share your insights on the decision to integrate the positions of Minister of Foreign Affairs and Tourism? Furthermore, how does this dual role contribute to the overall strategy for promoting Seychelles on the global stage?**

**Questions (Sample 4):**

1. When one thinks of the term 'agriculture' we usually (or at least I do) think of it only in terms of activities conducted on the land. However, when I was recently in Zanzibar, I was exposed to agricultural practices that take place in the ocean, namely: seaweed farming. I also read an article recently that spoke about seagrass meadows in Seychelles and the positive impact it has in addressing the effects of climate change.

**From your perspective, how do you view the concept of 'agriculture'? Does it include activities that take place in the ocean? How important are these activities to Seychelles?**

2. Seychelles, could become the first nation to report its 'blue carbon' (carbon held in coastal wetlands) stock to the United Nations as part of its greenhouse gas emission report. This could potentially allow Seychelles to take part in 'carbon trading' where Seychelles can trade its blue carbon stocks with countries wanting to offset their emissions. Notably, Seychelles has consistently expressed its aspiration to serve as a spokesperson on environmental issues, and initiatives such as the research conducted by the independent trust SeyCCAT on the benefits of seagrass exemplify this commitment. by actively contributing to the understanding of ecosystems' carbon sequestration potential, Seychelles is not only addressing environmental challenges locally but also establishing itself as an international innovator and pioneer in sustainable practices.

**I would be keen to hear your thoughts on the concept of 'blue carbon' and whether you see additional avenues through which Seychelles is taking on a pioneering role in shaping global environmental discourse and practices.**

3. Apart from what has been discussed above, Seychelles has numerous other innovative strategies when it comes to addressing climate change. For example, there is the 'debt-for-nature swap', the Green Climate Fund, the Global Environment Fund, and the Ocean Decade Alliance of which President Ramkalawan is one of two patrons.

**In your view, how do these initiatives allow Seychelles to play a more assertive and proactive role in the international arena?**

4. During the COP28 conference in Dubai in 2023, Minister Joubert played a pivotal role in representing Seychelles. I am interested in understanding the intricate process of negotiating with other nations and strategically placing agenda items on the global stage. To provide context, the Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS) previously supported Sweden's temporary seat bid on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 2017. This support was reciprocated with Sweden aligning its stance with SIDS on pertinent issues.

**In light of such diplomatic manoeuvres, I am curious to know if Seychelles has engaged in similar instances, trading support for another country at the**

## **UN or UNSC in exchange for reciprocal backing on matters crucial to Seychelles?**

5. In my dissertation I make the argument that instead of conceptualising of small islands states, such as Seychelles as Small Island Developing States (SIDS) we should rather refer to them as Ocean States (OS). The reason why I propose this is because it removes the emphasis from being 'small' to rather focus on the strengths of Seychelles namely that it has a large exclusive economic zone. However, upon further research, I discovered that SIDS often rely on presenting themselves as small and vulnerable to secure funding. In light of this, my question is:

**In terms of securing funding and investment, would it be helpful to 'rebrand' SIDS as Ocean States or is this not desirable?** [e.g. Seychelles relies on branding itself as 'too small to fail' – would this be impacted if they are rather called Ocean States?]

6. As a researcher, my understanding of Seychelles has thus far relied on literature and news sources, providing a limited perspective. Recognising the potential gaps in this approach, I am eager to delve deeper into Seychelles' policymaking dynamics.

**In Seychelles, is there a strong discussion between civil society and policymakers in terms of environmental policies? Furthermore, do you believe that because Seychelles is small in terms of both geography and population this makes it easier for Seychelles to introduce new policies and make foreign policy decisions? Or are there also hurdles such as the fact that the population is spread over islands that hinder the process of foreign policy implementation and formulation?**

## **Mauritius**

### **Historical Influences on Foreign Policy**

- **In your opinion, what were some of the most significant events in the history of Mauritius concerning its foreign policy? Additionally, how has its historical context influenced the selection of its foreign partners?**
- Mauritius has an extensive history in terms of colonisation. Between 1715 and 1810, Mauritius was a French colony, while after 1810 it became a British colony. Only in 1968 did Mauritius become independent.  
**In your view, how has your colonial history informed or influenced your foreign policy? Furthermore, do you feel Mauritius has maintained relations with its former colonisers or has there been an attempt to move away from them?**
- During colonisation, many Indians came to Seychelles as indentured labourers. After Mauritius became independent, the first Prime Minister of Mauritius emphasised the centrality of India in the foreign policy of Mauritius.  
**To what extent does India remain central in your foreign policy?**

### **Key Pressing Issues in International Relations**

- **Considering Mauritius's contemporary foreign policy landscape, what are the key, pressing issues it faces in its international relations?**
- At the moment, the more traditional security threats such as invasion of one country by another have become more prominent again, with the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. However, at the same time, Mauritius is facing many non-traditional security threats, such as high sea level rise, oil spills etc.  
**How does Mauritius ensure that the threats that it sees as most pressing are recognised by the international community?**

### **Identity and Perception**

- Renowned scholar Kalevi Holsti emphasizes the importance of a state's self-perception in shaping its foreign policy.  
**With this perspective in mind, how does Mauritius perceive its role in the global arena and what aspirations does it harbor regarding its international involvement?**
- Recently, Fiji has shifted its discourse to self-identify as a 'large ocean state' rather than a 'small island developing state.'  
**Could you discuss the significance of referring to island states as 'large ocean' or 'ocean' states instead of using the term SIDS? Is this linguistic shift pertinent to Mauritius?**
- In my dissertation, I argue that instead of conceptualizing small island states, such as Mauritius, as Small Island Developing States (SIDS), we should refer to them as Ocean States (OS). The reason for this is to shift the emphasis from being 'small' to highlighting Mauritius's strengths, namely its large exclusive economic zone. However, upon further research, I discovered that SIDS often rely on presenting themselves as small and vulnerable to secure funding. In light of this, my question is:  
**In terms of securing funding and investment, would it be helpful to 'rebrand' SIDS as Ocean States, or is this not desirable?**

### **Bilateral and Multilateral Relationships**

- In terms of your relations with major powers or important countries, how do you define your relationship with the UK, for example, considering the Chagos Islands.  
**Furthermore, how has this experience with the UK impacted who you conduct your foreign policy with?**
- To the best of my knowledge, Mauritius supports the US' presence on Diego Garcia. I would like to understand this decision a bit more.  
**In what ways is this a strategic decision? What does Mauritius gain through this decision? In your view, does it provide you with more or less autonomy in your foreign policy?**
- **In terms of the partners you typically conduct your bilateral relations with, have there been any new partners or has Mauritius stuck with its traditional**

partners? In one speech, your foreign minister explains that while Mauritius maintains its bilateral relations with its traditional partners, its friendship with Arab countries has also grown in recent years. How has the environment in which Mauritius conducts its foreign relations changed? Have there been new actors?

### Role and Importance of International Organizations

- *Is there any collaboration between SIDS in the Indian Ocean and those in other regions such as the Caribbean or the Pacific, beyond their involvement in AOSIS? Furthermore, could you elaborate on the significance of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) for SIDS in the area? What advantages does the organization offer, and what challenges does it pose? Additionally, considering international organizations, how vital are they to Mauritius?*
- *Delving into the dynamics of international organizations, how do small states like Mauritius wield influence and power on the global stage? For instance, do they find it more advantageous to form alliances or groups with shared interests when navigating interactions with more powerful states? Do such alliances bolster their negotiating capabilities?*
- In the past (September 2022) Mauritius has called for the reform of the UNSC to include both SIDS and African states.  
**Firstly, to what extent have you made progress on this call? Secondly, why is it particularly important for SIDS to have a seat at the UNSC? Do you think a SIDS seat would contribute to changing the discourse on security matters? Lastly, do SIDS have the capacity to occupy a seat at the UNSC? Are there any requirements that must be met for a country to assume its seat at the UNSC?**
- Mauritius, alongside other SIDS, has been advocating for the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI).  
**What role do you think Mauritius plays in terms of reforming the financial structure?**
- I would like to understand the role that regional, multilateral, or international organisations play for Mauritius.  
**What are the most important organisations for Mauritius? How important is the IOC for Mauritius?**

### Trade and Geopolitical Dynamics

- The Indo-Pacific contains several important Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) such as the Strait of Malacca, Strait of Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb, the Mozambique Channel, etc.  
**Are there any particular trade routes that run past Mauritius? From which countries is the trade volume the highest, and have you seen any dramatic increases in trade?**

- I am interested in understanding how Mauritius interacts with major powers on a bilateral level, especially amidst geopolitical rivalry. Mauritius is strategically located along important sea lines of communication (SLOCs) recognized by both India and China. In recent years, efforts have been made by India to increase its presence in the region, while China has also stepped up its defense cooperation with nearby nations. This suggests a potential battle for influence between India and China in the Indian Ocean.  
**From the Mauritian perspective, do you perceive an increase in geopolitical rivalry, and if so, how do you navigate this? Furthermore, how does the government negotiate the benefits and challenges of this heightened attention? Does this geopolitical competition impinge on Mauritius's ability to pursue its other foreign policy objectives?**

### **Security Concerns and Environmental Challenges**

- At the moment, the more traditional security threats such as invasion of one country by another has become more prominent again, with the invasion of Ukraine by Russia.  
**However, at the same time, Mauritius is facing many non-traditional security threats, such as, high sea level rise, oil spills etc. How does Mauritius ensure that the threats that it sees as most pressing are recognised by the international community?**
- Norway has recently voted to allow the controversial practice of sea-bed mining.  
**How does Mauritius, firstly, view the practice of sea-bed mining? Secondly, how is this action taken by Norway perceived by Mauritius?**

### **Diplomatic Strategies and Influence**

- I am interested in understanding the intricate process of negotiating with other nations and strategically placing agenda items on the global stage. To provide context, the Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS) previously supported Sweden's temporary seat bid on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 2017. This collaborative effort saw Sweden reciprocating the support by aligning its positions with the concerns and priorities of the SIDS. I also read one publication by your government from 2019, where Vietnam thanked Seychelles for supporting its candidature for the non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. This suggests that Mauritius may be taking part in similar diplomatic engagements.  
***In light of such diplomatic manoeuvres, I am curious to know whether Mauritius has engaged in similar instances, trading support for another country at the UN or UNSC in exchange for reciprocal backing on matters crucial to Mauritius.***
- ***From a Mauritian perspective, how do you define power?***

### **Leadership and Initiatives**

- Mauritius has on numerous occasions proclaimed that it would like to spearhead various initiatives. For example, in 2018 your former Prime Minister stated that "Mauritius continues to spearhead the fight against drug trafficking and other

maritime crimes”, while in 2022, your Prime Minister explained that the Bank of Mauritius “has set up the Climate Change Centre in 2021, to spearhead efforts in measuring, analysing, managing, and mitigating climate change risk”.

**How successful has Mauritius been in spearheading various initiatives? Further, why is it important to Mauritius to ‘spearhead’ various initiatives? Is this a specific role that Mauritius envisions for itself to play?**

### **Sample Interview Questions: Indian Ocean Commission (IOC)**

- What role do regional organizations like the IOC play in promoting peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region?
- Based on your experience, what recurring themes do you observe in the speeches and declarations made by the IOC regarding peace and security?
- What core themes and values are emphasized by the IOC in its narratives on peace and security?
- How effective do you think the IOC's communication strategies have been in promoting peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region?
- Can you discuss any specific communication strategies or campaigns by the IOC that have been particularly successful or unsuccessful?
- How does the IOC's approach to promoting peace and security compare to that of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF)?

## **Solomon Islands**

### **Introductory Questions**

1. Would you be able to tell me a little about yourself, the positions you have held in the past, and your current roles?
2. Turning to the Solomon Islands, what are some of the biggest challenges the country currently faces?
3. What are some of the unique constraints you feel Solomon Islands faces because of its status as a small island developing state?

### **Foreign Policy Questions**

4. A new Prime Minister, Jeremiah Manele, was recently inaugurated. In your view, can we expect significant changes in the Solomon Islands' foreign policy under his leadership?
5. I have a particular interest in understanding the Solomon Islands' foreign policy. One issue I find puzzling is its stance on West Papua.
  - a. In 2017, the Solomon Islands voiced support for West Papua at the UNGA.
  - b. In 2018, under a new Prime Minister, it expressed support for Indonesia.

c. In 2019, support for Indonesia continued, but since 2020, the issue has not been mentioned at the UNGA.

Is there a straightforward explanation for this shift?

6. Is the issue of West Papua perceived in the same way as New Caledonia, given that both involve struggles for self-determination? If so, why does the Solomon Islands publicly support New Caledonia but no longer West Papua?
7. The Solomon Islands has historically pursued a “friends to all” foreign policy. From your perspective, what does such a policy mean for the country?
8. When the Solomon Islands signed the security agreement with China in 2022, it raised concerns in the Western world. However, I view this as consistent with its “friends to all” policy rather than a departure from past behaviour. What is your perspective on this, and do you think the West’s reaction was justified?
9. The Solomon Islands hosted the Pacific Games in 2023, with significant financial support from China. Considering this, who are the country’s most important partners today, and has there been a notable shift from the past?
10. Given that the Solomon Islands is a former British colony, how would you describe its current relationship with the United Kingdom? Additionally, how does the UK’s treatment of the Chagossians influence the Solomon Islands’ willingness to cooperate with the UK?
11. Furthermore, I read that India held its annual Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation and that Solomon Islands presented its first High Commissioner to India? In the context of the U.S.’s Indo-Pacific strategy, India is often seen as a counterbalance to China. Have you observed heightened engagement or attention from India recently? How does the Solomon Islands navigate its relationships with both China and India in this evolving geopolitical landscape?

### **International Environment Questions**

12. Australia’s role in the region has been viewed as both problematic and constructive, depending on the period and perspective. How does the Solomon Islands currently view Australia?
13. How important is regional cooperation to the Solomon Islands? Does the Solomon Islands consider the Pacific Islands Forum or the Melanesian Spearhead Group to be more significant? What challenges does the country face within these organisations?
14. On a broader scale, how important is the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) to the Solomon Islands? Would the country’s influence be diminished without these alliances?
15. The Solomon Islands has historically been subject to great power competition, such as during the Battle of Guadalcanal. More recently, we see a resurgence in geopolitical competition. Is the current dynamic different from the past?

16. The Solomon Islands has been outspoken on numerous occasions in the international arena, even calling out major powers. Is this linked to a particular sense of “Solomon Islands identity”? Are there additional examples where the country has taken a bold stance on global issues?
17. As a Small Island Developing State, the Solomon Islands faces constraints related to its size and population. How do these limitations affect its participation in international negotiations and events?
18. In my view, the Solomon Islands has been able to “punch above its weight” on the international stage. Would you agree with this characterization? Furthermore, are there any particular techniques or strategies it uses to be able to have this disproportionate impact?
19. What are some important aspects of Solomon Islands foreign policy that I have perhaps not mentioned but are important for me to understand?

## Annex B. Interview participants

Date	Country	Name and/or position	Format
19 February 2024	Seychelles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ralph Agrippine</b> <i>Principal Counsellor/ Permanent Liaison Officer to the IOC</i></li> <li>• <b>Anonymous A</b> <i>Bilateral Affairs</i></li> <li>• <b>Anonymous B</b> <i>Multilateral Affairs</i></li> </ul>	In-person
20 February 2024	Seychelles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Denis Matatiken</b> <i>Permanent Secretary of Environment, Ministry of Agriculture, Climate Change and Environment</i></li> <li>• <b>Tony Imaduwa</b> <i>Principle Secretary for Energy and Climate Change</i></li> <li>• <b>Christian Faure</b> <i>Director General for Regional Affairs</i></li> </ul>	In-person
22 February 2024	Seychelles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Captain Sam Gontier</b> <i>Director Regional Coordination Operations Centre</i></li> <li>• <b>Anonymous C</b> <i>Principle Secretary for Investment</i></li> <li>• <b>Phillianne Ernesta</b> <i>Principal Secretary for Blue Economy</i></li> </ul>	In-person
23 February 2024	Seychelles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Flavien Joubert</b> <i>Minister for Agriculture, Climate Change &amp; Energy</i></li> <li>• <b>Ralph Agrippine</b> <i>Principal Counsellor/ Permanent Liaison Officer to the Indian Ocean Commission</i></li> </ul>	In-person
1 July 2024	Mauritius	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Gilles Ribouet</b> Responsable de la Communication - Indian Ocean Commission</li> <li>• <b>Raj Mohabeer</b> Office in Charge - Indian Ocean Commission</li> </ul>	In-person
2 July 2024	Mauritius	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Michele Stallone</b> <i>Regional Coordinator Port Security Programme - Indian Ocean Commission</i></li> </ul>	In-person
4 July 2024	Mauritius	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Shakuntala Jugmohun</b> <i>Former Advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs</i></li> </ul>	In-person
21 November 2024	Solomon Islands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Karamui Bugotu</b> <i>Policy Focal - Infrastructure and Lands; Policy Implementation and Monitoring</i></li> </ul>	Online

		<i>Evaluation Unit - office of the Prime Minister</i>	
24 November 2024	Solomon Islands	• <b>Walter Diamana</b> <i>Ministry of Home Affairs Deputy Secretary Technical</i>	Online

## Annex C. Consent form

### Consent Form

I..... [name and surname] in my capacity as  
.....[position/occupation] voluntarily agree to  
participate in this research study.

- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves providing insight into the questions asked by the interviewee and will be used in either the researcher's dissertation, thesis (and any publications stemming from the thesis), as well as potentially in research briefs for the Department of Political Sciences, University of Pretoria's Ocean Regions Programme.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research, i.e., there is no monetary compensation.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded (unless I have specifically asked for it not to be audio-recorded).
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research, my identity will remain anonymous if I have requested this.
- I understand that extracts from my interview may be quoted in the dissertation, thesis, and potential published paper of the researcher, though, should I have indicated a preference for anonymity, such an extract will not be ascribed to me.
- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained on the laptop and tablet of the researcher which is password protected. Only the researcher herself has access to these recordings and they will be deleted as soon as the final thesis is completed.
- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for the period of the master's dissertation/PhD. thesis.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

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Name of participant:  
Signature of participant  
Date:

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Name of researcher:  
Signature of researcher  
Date:

## Annex D. Reference list for speeches utilised

### Fiji Speeches

Date	Speech author	Name of Speech	Occasion
6 April 2017	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Hon PM Bainimarama Address at Heads of Missions Meeting 2017	Heads of Mission Meeting
22 May 2017	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Hon PM Bainimarama Opening Statement at Petersberg Dialogue	Petersberg Dialogue
23 May 2017	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Hon PM Bainimarama Keynote Speech in Political Segment at Petersberg Dialogue	Climate Action Pacific Partnership Event
3 July 2017	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Hon PM Bainimarama Opening Address at The Climate Action Pacific Partnership Event	Climate Action Pacific Partnership Event
21 September 2017	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Opening of the 13 Session of the United Nations General Assembly	UNGA 72
23 August 2017	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Hon PM Bainimarama, At the Opening of The Pacific Blue Economy Conference	Opening of the Pacific Blue Economy Conference
7 November 2017	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Hon PM Bainimarama & Cop23 President Remarks on Assuming the Presidency of Cop23	Assuming Presidency of COP23

<b>Date</b>	<b>Speech author</b>	<b>Name of Speech</b>	<b>Occasion</b>
15 November 2017	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Hon PM Bainimarama's Opening Remarks at UN High Level Forum Partnership for Climate Friendly and Sustainable Development: Southern Countries In Action	UN High Level Forum Partnership for Climate Friendly and Sustainable Development
23 May 2018	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Hon. PM Bainimarama At the Fiji-EU Political Dialogue	
15 June 2018	HE President Jioji Konrote	He President Jioji Konrote at The Opening of The Peacekeeping Symposium	Peacekeeping Symposium
20 June 2018	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Hon. PM Bainimarama Keynote Address at The Petersburg Climate Dialogue on The Talanoa Dialogue for Increased Climate Ambition	Petersburg Climate Dialogue
15 September 2018	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Hon. PM Bainimarama's Remarks at The Global Climate Action Summit Ocean Leadership Dialogue	Global Climate Action Summit Ocean Leadership Dialogue
27 September 2018	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Hon. PM Bainimarama's Remarks at The United Nation's Secretary-General's UNGA Climate Event	United Nation's Secretary-General's UNGA Climate Event
29 September 2018	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Hon. PM Bainimarama's National Address at The Un General Assembly	UNGA 73 New York
13 December 2018	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Hon. PM Bainimarama at the High-Level Forum on South-South Cooperation on Climate Change	High Level Forum on South-South Cooperation on Climate Change

<b>Date</b>	<b>Speech author</b>	<b>Name of Speech</b>	<b>Occasion</b>
14 December 2018	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Hon. PM Bainimarama's Speech at The Launch of The Fiji Low Emission Development Strategy	Launch of the Fiji Low Emission Development Strategy
17 January 2019	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Hon. PM Bainimarama's remarks at welcome dinner for Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison	Welcome Dinner for Australian PM
21 January 2019	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Prime Minister Bainimarama addresses attendees at a State Dinner hosted for Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and his wife, Jenny.	State Dinner hosted for Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and his wife
8 May 2019	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Hon. PM Bainimarama's Speech at The Carbon Market Institute's Australian Emission Reduction Summit	Carbon Market Institute's Australian Emission Reduction Summit
9 May 2019	Minister for Defence Honourable Inia Seruiratu	Minister for Defence Hon. Inia Seruiratu at The Opening of The South Pacific Defence Ministers Meeting	South Pacific Defence Ministers Meeting
10 May 2019	Minister Kumar	Minister Kumar's Address at The Fiji – USA Business Council Annual General Meeting	USA Business Council Annual General Meeting
13 May 2019	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Hon. PM Bainimarama's Opening Address Third Climate Action Pacific Partnership Meeting	Third Climate Action Pacific Partnership Meeting
12 August 2019	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	PM Bainimarama's Keynote Address at The Sautalaga Event of the 50th Pacific Islands Forum	Sautalaga Event of the 50th Pacific Islands Forum

<b>Date</b>	<b>Speech author</b>	<b>Name of Speech</b>	<b>Occasion</b>
26 September 2019	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Hon. PM Bainimarama's Remarks at India/PSIDS Leaders' Summit Level Meeting	India/PSIDS Leaders' Summit Level Meeting
26 September 2019	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	PM Bainimarama Delivers Fiji's Statement at the 74th Session of UNGA80 Date: 26 September 2019	UNGA 74
2 December 2019	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	PM Bainimarama's Statement at the 56th Session of The Iso Council Agenda Item 7 - National Policies	Iso Council Agenda Item 7
10 December 2019	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama's Address at The Moana Blue Pacific Pavilion High-Level Event	Moana Blue Pacific Pavilion High-Level Event
10 December 2019	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama's Keynote Remarks at The Solar and SIDS Making The Sun Shine Brighter	Solar and SIDS Making The Sun Shine Brighter
11 December 2019	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama's Keynote Speech at The Sustainable Innovation Forum	Sustainable Innovation Forum
12 December 2019	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	PM Bainimarama At the Commonwealth Secretariat Climate Change and Ocean Action Event	Commonwealth Secretariat Climate Change and Ocean Action Event
26 September 2020	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Un General Assembly Debate 2020 Address by Hon. Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama to	UNGA 75

Date	Speech author	Name of Speech	Occasion
		The 75th Session of The Un General Assembly	
8 April 2021	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Prime Minister Hon. Voreqe Bainimarama's Speech at The Launch of The Regional Pacific NDC Hub's Strategy 2030	Launch of the Regional Pacific NDC Hub
23 April 2021	Attorney-General Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum	The Attorney-General Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum's Statement at The Leaders Summit on Climate	The Leaders Summit on Climate
26 September 2021	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	PM Bainimarama's National Statement to UNGA76	UNGA 76
14 April 2022	Attorney-General Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum	Attorney-General Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum's Speech at the 7th Our Ocean's Conference	7th Our Ocean's Conference
26 April 2022	Attorney General and Minister of Economy Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum	2022 ECOSOC Forum On Financing for Development	ECOSOC Forum
24 June 2022	Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport Faiyaz Koya	Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport Hon. Faiyaz Koya's Speech at The Korea-Pacific Islands Countries Seminar	Korea-Pacific Islands Countries Seminar
8 July 2022	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Prime Minister Hon. Voreqe Bainimarama's Speech at the "Blue Economy for The Pacific Island Countries – Leadership, Capacity Development and Blue Economy Index	Blue Economy for The Pacific Island Countries – Leadership, Capacity Development and Blue Economy Index
8 July 2022	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Prime Minister Hon. Voreqe Bainimarama's Speech at The	Alliance of Countries Joining a Deep-Sea Mining Moratorium

Date	Speech author	Name of Speech	Occasion
		Alliance of Countries Joining a Deep-Sea Mining Moratorium	
8 July 2022	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Prime Minister Hon. Voreqe Bainimarama's Speech at The PIF Informal Dinner Event	PIF Informal Dinner Event
8 July 2022	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Prime Minister Hon. Voreqe Bainimarama's Speech at The Progressing Blue Economy Through Marine Spatial Planning (MSP): Opportunities for The Pacific Meeting	
13 July 2022	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Prime Minister Hon. Voreqe Bainimarama's Address at The Launch Ceremony of RFMF–RFN Maritime Essential Services Centre (MESOC)	Launch Ceremony of RFMF–RFN Maritime Essential Services Centre (MESOC)
13 July 2022	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Prime Minister Hon. Voreqe Bainimarama's Address at The Announcement on The United States Treaty	Announcement on the United States Treaty
23 August 2022	Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism & Transport Hon. Faiyaz Koya	Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism & Transport Hon. Faiyaz Koya's Keynote Address at The Mou Signing Between the Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Fiji Chamber of Commerce and Industry	The Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Fiji Chamber of Commerce and Industry
24 August 2022	Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport Faiyaz Siddiq Koya	Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport Faiyaz	Fiji- Korea Business Forum

Date	Speech author	Name of Speech	Occasion
		Siddiq Koya's Speech At The Fiji-Korea Business Forum	
24 September 2022	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Prime Minister Voreqe “Frank” Bainimarama Fiji’s National Statement at the 77th Session of The General Assembly	UNGA 77
28 September 2022	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Prime Minister Hon. Voreqe Bainimarama's Climate Statement for Panel Discussion at The Discussion on Climate Action, Climate Resilience, Clean Energy Transformation	Discussion On Climate Action, Climate Resilience, Clean Energy Transformation
28 September 2022	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Prime Minister Hon. Voreqe Bainimarama’s Opening Remarks as The Chair of PIF at the U.S.– Pacific Economic and Trade Ties	U.S.–Pacific Economic and Trade Ties
26 October 2022	Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama	Prime Minister Hon. Voreqe Bainimarama's Speech at The Launch of The Marine Protected Area National Consultation	Launch of the Marine Protected Area National Consultation
2022	The Permanent Representative of Fiji to the United Nations Satyendra Prasad	Opening Statement by The Permanent Representative of Fiji to The United Nations Satyendra Prasad at The Resumed High-Level Segment United Nations Climate Change Conference, Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, 2022	United Nations Climate Change Conference, Egypt
26 January 2023	Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Cooperatives, SMES and	Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Cooperatives, SMES and Communications	Fiji-Australia Business Council Breakfast Event

Date	Speech author	Name of Speech	Occasion
	Communications Manoa Kamikamica	Manoa Kamikamica's Speech at the Fiji-Australia Business Council Breakfast Event	
3 February 2023	His Excellency Ratu Wiliame Maivalili Katonivere	His Excellency's Address at The Opening of the 2023-2024 Session of Parliament	Fiji - Opening Session of Parliament
5 February 2023	President Ratu Wiliame Katonivere	His Excellency, President Ratu Wiliame Katonivere's Address at The Chinese New Year Lantern Festival Gala	Chinese New Year Lantern Festival Gala
8 February 2023	Deputy Prime Minister Manoa Kamikamica	Remarks by DPM Hon. Manoa Kamikamica at The Launch of The Blue Accelerator Grant Event	Launch of the Blue Accelerator Grant Event
16 February 2023	Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka	PM Rabuka's Speech at The Bilateral Meeting with Minister for External Affairs of The Republic of India, Hon. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar	Bilateral Meeting with Minister for External Affairs of The Republic of India
23 February 2023	Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka	PM Hon. Sitiveni Rabuka's Opening Address at The Opening Dinner of the 2023 PIFS Special Leaders Meeting	Opening Dinner of the 2023 PIFS Special Leaders Meeting
8 June 2023	President Ratu Wiliame Katonivere	His Excellency the President Ratu Wiliame Katonivere's Address at The World Oceans Day Celebrations	World Oceans Day Celebrations
28 June 2023	Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka	PM Rabuka's State of The Nation Address - "Rebuilding Fiji Together	State of the Nation Address

<b>Date</b>	<b>Speech author</b>	<b>Name of Speech</b>	<b>Occasion</b>
20 July 2023	Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-Operatives, SMES and Communication, Manoa Kamikamica	Opening Statement by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-Operatives, SMES and Communication, Honourable Manoa Kamikamica, for Fiji Fourth Trade Policy Review at The World Trade Organization	Fiji Fourth Trade Policy Review at The World Trade Organization
24 July 2023	Attorney-General Hon. Siromi Turaga	Attorney-General Hon. Siromi Turaga at The Pacific Island Submissions to The ICJ Advisory Proceedings	Pacific Island Submissions to The ICJ Advisory Proceedings
31 July 2023	Deputy PM and Minister for Trade, Co-Operatives, SMES, and Communications Manoa Kamikamica	Deputy PM and Minister for Trade, Co-Operatives, SMES, and Communications Hon. Manoa Kamikamica's Address at The Pacific Trade Training Course	Pacific Trade Training Course
15 August 2023	Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka	Prime Minister Hon. Sitiveni Rabuka's Address at The Arrival of Fiji Airways A350 - Island of Beqa	Arrival of Fiji Airways A350 - Island of Beqa
17 August 2023	Deputy Prime Minister Manoa Kamikamica	Deputy PM Hon. Manoa Kamikamica's Address at the Launch of USAID Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity Partnership - Pacific Activity	Launch of USAID Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity Partnership - Pacific Activity
18 August 2023	Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport RO Filipe Tuisawau	Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport Ro Filipe Tuisawau's Speech at The Third Pacific Meteorological Ministerial Meeting	Third Pacific Meteorological Ministerial Meeting

<b>Date</b>	<b>Speech author</b>	<b>Name of Speech</b>	<b>Occasion</b>
22 September 2023	Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka	Prime Minister Rabuka's National Statement at the 78 <sup>th</sup> UNGA	78 <sup>th</sup> UNGA
26 February 2024	Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka	PM Sitiveni Rabuka at The IMF Pacific High-Level Conference	Pacific High-Level Conference
4 March 2024	President Ratu Wiliame Katonivere	He President Ratu Wiliame Katonivere's official Address at the Opening of Parliament 2024	Official Opening of Parliament Address
6 March 2024	Ambassador Filipo Tarakinikini	Oral Presentation of The Republic of Fiji	International Court of Justice
26 March 2024	President Ratu Wiliame Katonivere	HE President Ratu Wiliame Katonivere's Address at The Launch of The Fiji-Indonesia Friendship Association	Launch of the Fiji-Indonesia Friendship Association
4 April 2024	Minister Prasad	Minister Prasad's Speech at The Launch of The Fiji Airways Special Publication 'soar' 255	Launch of Fiji Airways Special Publication
10 April 2024	Minister Ditoka	Minister S. Ditoka Speech at The Pacific Regional Disaster Management Meeting	Pacific Regional Disaster Management Meeting
23 April 2024	President Ratu Wiliame Katonivere	He President Ratu Wiliame Katonivere's Address at The Pacific Tripartite High-Level Dialogue on Decent Work and The 2050 Strategy for The Blue Pacific Continent	Pacific Tripartite High-Level Dialogue, Fiji
9 May 2024	Deputy Prime Minister Biman Prasad	Deputy PM & Minister for Finance Hon. Biman Prasad's Address at The National Blue Economy Workshop	Deputy Prime Minister Honourable Biman Prasad

Date	Speech author	Name of Speech	Occasion
20 May 2024	Deputy Prime Minister Manoa Kamikamica	DPM and Minister for Trade Hon. Manoa Kamikamica at the Fiji-North America Business Forum in Surrey, Bc, Canada	Fiji-North America Business Forum, Canada

### Mauritius Speeches

Date	Speech author	Name of Speech	Occasion
20 March 2017	Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth	Speech for Hon Pravind Kumar Jugnauth Prime Minister Launching of African Economic Platform	Westin Turtle Bay Resort Balaclava
21 September 2017	Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth	Address by Mr. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs, External Communications and National Development Unit, Minister for Finance and Economic Development of The Republic of Mauritius	UNGA 72
28 September 2018	Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth	Address by Mr. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, Prime Minister, Minister for Home Affairs, External Communications and National Development Unit, Minister for Finance and Economic Development of the Republic of Mauritius	UNGA 73

<b>Date</b>	<b>Speech author</b>	<b>Name of Speech</b>	<b>Occasion</b>
29 August 2019	Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth	Japan-Mauritius Summit Meeting	Seventh Tokyo International Conference on African Development
27 September 2019	Mr. Paramasivum Pillay Vyapoory, G.O.S.K Acting President of The Republic of Mauritius	Address by H.E. Mr. Paramasivum Pillay Vyapoory, G.O.S.K Acting President of The Republic of Mauritius 74th Session of The United Nations General Assembly	UNGA 74
26 September 2020	Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth	Statement by Hon Pravind Kumar Jugnauth Prime Minister	UNGA 75
22 July 2021	Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth	U.S. -Africa Business Summit 2021	U.S. -Africa Business Summit 2021
14 September 2021	Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth	Statement by Hon Pravind Kumar Jugnauth Prime Minister of The Republic of Mauritius	UNGA 76
22 September 2021	Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth	Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) Leaders' Summit	Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) Leaders' Summit
7 October 2021	Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth	Inauguration of the Satellite Ground Station	Inauguration of The Satellite Ground Station
25 October 2021	Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth	Launch Ceremony of Afrinex	Launch Ceremony of Afrinex
1 November 2021	Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth	World Leaders Summit	Scottish Event Campus, Glasgow
23 November 2021	Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth	1st Comesa Summit of Heads of State and Government, 23rd November 2021	21st Comesa Summit of Heads of State

<b>Date</b>	<b>Speech author</b>	<b>Name of Speech</b>	<b>Occasion</b>
27 December 2021	Prime Minister Pravinnd Jugnauth	Get Together with Diplomatic Corps  Hosted by Hon Prime Minister	Get Together with Diplomatic Corps
26 January 2022	Prime Minister Pravinnd Jugnauth	Inauguration of The Ashok Stambh 39 on The Occasion of The 73rd Republic Day of India	The 73rd Republic Day of India
20 April 2022	Prime Minister Pravinnd Jugnauth	Global Ayush Investment and Innovation Summit	Mahatma Mandir, Gandhinagar, Gujarat
26 June 2022	Hon Pravinnd Kumar Jugnauth Prime Minister of The Republic of Mauritius	Official Inauguration of The Mushishito – Rukarara V Hydropower Plant	Nyagamabe, Rwanda
29 July 2022	Prime Minister Pravinnd Jugnauth	1st Regional Judicial Colloquium On Maritime Crimes Organised by The United Nations office On Drugs and Crime Global Maritime Crime Programme (Unodc-Gmcp) official Launching Ceremony	Le Meridien Hotel, Pointe Aux Piments
23 September 2022	Prime Minister Pravinnd Jugnauth	Statement by the Hon. Pravinnd Kumar Jugnauth Prime Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity	UNGA 77
9 December 2022	Prime Minister Pravinnd Jugnauth	African Development Bank (AFDB) United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) & United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) Opening Ceremony of The African Economic Conference 2022	African Economic Conference

Date	Speech author	Name of Speech	Occasion
26 February 2024	Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth	Intervention of the Hon Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, Prime Minister of The Republic of Mauritius on Palestine	Thirty- Seventh (37th) Ordinary Session of The Assembly of the African Union
26 February 2024	Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth	Statement Chagos: Intervention of The Hon Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, Prime Minister of The Republic of Mauritius on Chagos Archipelago	Thirty- Seventh (37th) Ordinary Session of The Assembly of the African Union
25 April 2024	Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth	Opening of the Ministerial Conference on Drug Trafficking and Substance Abuse in The Western Indian Ocean	Intercontinental Mauritius Resort, Balaclava

### Seychelles Speeches

Date	Speech author	Name of Speech	Occasion
14 February 2017	President Danny Faure	State of the Nation Address 2017 - 14 February 2017 by President Danny Faure	State of the Nation Address
10 July 2017	President Danny Faure	Address by President Faure- 41st Plenary Assembly Session of the SADC Parliamentary Forum	Plenary Assembly Session of the SADC Parliamentary Forum
21 September 2017	President Danny Faure	Address by Mr. Danny Faure, President of the Republic of Seychelles	UNGA 72
26 September 2017	President Danny Faure	Address by President Danny Faure on the Occasion of Official Opening of the Sixth	Official Opening of the Sixth Meeting of African

<b>Date</b>	<b>Speech author</b>	<b>Name of Speech</b>	<b>Occasion</b>
		Meeting of African Ministers of Health of Small Island Developing States	Ministers of Health of Small Island Developing States
18 April 2018	President Danny Faure	President Faure opening remarks Commonwealth Business Forum Green finance Returns with Responsibility - Tuesday 17th April - Lord Mayor's Dining Room, Mansion House, Walbrook	Commonwealth Business Forum
24 April 2018	President Danny Faure	Speech by President Danny Faure on the Occasion of the official Opening of the African Shipowners Association Summit 2018	Official Opening of the African Shipowners Association Summit
26 June 2018	President Danny Faure	Speech by President Danny Faure at the India Seychelles Business Forum, New Delhi	India Seychelles Business Forum, New Delhi
25 September 2018	President Danny Faure	Statement for the 73rd United Nations General Assembly Session by President Danny Faure	UNGA 73
1 October 2018	President Danny Faure	Opening Remarks by President Danny Faure, President of the Republic of Seychelles at the Diplomatic Convention held at Eden Bleu, October 2018	Diplomatic Convention held at Eden Bleu
9 October 2018	President Danny Faure	Speech on the Occasion of the State Visit to Seychelles of H.E. Mr Maithripala Sirisena, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka – Reception hosted by President Danny Faure, State House	Occasion of the State Visit to Seychelles of H.E. Mr Maithripala Sirisena

<b>Date</b>	<b>Speech author</b>	<b>Name of Speech</b>	<b>Occasion</b>
26 November 2018	President Danny Faure	Global Conference on Sustainable Blue Economy, Nairobi Kenya - Speech by President Danny Faure at the Leaders Commitment Segment	Global Conference on Sustainable Blue Economy
5 August 2019	President Danny Faure	Keynote Address by President Danny Faure for the official launching ceremony of Vision 2033 and the National Development Strategy 2019 – 2023	Launching ceremony of Vision 2033 and the National Development Strategy
26 March 2020	President Danny Faure	Speech by President Danny Faure on the occasion of 30% of Seychelles' EEZ Designated as Marine Protected Area	Occasion of 30% of Seychelles' EEZ Designated as Marine Protected Area
3 June 2020	President Danny Faure	OACPS First Extra-ordinary Inter-Sessional Summit of Heads of State and Government - Remarks by President Danny Faure - Wednesday 3rd June 2020	OACPS First Extra-ordinary Inter-Sessional Summit of Heads of State and Government
8 July 2020	President Danny Faure	ILO Global Summit on COVID-19 and the World of Work - Statement by Seychelles President Mr Danny Faure	ILO Global Summit
23 September 2020	President Danny Faure	Statement for the General Debate by President Danny Faure to the 75 <sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly	UNGA 75 – General Debate
19 November 2020	President Wavel Ramkalawan	President Wavel Ramkalawan's opening remarks - Meeting with the Resident Diplomatic Corps State House	Diplomatic Corps Meeting
20 November 2020	President Wavel Ramkalawan	Seychelles president on taking power in a pandemic	Online

Date	Speech author	Name of Speech	Occasion
7 April 2021	President Wavel Ramkalawan	Remarks by President Wavel Ramkalawan - Leaders' Dialogue on the Africa COVID-Climate Emergency - Tuesday 6th April, 2021	Leaders' Dialogue on the Africa COVID-Climate Emergency
21 May 2021	President Wavel Ramkalawan	President Ramkalawan addresses conference focusing on the plight of island peoples in the face of climate change and other dangers	N/A
2021	Foreign Minister of Seychelles, Sylvestre Radegonde	Message from His Excellency Mr. Sylvestre Radegonde, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Tourism of the Republic of Seychelles	N/A
7 August 2021	President Wavel Ramkalawan	The President's message for the African Day of Seas and Oceans on the 25th July 2021	African Day of Seas and Oceans
23 September 2021	President Wavel Ramkalawan	76th Session of United Nations General Assembly Address by Mr Wavel Ramkalawan President of The Republic of Seychelles	UNGA 76
18 July 2022	President Wavel Ramkalawan	Joint Press conference on the occasion of the State Visit of H.E. President Uhuru Kenyatta to Seychelles Remarks by President Wavel Ramkalawan	State Visit of H.E. President Uhuru Kenyatta
21 September 2022	President Wavel Ramkalawan	Speech by President Wavel Ramkalawan	UNGA 77
7 November 2022	President Wavel Ramkalawan	COP27 - President Wavel Ramkalawan delivers keynote address at the the High-level segment of The Great Blue Wall (GBW) - Accelerating and Scaling Up Ocean Action in the Western Indian Ocean	High-level segment of The Great Blue Wall (GBW)

<b>Date</b>	<b>Speech author</b>	<b>Name of Speech</b>	<b>Occasion</b>
14 December 2022	President Wavel Ramkalawan	Fireside conversation with H.E. Wavel Ramkalawan, President of the Republic of Seychelles	Atlantic Council (online)
14 February 2023	President Wavel Ramkalawan	World Government Summit Keynote Address by Mr Wavel Ramkalawan, President of the Republic of Seychelles The Era of Climate Change: The urgency of addressing rising seas	World Government Summit
17 February 2023	Foreign Minister of Seychelles, Sylvestre Radegonde	Address by the Foreign Minister of Seychelles, H.E. Sylvestre Radegonde, to the assembled diplomats accredited to Seychelles and government officials of the state	Seychelles
9 May 2023	Foreign Minister of Seychelles, Sylvestre Radegonde	Message by Minister for Foreign Affairs and Tourism, Sylvestre Radegonde, on the occasion of Europe Day	Europe Day
13 August 2023	Foreign Minister of Seychelles, Sylvestre Radegonde	Interview with Sylvestre Radegonde, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Tourism, Seychelles	Seychelles
20 September 2023	President Wavel Ramkalawan	UNGA78 General Debate Statement delivered by President Wavel Ramkalawan in New York on 20th September 2023	UNGA 78
23 February 2024	Foreign Minister of Seychelles, Sylvestre Radegonde	Diplomatic Cocktail	Diplomatic Cocktail
10 April 2024	President Wavel Ramkalawan	Keynote Speech Delivered by President Wavel Ramkalawan before the 2024 Ocean Decade Conference	2024 Ocean Decade Conference
16 April 2024	President Wavel Ramkalawan	Intervention by President Ramkalawan at the High Ambition and Partnerships for the	High Ambition and Partnerships for the

Date	Speech author	Name of Speech	Occasion
		High Seas in the sidelines of the Our Ocean Conference	High Seas in the sidelines of the Our Ocean Conference
17 April 2024	President Wavel Ramkalawan	Speech by President Ramkalawan during High-Level Segment at the 9th Our Ocean Conference	High-Level Segment at the 9th Our Ocean Conference
28 May 2024	President Wavel Ramkalawan	General Debate Plenary Statement by President Ramkalawan-Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS 4)	Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS 4)

### Solomon Islands Speeches

Date	Speech author	Name of Speech	Occasion
22 September 2017	Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare	Opening of the 72 <sup>nd</sup> Session of The United Nations General Assembly	United Nations General Assembly 73
28 September 2018	Mr. Ricky Nelson Houenipwela, Prime Minister of Solomon Islands	Opening of the 73 <sup>rd</sup> Session of The United Nations General Assembly	United Nations General Assembly 73
8 July 2019	Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare	Moving Forward in Unity to Build a Stronger Nation	Independence Celebrations
27 September 2019	Mr. Jeremiah Manele, Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade of Solomon Islands	Opening of the 74 <sup>th</sup> Session of The United Nations General Assembly	United Nations General Assembly 74

<b>Date</b>	<b>Speech author</b>	<b>Name of Speech</b>	<b>Occasion</b>
26 September 2020	Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare	Opening of the 75 <sup>th</sup> Session of The United Nations General Assembly	United Nations General Assembly 75
7 July 2020	Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare	42 <sup>nd</sup> Independence Anniversary Address to the Nation	Solomon Islands
25 September 2021	Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare	Opening Debate of The Seventy Sixth Session of The United Nations General Assembly	United Nations General Assembly 76
6 September 2022	Government Statement	Timing of Australian Election offer Inappropriate	N/A
19 September 2022	Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare	Statement at the Transforming Education Summit Leaders Roundtable	N/A
23 September 2022	Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare	Opening Debate of The Seventy Seventh Session of The United Nations General Assembly Theme: “A Watershed Moment: Transformative Solutions To Interlocking Challenges”	United Nations General Assembly 77
4 October 2022	Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare	Solomon Islands Foreign Minister Jeremiah Manele speaks to the media	Media interview with NZ Herald
4 October 2022	Foreign Minister Jeremiah Manele	Solomon Islands foreign minister says his country will not 'choose sides'	N/A
17 November 2022	Minister of Forestry and Research, Dickson Panakitasi Mua	Solomon Islands calls for real commitment to Loss and Damage financing	Sharm El-Sheikh, COP27
3 March 2023	Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare	Manele acknowledges U.S commitment to reopen Honiara Embassy	Honiara, Solomon Islands
7 July 2023	Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare	Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare mulls country's future on 45th year of independence	Independence Day Address

<b>Date</b>	<b>Speech author</b>	<b>Name of Speech</b>	<b>Occasion</b>
15 July 2023	Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare	Exclusive with Solomon Islands' PM Manasseh Sogavare	Online News Interview with CGTN
22 September 2023	Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare	Opening of the United Nations General Assembly	United Nations General Assembly 78
5 June 2024	Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare	PM Manele reaffirms Solomon Islands respect to the One China Policy	Courtesy Call
30 June 2024	Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare	Manele confident in Australia's readiness to bolster new partnership with Solomon Islands	Press Conference at the Honiara International Airport
29 May 2024	Head of Delegation and Solomon Islands Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Jane Waetara	Solomon Islands PRUN HE Jane Waetara delivers national statement to SIDS4	SIDS4 Conference
27 September 2024	Honourable Peter Agovaka Minister of Foreign Affairs and External Trade	Solomon Islands Statement by Honourable Peter Agovaka Minister of Foreign Affairs and External Trade of Solomon Islands At The Debate of The 79th Session of The United Nations General Assembly	New York