

India's Engagement with Mauritius amid the New Maritime Geopolitics

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India's growing role in Mauritius reflects wider shifts in the geopolitics of the Indian Ocean region, where small island states face mounting pressure to pick sides. Built on their shared history and close cultural and economic ties, the India–Mauritius relationship has deepened through defence and maritime cooperation. While this engagement strengthens Mauritius's security infrastructure, it also raises important questions about the limits of its traditionally balanced foreign policy. This brief explores how India's expanding footprint in the Indian Ocean, especially through initiatives such as the Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions (MAHASAGAR), influences Mauritius's capacity to effectively pursue a foreign policy that balances multiple partnerships, as well as outlines the risk for Mauritius against the backdrop of intensifying major power rivalries. The brief highlights that in certain domains, Mauritius remains in a position of dependency, which complicates efforts to bargain or balance in the context of an increasingly zero-sum regional order. Stronger regional integration and leadership as well as additional engagement with European partners can be possible enablers of an independent foreign policy.

Mauritius, a small yet strategically positioned island state in the Western Indian Ocean, has long pursued an outward oriented and pragmatic foreign policy. Since independence in 1968, it has cultivated a diversified web of political and economic partnerships to support national development objectives and safeguard its strategic interests.¹ Central to this diplomatic architecture is Mauritius's long-standing and multifaceted relationship with India. Rooted in deep historical, cultural, and demographic ties, and consolidated through expanding defence partnerships, maritime domain awareness initiatives, and capacity-building cooperation, India has become Mauritius's preferred and most trusted partner, particularly in the security sector.

This bilateral relationship is unfolding within an Indian Ocean region that has become a critical theatre of 21st century geopolitics. The region's strategic value derives from its key sea lines of communication, energy transit routes, and maritime infrastructure that connect African, Middle Eastern, and Asian economies. Consequently, the Indian Ocean has evolved into an arena of heightened great power rivalry, where geopolitical and geo-economic interests intersect. Major actors including China, India, several European Union (EU) member

¹ Daniela Maggraff, 'Seychelles and Mauritius as Pioneers: The Case for a Refined Conceptualization of Small State Foreign Policy,' *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* 47, no. 1 (2025): 65–79.

states, Japan, the United Kingdom (UK), the United States (US), and Russia have intensified their military, diplomatic, and economic engagements across the region.

Within this shifting landscape, India is seeking to consolidate its role as the leading regional power, in part to counterbalance China's expanding influence in both Africa and the wider Indian Ocean. Although recent diplomatic overtures, such as the August 2025 meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping, have stressed cooperation over confrontation, deep-seated strategic competition persists, especially in the maritime domain and in connectivity initiatives influenced by China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its expanding naval presence.²

For Mauritius, these geopolitical dynamics and its deepening reliance on India complicate the pursuit of a foreign policy that is designed to maximize autonomy by cultivating flexible, issue-specific partnerships with a wide range of actors. Situated intellectually within the legacy of the Non-Aligned Movement, it offers a pragmatic, normatively hedged version of a policy that avoids binding alliances. Popular among state representatives in countries of the so-called Global South, it is linked to the promise of strengthening third voices in a system largely defined by great power competition. Its effectiveness, however, depends on the capacity of a small state to maintain credible alternatives, exploit overlapping interests, and employ calibrated strategic ambiguity.³ It also relies on the state's ability to deploy sufficient strategic weight in negotiations.⁴ In the domain of defence and maritime security, in which Mauritius lacks a standing army and is structurally dependent on external support for naval patrols, surveillance systems, and associated financing, such strategic weight is limited. This asymmetry narrows Mauritius's room for manoeuvre and complicates efforts to balance or bargain within an increasingly zero-sum regional environment.

To enhance its autonomy, Mauritius could benefit from fostering regional integration, broadening its pool of strategic partners, and engaging more deeply with the EU and key EU member states, such as France and Germany, whose Indo-Pacific strategies emphasize partnerships with like-minded states and the promotion of international maritime norms.⁵ Positioning itself within these frameworks could bolster Mauritius's bargaining capacity vis-à-vis India and other major actors, thereby reinforcing the foundations of its flexible, non-aligned and pragmatic strategy.

Drawing on public documents, secondary literature, and interviews with Mauritian policymakers, bureaucrats, and journalists conducted between February and April 2025,⁶ this policy brief analyses how India's policy in the Indian Ocean region is also reshaping Mauritius' quest for strategic flexibility amid intensifying great power competition. It argues that maintaining a fluid and low-cost balancing posture is becoming increasingly challenging as external expectations to "take sides" sharpen and the costs of hedging continue to rise.

² Chietigj Bajpae, 'Modi's SCO Summit Visit Shows China and India want to Reset Relations. But the 'Dragon-Elephant Tango will be Tough,' *Chatham House*, September 1, 2025, accessed Dec 4, 2025.

³ Closely related to "constructive ambiguity" (Henry Kissinger) and "calculated ambivalence", strategic ambiguity is a "a rhetorical tactic in which a communicator creates a: (1) polysemic message with multiple reasonable interpretations supported by the text, that is; (2) aimed at audiences from varying interpretive communities; and (3) by which polysemy the communicator stands to gain some specific advantage." Parker Bach et al., 'Let me be Perfectly Unclear: Strategic Ambiguity in Political Communication,' *Communication Theory* 35, no. 2 (2025): 96-106.

⁴ A. Shaji Geogre, 'The Multi-Alignment Advantage in India's Foreign Policy Evolution for Maximizing Strategic Autonomy and Economic Growth,' *Partners Universal Research Publication* 3, no. 4 (2025): 71-91.

⁵ Siddharth Tripathi, 'Germany and India in the Indo-Pacific: United or Untied?' Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Facts & Finding no. 442 (June, 2021), accessed Aug 10, 2025.

⁶ The interviews collected were drawn from a larger study on Mauritius's engagement with external partners, see: Ackiah, K. et al., 'Mauritius's Digital Cooperation and Engagement with External Partners,' IDOS/UOM, May (2025).

India's Engagement with Mauritius: Strengthening Bilateral Ties in all Areas

India's strategic engagement with Mauritius is a central pillar of its broader Indian Ocean policy.⁷ It is therefore highly significant that both maritime doctrines, namely Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) and MAHASAGAR, were formally unveiled in Mauritius during Prime Minister Modi's visits in 2015 and 2025. This underscored the island's symbolic and strategic importance in India's regional vision. MAHASAGAR means "Great Ocean" and reflects the heightened ambition India is placing on the initiative, aiming to counter China's influence by offering strategic alternatives to the Global South. The strategy presents itself as a holistic and integrated approach to maritime security. Beyond support for security infrastructure, it includes elements of capacity-building across multiple sectors, investment in economic development, and efforts to strengthen climate resilience. Through a combination of diplomatic, informational, military, and economic tools of engagement, India advances its vision of a free and open Indian Ocean at a time when China is also expanding its influence in the region. MAHASAGAR is additionally framed as an expression of India's aspiration to act as the "voice of the Global South".⁸ It is important to underscore that the MAHASAGAR doctrine has further elevated the strategic significance of small island states, such as Seychelles, the Maldives, and Mauritius, within India's regional ambitions. Despite their modest size, these islands have become key focal points for major powers vying for influence across the Indian Ocean.⁹

Heightened security concerns in the Western Indian Ocean, particularly threats to commercial shipping lanes vital to India's export-oriented economy, have prompted New Delhi to expand its military presence in the region. This strategic posture includes establishing forward operating bases, conducting joint naval exercises with partners such as France, and signing defence cooperation agreements that permit shared use of facilities, exemplified by India's logistics pact with Japan, which grants access to Japan's base in Djibouti.¹⁰ China's launch of the Maritime Silk Road Initiative in 2013, combined with the growing deployment of Chinese naval assets across the region, has further intensified Indian anxieties amid their ongoing positional, spatial, and strategic rivalry.¹¹ In this evolving security landscape, India has deepened defence cooperation with the US, Japan, and Australia, culminating in the formation of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue.¹² Consistent with this approach, India views itself as the custodian of the Indian Ocean, pursuing a strategy often described as aiming to "keep China out, the United States in, and Pakistan down".¹³

In the economic sphere, India has reinforced its already close ties with Mauritius by intensifying cooperation in recent years. In 2016, the two countries concluded a Special Economic Package worth USD 353 million to support major infrastructure initiatives, includ-

⁷ Hanna Samir Kassab, 'What Is the Indo-Pacific? Genealogy, Securitization, and the Multipolar System,' *Chinese Political Science Review* 8 (2023): 573-596.

⁸ Raghvendra Kumar, 'Situating Mauritius in India's Broader Oceanic Strategy,' *E-International Relations*, March 21, 2025, accessed Dec 4, 2025; TOI News Desk, 'What is MAHASAGAR vision? New policy for Global South unveiled by PM Modi in Mauritius,' *Times of India*, March 12, 2025, accessed Dec 4, 2025.

⁹ Chulanee Attanayake and Amit Ranjan, 'The Small Island States in the Indian Ocean: Perceptions, Concerns and Interests,' *AEI-Insights: An International Journal of Asia-Europe Relations* 8, no. 1 (2022): 101-13.

¹⁰ Samuel Matthews Bashfield, 'Military Security Obstacles to Decolonizing the Chagos: A Reply to Harris,' *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* 17, no. 2 (2021): 230-234.

¹¹ David Scott, 'The Return of the "Indo-Pacific",' *Asia Major XXXIV* (2023): 441; Raj Verma and Hangwei Li, 'Clash of the 'Asian giants': The Sino-Indian Battle for Leadership of the Global South in the Modi-Xi era,' *International Politics* (2025): 1-22.

¹² Scott, 'The Return of the "Indo-Pacific",' 441.

¹³ Rohan Mukherjee, 'Keeping China Out, the United States In, and Pakistan Down: India's Strategy for the Indian Ocean Region,' *Asia Policy* 16, no. 3 (2021): 29-33.

ing a new light-rail system, Supreme Court building, and Ear Nose Throat Hospital.¹⁴ This was followed in February 2021 by the signing of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, widely interpreted as a strategic response to the Mauritius–China Free Trade Agreement (FTA),¹⁵ which was Beijing's first FTA with an African country and came into force in January 2021.¹⁶ Most recently, during Prime Minister Ramgoolam's visit to India in September 2025, New Delhi extended a new Special Economic Package of USD 680 million to Mauritius, further consolidating India's economic footprint on the island.¹⁷

Beyond Mauritius' strategic location and economic ties, India's connection with the island is anchored in deep historical and cultural ties. A significant portion of the Mauritian population traces its ancestry to India, providing a strong basis for India's diplomatic, economic, and cultural outreach.¹⁸ Indian policymakers frequently refer to Mauritius as “mini-India”, reflecting this enduring link. In addition to shared history, culture, and demographic ties, political relations have played a decisive role in shaping bilateral engagement, with eight Indian Prime Ministers undertaking official visits to Mauritius since its independence.

While China and other actors have strengthened their ties with Mauritius across various sectors, India's influence remains unrivalled in the domain of security cooperation. Under their enhanced strategic partnership, and in support of efforts to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, drug trafficking, piracy, and disruptions to sea lines of communication off Somalia and in the Red Sea, India has supplied Mauritius with a range of military assets, including Dornier surveillance aircraft, helicopters, patrol boats, and radar systems. In 2021, the Government of India extended a USD 100 million line of credit to Mauritius for the purchase of defence equipment.¹⁹ Beyond financial support, India has provided technical assistance to develop strategic infrastructure on Agalega, an outer island located roughly 1,000 km north of Mauritius, where a 3 km runway and jetty have been constructed. Officially, this facility is described as a logistical support hub aimed at enhancing maritime security in the Indian Ocean, backed by USD 250 million in Indian investments under the SAGAR programme.²⁰

The Agalega development has sparked significant speculation and controversy regarding India's long-term intentions of establishing such a costly and strategically positioned facility on an island home to just 300 inhabitants. Both Indian and Mauritian authorities assert that the initiative is intended to “enhance the capabilities of the Mauritian Defence and allow India to fulfil its role as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean”.²¹ Critics, however, caution that the project could lay the groundwork for a permanent Indian military presence, drawing comparisons to the US naval base on Diego Garcia.²² Despite international media

¹⁴ Roukaya Kasenally and Manisha Dookhony, ‘New Players, New Ties in the Indian Ocean: A Win - Win Situation for Mauritius?’ *Mauritius Society Renewal* (2022).

¹⁵ India, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, ‘India-Mauritius Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement will Enter into Force on 1st April 2021,’ *Delhi, Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), Department of Commerce*, March 31, 2021, accessed Dec 5, 2025.

¹⁶ Mauritius, The Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry, ‘Mauritius-China Free Trade Agreement (FTA),’ (Port Louis, MCCI, 2021), accessed Dec 5, 2025.

¹⁷ Sachin Parashar, ‘India Announces \$ 680 million Package to Boost Mauritius’ Infra , Security; Mauritius Backs Indian Presence in Chagos,’ *The Times of India*, September 12, 2025, accessed Dec 5, 2025.

¹⁸ Augendra Bhukuth, ‘The ‘Great Experiment’ of Cheap Labor in Mauritius: A Historical Perspective,’ *Labor History* 66, no. 4 (2024): 484-504.

¹⁹ ‘India Grants Mauritius \$100mn for Procurement of Defence Assets,’ *ELE Time News*, March 24 2021, accessed Oct 18, 2025.

²⁰ Smruti S. Pattanaik, ‘China-India Rivalry in the Indian ocean,’ *The Kathmandu Post*, March 14, 2024, accessed Aug 10, 2025.

²¹ Samir Bhattacharya, ‘India Is Embracing a ‘Net Security Provider’ Role in the Indian Ocean Region,’ *Observer Research Foundation*, March 11, 2024, accessed Aug 10, 2025.

²² Kumari Issur, ‘Mapping Ocean-State Mauritius and its Unlaid Ghosts: Hydropolitics and Literature in the Indian Ocean,’ *Cultural Dynamics* 32, no. 1-2 (2020): 117–131.

coverage of Agalega,²³ information from the Indian and Mauritian governments has been scarce, citing national security considerations. This opacity has fuelled concerns over the lack of transparency surrounding the agreement, with minimal parliamentary debate and limited public discourse.

India's influence in Mauritius' security field is not limited to hardware and infrastructure, but extends into its institutions. Since the 1980s, Indian nationals have regularly occupied senior security positions in Mauritius, including the posts of National Security Advisor and the head of the Mauritius Coast Guard.²⁴

Taken together, these dynamics point to a condition of constrained independence. Although Mauritius formally champions a policy of multi-alignment, shaped by pragmatic opportunism and strategic flexibility, in practice it gravitates towards India, inhabiting an ambiguous space between autonomy and dependence. The developments outlined above reveal a security partnership that is both close and deeply embedded, while simultaneously raising broader questions about the real extent of Mauritian autonomy and sovereignty within this relationship, particularly against the backdrop of India's ambition to assert supremacy and leadership in the Indian Ocean Region.²⁵

Mauritius's Engagement with India: Testing the "a friend to all" Approach

Mauritius's national motto, "The Star and Key of the Indian Ocean", is a symbolic assertion of the island's strategic significance in regional maritime and geopolitical affairs. This goes back to the times when the island was still under colonial rule and served as a strategic outpost on the spice route, a thriving plantocracy and an important destination for both slavery and indentured labour.

Mauritius's strategy of economic diversification has long relied on its ability to cultivate relationships with multiple external markets. In the case of sugar, a historic pillar of the Mauritian economy, the country benefitted from the Sugar Protocol under the Lomé Convention, which guaranteed an annual export quota to the EU at preferential prices. Similarly, the growth of the Mauritian textile sector depended heavily on the Multi Fibre Agreement, which provided preferential access to European and US textile markets. As for the acceleration of the financial services sector, another key pillar of the Mauritian economy, it was essentially enabled by the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement with India.

Building on these long-standing external linkages, Mauritius has progressively embedded itself in a wide array of regional, continental, and global groupings. These include the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), Indian Ocean Rim Association, Southern African Development Community, African Union, Commonwealth, and Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie. Its accession to the Non-Aligned Movement just a few years after independence further underscores the country's longstanding commitment to its well-known principle of being "a friend to all, enemy to none".

Despite Mauritius's commitment to a "friend to all" foreign policy, India has consistently occupied a special place in its external relations. Notably, newly elected Mauritian prime ministers almost always choose India for their first official visit, underscoring the privileged

²³ See for instance, Patrick Hilbert, 'Indian Defence Research Wing : la presse indienne confirme l'existence d'une base militaire à Agaléga,' *Defimedia*, May 7, 2025, accessed Oct 20, 2025.

²⁴ Samuel Bashfield, 'Agaléga: A Glimpse of India's Remote Island Military Base,' *The Interpreter*, March 21, 2021, accessed Aug 10, 2025.

²⁵ Aishwarya Dutta, 'Modi and 'Mini India': India's Growing Bilateral Ties with Mauritius and its Dynamics,' *Modern Diplomacy*, March 27, 2025, accessed Aug 10, 2025.

status of the bilateral relationship. India's historical commitment to non-alignment once enabled Mauritius to pursue its own version of a flexible foreign policy. Port Louis has generally maintained space to engage with diverse partners while still assigning India a special role as its preferred partner. However, this arrangement is now under some pressure as India's foreign policy is more assertive and has a strong focus on security. Repeatedly, Indian officials highlight their intent to strengthen cooperation in the area of maritime security.²⁶ The aforementioned official visit of the Mauritian Prime Minister to India where a Special Economic Package of USD 680 million was agreed had an important geo-security dimension. In fact, New Delhi pledged full support for safeguarding Mauritius's Exclusive Economic Zone, strengthening capacity through the refitting of Coast Guard vessels and providing infrastructure assistance for a National Maritime Information Sharing Centre. India even went a step further by committing to support Mauritius in the surveillance of the Chagos Archipelago.

At the same time, militarization of the region is deepening. With the US base on Diego Garcia²⁷ and India's expanding facilities on Agalega, the island nation is becoming a key node in regional security infrastructure. This dual presence has raised concerns among some senior Mauritian officials. Rather than viewing it as evidence of successfully balancing multiple partnerships, they worry that the country could be drawn into future geopolitical confrontations as a "co-belligerent",²⁸ a position that would erode its strategic flexibility.

Yet, distancing from these security partnerships is not a viable option for Mauritius as India and the US remain essential for safeguarding Mauritius's maritime interests, particularly in combating piracy, illegal fishing, and drug trafficking. This strategic reliance might explain why Mauritius remains one of the few African states that has not joined China's BRI. Several interviewees argue that Port Louis declined BRI membership partly due to pressure from India.²⁹ Likewise, Chinese efforts to establish a fishing port in Mauritius reportedly encountered strong resistance from Indian diplomats.³⁰ While officially presented as an autonomous decision, Indian pressure likely played a significant yet indirect role in steering the outcome.³¹ Mauritius's refusal to join the BRI can therefore be interpreted as a small island state operating under the structural influence of a dominant regional power.

²⁶ Anurg Srivastava, 'Diplomacy, Interviews', *Bizweek*, August 25, 2025, accessed Oct 20, 2025.

²⁷ Diego Garcia is the largest island in the Chagos Archipelago, a coral atoll in the central Indian Ocean. Historically a dependency of Mauritius, it was detached in 1965 to form part of the British Indian Ocean Territory. In the early 1970s, the UK forcibly removed the Chagossian population to enable construction of a US military base under a UK-US defence agreement. Today, the island hosts about 4,000 US and British military and civilian personnel, with no permanent local population. Diego Garcia has been a key strategic base for operations in the Persian Gulf War, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Sovereignty disputes persist, even after the International Court of Justice deemed the UK's separation unlawful in 2019 and a treaty to return sovereignty to Mauritius while keeping the US-UK was signed in May 2025. See: UK Parliament, 'Diego Garcia Military Base Bill Concludes Lords Committee Stage', November 26, 2025, accessed Dec 4, 2024; 'Diego Garcia | History, Map, & Facts | Britannica', *Britannica*, November 13, 2025, accessed Dec 4, 2025.

²⁸ Interview with a Mauritian policymaker, 28 March 2025.

²⁹ Opposite views also exist: Some pundits, referencing the existing free trade agreement between Mauritius and China, argue that Mauritius has already secured a better deal, making its participation in BRI unnecessary.

³⁰ Multiple interviews with Mauritian policymakers, Port Louis, March and April 2025.

³¹ P.K. Balachandran, 'Pros and Cons of India's Support to Mauritius against UK on Chagos Issue – Analysis', *Eurasia Review*, July 19, 2024, accessed Dec 4, 2025; Iqbal Ahmed Khan, 'Mauritius and the Battle between India and China over the Maldives', *L'express*, January 10, 2022, accessed Dec 4, 2025; S.Y. Surendra Kumar, 'China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): India's Concerns, Responses and Strategies', *International Journal of China Studies* 10, no. 1 (2019): 27-45; Interview with ICT expert, 7 April 2025.

Discussion and Conclusion: Defending One's Interests in a Contested Geopolitical Order

Mauritius's economic and security profile is deeply, though not exclusively, tied to India. This broader strategic context also highlights the shifting viability of Mauritius's long-standing policy of multi-alignment. Historically, this approach enabled the country to maintain flexible relations with a diverse set of partners while safeguarding policy space. However, as shown in the above analysis, balancing multiple partnerships is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain. Competing geopolitical regimes, especially India, China, and the US, now exert stronger expectations and link economic, security, and political cooperation in ways that narrow the margins for pragmatic engagement.

The India–Mauritius relationship clearly illustrates these pressures. India couples financial support, security cooperation, and narratives of kinship to deepen its strategic presence, thereby tightening Port Louis's constraints. The infrastructure developments on Agalega exemplify how quickly overreliance on a single security provider can emerge, limiting options for complementary arrangements with other partners. Although India's influence remains broadly viewed as positive by the Mauritian public,³² the strategic implications of this deepening reliance are more complex.

Mauritius's strategic challenge ahead is not to exit this asymmetrical relationship, but to safeguard and expand its room for manoeuvre to preserve its autonomy while continuing to derive benefits from the uneven partnership. This is precisely where a strategically oriented, pragmatic, and anticipatory foreign policy must prove its value. As the Foreign Minister of Maldives aptly observed, “small island developing states are exceptionally vulnerable but are not powerless”.³³

Mauritius indeed possesses avenues for both individual and collective agency. Individually, it controls one of the largest Exclusive Economic Zones in the Western Indian Ocean – 2.3 million square kilometres – an asset that can anchor national priorities and shape external engagement. The government's decision to use international judicial mechanisms to press the Chagos claim illustrates national agency in practice. Despite a protracted process, Mauritius significantly advanced its strategic interests. Collectively, influence can be amplified through regional platforms that help dilute asymmetric pressures from major powers. The Western Indian Ocean islands have cultivated a relatively cohesive voice through the IOC, which has proved effective in driving cooperation on fisheries governance, piracy, and maritime security. Regional mechanisms, such as the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre and Regional Coordination Operations Centre, further demonstrate how joint initiatives can enhance regional ownership and operational capacity. Yet, for collective agency to have a transformative effect, these bodies must gain greater political weight. Mauritius could champion reforms that position IOC states as “critical stakeholders in the security and stability of the region rather than pawns in geopolitical competition”,³⁴ including through codifying regional red lines on foreign basing and coordinating collective positions on external military access.

The key question, therefore, is how Mauritius can mitigate overdependence on any single major power while sustaining a realistic and interest-driven strategy. Three pathways stand

³² According to Afrobarometer Round 10, 84 per cent of respondents say that India's economic and political influence is “somewhat” or “very” positive. Afrobarometer. 2024. Summary of Results: ‘Mauritius Round 10 data (2024).’ Afrobarometer, June 13, 2025, accessed Dec 4, 2025.

³³ Abdulla Shahid, ‘Why Small Island States Are Vulnerable but Not Powerless,’ *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, September 27, 2022, accessed Aug 10, 2025.

³⁴ Madvee Jane Moteea-Sewlall, ‘Event Proceedings: The Role of Small Island States in the Geopolitics of the Indian Ocean,’ *Charles Telfair Centre*, 30 May 2023, accessed 10 Aug 2025.

out. First, revitalizing underutilized regional platforms, such as the IOC, could allow Mauritius to act collectively rather than in an isolated manner. Second, partner diversification beyond India, China, and the US can broaden strategic options. Third, cultivating a more structured and forward-looking relationship with Europe could prove particularly valuable, given the EU's weight as a major export market and its comparative strengths in trade, development and climate finance, investment, technical assistance, and maritime security.

President Macron's visit to Mauritius on 20 November 2025, the first by a French head of state in three decades, reinforced this potential by placing Indian Ocean security prominently on the bilateral agenda. It signals that Mauritius may have more room for strategic diversification than previously assumed, pointing to the possibility of a more genuine form of multi-alignment in the maritime domain. While Europe has been slower than other major powers to adapt its engagement to the region's shifting geopolitics, a closer partnership would support Mauritius's ability to maintain autonomy while serving Europe's own interest in building resilient, rules-based cooperation across the Indo-Pacific.

In summary, Mauritius cannot avoid the structural realities of great power competition, but it can shape the terms of its engagement. Strengthening regional agency, diversifying partners, and cultivating a more strategic relationship with Europe offer concrete pathways for reinforcing its autonomy. In an increasingly contested geopolitical environment, these measures are essential for ensuring that Mauritius remains not merely an object of regional competition, but an active shaper of its own strategic destiny.

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