

# Introduction: The Island States, Great Powers, and the Indo-Pacific

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This thematic issue, entitled “The Island States, Great Powers, and the Indo-Pacific,” is a compilation of articles that share perspectives from several island states in the Indo-Pacific and some great powers and their strategic thinking regarding the Indo-Pacific and the role of island states. The term *great power* is used loosely to encompass China, the United States, India, Japan, and Australia. Rather than striving to be an all-inclusive edition that covers all the great powers that are in the Indo-Pacific and the many island states in the region, this issue focuses on some of the less discussed island states and “great powers” competing in the Indo-Pacific. The collection of papers in this issue shares perspectives from some states big and small to shed light on diverse perspectives from the island nations such as Kiribati and the Chagos Islands as well as great powers such as Australia, China, and Japan. While this issue does not have articles specifically dealing with key islands in the region such as Sri Lanka or Maldives or major players such as India, almost all articles touch on these key players as well within the papers. It serves to bring to light some of the other island states in the Indo-Pacific that do not often garner academic discussion in the manner in which some others do.

The issue also has several articles that share the perspectives from countries that could be perceived as the great powers, with influence such as China, Japan, and Australia. A common theme for all the papers is strategic thinking from the perspective of great powers. In the first senior leader perspective, retired US Ambassador and JIPA editorial advisor Daniel Shields discusses the significant role the island of Borneo plays within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, particularly with Indonesia’s building of its new capital, Nusantara, on the island. Next, former US Ambassador John T. Hennessey-Niland outlines measures needed to maintain US credibility in the Pacific Islands, a point that has become clearer in 2022 amid Chinese overtures in the region.

Michael O’Keefe’s article, on the other hand, uses case studies such as Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, and Fiji to argue that it is in fact Australia’s strategic culture that explains the continuity in Australian foreign policy and Canberra’s slow shift to a truly *Indo-Pacific* outlook. In his article, Kei Koga examines Japan’s strategic approach to Pacific islands and concludes that the core strategic objective for

Tokyo is to maintain the regional rules-based order. However, doing so would lead Japan to confront China in some areas. Koga discusses Japan's focus on the Free and Open Indo-Pacific and the rules-based international order.

Similar to Koga, Peter Harris, in his article, also discusses the rules-based international order in great detail, arguing that the Indo-Pacific order is a set of unevenly applied rules and institutions. To support his argument, Harris uses the example of the Chagos dispute between Mauritius and the United Kingdom to argue that the Indo-Pacific's extant norms, rules, processes, and institutions are demonstrably insufficient to protect the interests of small island states.

Moving to the Philippines, Stephen Burgess calls for Washington to continue building on the United States' longstanding relationship with the island nation. Burgess analyzes the Philippines' security profile, the Armed Forces of the Philippines and Philippine Air Force's (PAF) status, and the alliance with the United States. He then appraises what Philippine officials would like the United States and USAF to do to build capacity and develop capabilities and then what the United States and USAF would like Philippines and its PAF to do, especially to counter and deter China. He also assesses how Washington and the USAF might overcome barriers, advance mutual interests, and be creative in working with the Philippines. Finally, he weighs different scenarios about how US and USAF engagement with the Philippines and the PAF may change and evolve to meet future security goals, including the provision of deterrence.

David Scott considers the similarities and differences faced by Singapore and Taiwan vis-à-vis the major powers in the Indo-Pacific. He then moves to consideration of Singapore's and Taiwan's political, geopolitical, and geocultural trajectories, addressing the two nations' relations with other small island states across the Indo-Pacific. Scott then provides a bilateral study of Singapore-Taiwan relations, followed by consideration of how Singapore and Taiwan have responded to the greater powers in the region, specifically China, India, Japan, and the United States.

Too often, Pacific Island Countries (PIC) and their role in the Indo-Pacific are not adequately discussed in academia. To help rectify this situation, Colonel Bud Fujii-Takamoto, USAF, points out that increasing economic and political alignment between Kiribati and China indicates a loss of US and Western influence. If China can succeed in gaining political allies in places like Kiribati, then Beijing may be able to succeed with other PICs to create pockets of increased risk to the US ability to project military power across the Pacific. To counter China's influence in Kiribati, Fujii-Takamoto argues that a first step is to establish a US Embassy in the capital Tarawa and to enter into a Compact of Free Association agreement with Kiribati. He further argues that Washington should increase political influence in the PICs to counter Beijing's expanded influence in the Pacific.

Finally, Manon Leprince examines how the PICs intend to enhance their autonomy and influence in the Pacific region under the “new Pacific diplomacy” and how existing power relations between PICs and the rest of the world are changing. She also explores the use of the Blue Pacific narrative as a strategic tool to challenge the global narrative on the islands and to manifest their agency and the influence of the new Pacific diplomacy on the relationship between PICs and Australia.

We hope the diverse collection of articles in this issue help to shed light on how the current great-power competition is playing out in the Indo-Pacific region and goes beyond players such as China and the United States and that this issue contributes to the vibrant academic discourse on the subject matter by touching on some of the lesser examined islands and nontraditional great powers.

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