There are now four independent small island states in the Indian Ocean and the peace and security concerns of at least three of them have more to do with the global policies of the Western powers and the regional ambitions of the Republic of South Africa than with Soviet threats from the North, either through Afghanistan, the Gulf or the Middle East.

This excludes of course the larger Republics of Madagascar and Sri Lanka; the Indian islands of Laccadive, Andamen and Nicobar; the Australian islands of Christmas and Cocos; the French territory of Réunion; the Omani island of Masira; and the South Yemeni island of Socotra.

With the exception of the Republic of Maldives, which “looks North” as it were, having forged close links with the Arab world and having joined the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) whose first Summit meeting is being held in Dhaka in December, the three small island states in question, namely Mauritius, the Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoros and the Republic of Seychelles, more to the South and more isolated, have all had direct experience of aggression.

Amputated Before Birth

Two of them, Mauritius and the Comoros, were born into the concert of nations as sovereign and independent members with their territorial integrity amputated courtesy of their friends and erstwhile colonial masters, Britain and France respectively.

The third small island country, the Seychelles, was the target in November 1981 of a coup attempt involving more than 50 white mer-
cenaries who flew in from South Africa posing as rugby players. They failed to seize the airport and seven of them were captured but at least 45 others made their getaway to Durban aboard a hijacked Air India plane.

The Seychelles itself was forcibly deprived in 1965 of the islands of Aldabra, Farquhar and Desroches by the British colonial administration, which dumped the three islands with the Chagos archipelago, wrenched unilaterally from Mauritius, to form the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT).

In the case of Mauritius, the trauma resulting from the 1965 "loss" of the Chagos archipelago was delayed for many years because of the secrecy shrouding whatever deal was then struck "between gentlemen" and the prolonged silence of the former Labor government of Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, which has tried, belatedly, to argue that it was the price Mauritius paid for independence.

But the brutal deportation of the 2,000 islanders of the Chagos to Mauritius in the 1970s, concern over militarization of Diego Garcia by the US, support from the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the 1982 adoption of the UN Law of the Sea Convention and the election of the Jugnauth government have led Mauritius to reclaim its natural heritage, peacefully but firmly.

As for the Comoros, when the electorate voted for independence in a December 1974 referendum reluctantly granted by France, the National Assembly in Paris hastily and retroactively legislated that the results would be considered "island by island".

In July 1975, the Comoros became independent "within its colonial boundaries" but comprising only three of the four islands, Grande Comore, Mohéli and Anjouan, which have Moslem majorities. France retained sovereignty over the fourth, Mayotte, with a Christian majority, which counts for 14 per cent of the total population and where 64 per cent of voters had opposed independence in December 1974.

France has held on to Réunion and Mayotte, as well as to the islands of Europa, Bassas de India, Juan de Nova and les Glorieuses, which control access to the Mozambique Channel and which are claimed by Madagascar. France also occupies the island of Tromelin, itself an object of dispute between Madagascar and Mauritius.

After leasing Diego Garcia to the United States in 1965, in exchange reportedly for secret cut-rates on nuclear armaments, Britain kept the rest of the Chagos, but restored Aldabra, Desroches and Farquhar to Seychelles at independence in 1976.
Projection of Western Power

The intensified projection of Anglo-American and French power in the Indian Ocean a quarter-century after the decolonization wave of the 1960s does not lack for theoretical justification: regional "security vacuum", the need to protect "freedom of navigation", defense of the "oil lines", countering "Soviet expansionism".

This line of reasoning does not sit well with the larger countries of the Indian Ocean, who see no "vacuum" but rather "assertive new nationalisms". Such is the case of Burma, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, the Gulf States, Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Indonesia and Australia, for example — although Australia, active vis-à-vis the Pacific and South-East Asia, seems to have "turned its back" on the India Ocean.

Oman, and more recently the United Arab Emirates, traditionally close to the United States, have ventured towards greater balance by establishing diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Chinese leaders have also visited the Gulf States and, for the first time since 1949, two Chinese warships undertook a goodwill tour of Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan in November 1985.

Even though they may share the view of their larger neighbors, the small island states of the Indian Ocean remain highly vulnerable, however, to the "power imperative" of forces foreign to the region, be they of the West or of the East.

The forces most actively interested in influencing the island states are of the West, however. For one, the Soviet Union already occupies the "heartland" of the Eurasian mainland and the islands of the Indian Ocean, which constitute a sort of "rimland" of Eurasia, are springboards for the projection of Western "counter-power" in the region.

The residual lingering presence of the former colonial masters remains strong moreover, in direct proportion to the economic and military vulnerability of these island states. Finally, since Vietnam, Western powers seem disinclined to intervene on any land-mass anywhere in the Third World; islands are more convenient, especially if they present the characteristics of Mayotte or Diego Garcia.

These foreign forces do not have to exert direct military, political, economic or cultural pressure on the island states; they can simply act through local dissidents or exiled elements, mercenaries, the media or multinational corporations to obtain desirable policy changes or totally destabilize their weak targets.
The Republic of South Africa, self-proclaimed "bastion of the Free World in the fight against Soviet expansionism in the region", remains the dominant power in the South-Western Indian Ocean, enjoying tremendous economic, political and military leverage on the Comoros, the Seychelles and Mauritius.

Claiming that the Cape route carries 60 per cent of Western Europe’s and 20 per cent of the United States’ oil requirements, as well as 25 per cent of Europe’s food supplies, South Africa boasts of its naval base at Simonstown, its modern maritime headquarters at Silvermine, with sub-headquarters at Durban, and shipping repair facilities at Port Elizabeth, East London and Richards Bay to patrol and service the area.

These experiences strongly color the peace and security concerns expressed by officials of three of the four small island states of the Indian Ocean I spoke with in New York recently during the 40th anniversary celebrations of the United Nations.

The officials, I might add, expressed surprise at the almost exclusively "northward orientation" of the present workshop. They were equally surprised at the fact that they had not been invited to participate in this meeting.

This is not to say that these small island states are not concerned with the arms race developing to the north of the Indian Ocean. The continuing Soviet occupation of Afghanistan alarms them and they know full well that their area has become all-at-once an extension of the Middle East and of the South-East Asian conflicts, not to mention the ongoing scramble for South Asia. The Indian Ocean, in short, has become a hot theater of the East-West "Cold War".

**US Anti-Soviet Strategic Consensus**

The determination shown by the US in bringing countries from East Africa, the Horn, the Middle East, the Gulf and South Asia together into an anti-Soviet "strategic consensus" hinging on the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDJTF) based at Diego Garcia carries its own inherent destabilizing propensities.

US aid programs are geared to the furtherance of this "strategic consensus". The 1971 signing of a long-term Friendship and Cooperation Treaty between India and the Soviet Union, on the eve of the independence of Bangladesh, subsequent Soviet moves along the rim of the Arabian peninsula and in the Horn of Africa and, above all, the
1979 Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan have only intensified the pressure.

One of the more alarming effects of the East-West rivalry in the Indian Ocean region has been the mushrooming arms race between Pakistan and India on the South-Asian subcontinent. This regional rivalry has now taken on a nuclear dimension.

The small "sea-locked" states of the region are thus acutely concerned that, while talk of a "Zone of peace" is leading nowhere, the Indian Ocean may in fact be turning into a "Nuclear Zone", especially in light of reports to the effect that Israel and South Africa may also have a nuclear potential.

To ask if the US build-up on Diego Garcia was "reactive" or whether the "reactive" move was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan is as academic as the debate over which came first, the chicken or the egg.

Still, the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, if it were obtained peacefully, could no doubt usher in a dynamic era of détente and disarmament in the Indian Ocean. Similarly, Anglo-American recognition of Mauritian sovereignty over the Chagos and French restitution of Mayotte to Comoran sovereignty would restore confidence and trust in the Western presence in the region.

What is very real, however, is the "self-fulfilling power" of US Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan's prophecy that "Asia will belong to the power which will achieve control over the Indian Ocean, and the future of the world will be decided in its waters".

Nearly a century later, his fellow Admiral Elmo Zumwalt put it less grandly but no less pointedly when he announced in 1974, on his retirement as chief of Operational Planning for the US Navy, that "the Indian Ocean would be the keystone of the great strategic readjustment of the 1980s".

Mauritius, the Seychelles and the Comoros have many fears for their peace and security. Their fears take on a special urgency in the overall context of quasi-maximal vulnerability which they share with the Maldives, even though, apart from threats of coups and counter-coups, real or imagined, this latter archipelago has suffered no such trauma as the other three.

Vulnerability Factors of Small States

Indeed, all four island states exhibit the basic features of smallness, dis-
persal and geographical isolation in an area of primary strategic importance for many major powers, including the superpowers, coupled with inherent vulnerability factors, which are well documented in the recently released report of a Commonwealth Consultative Group, entitled "Vulnerability, Small States in the Global Society".

Only one of the four, Mauritius, hovers around the one-million population cut-off mark set as the criterion of smallness by the UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) for its 1969 study on the "Status and Problems of Very Small States and Territories", a criterion embraced by the Commonwealth Group.

In the case of the Comoros, we are talking of half a million inhabitants while the Maldives have a population of close to 200,000 and the Seychelles have about 65,000 people.

In terms of territory and land-area, we are dealing with widely dispersed "archipelagic" states as defined under the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea:

- The main island of Mauritius is 400 miles from Rodrigues, 600 miles from Agalega, and 350 miles from the Saint-Brandon and the Cargados Carajos Groups, with a total land-area of about 800 square miles; the Chagos, including Diego Garcia, are 1,200 miles to the North.
- The four islands of the Comoros span about 200 miles across the Mozambique Channel, with a land-area of 840 square miles.
- The 2,000 islands of the Maldives stretch over 400 miles from north to south, covering 115 square miles of land.
- The 92 islands of the Seychelles, curving eastwards from the African coast and then north, occupy a land-area of 110 square miles.

Even in the absence of external threats, these few facts and figures about these islands, seen against the classic background of their role as strategic bases and exporters of cash-crops through centuries of colonial rule, point to four very fragile societies.

Limited resources, lack of credible defense forces, inability to even patrol — let alone properly exploit — the 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) recognized under the Law of the Sea Convention, undiversified and extraverted economic structures, small internal markets, excessive dependence on external trade, population explosion and the revolution of rising expectations at home are some of the main features of this vulnerability.

The situation is further aggravated by the fact that no common regional approach binds these fragile island states together in terms of their security or economic cooperation.
The Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) launched in July 1982 by Mauritius, Seychelles and Madagascar marked only the very first steps towards regional cooperation in the area. It is in no way comparable yet to such examples as the South Pacific Forum and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States in the field of security, or to the Caricom and the South Pacific Bureau for Economic Cooperation in terms of development.

In mid-1985 the first Indian Ocean Games were held in Mauritius, with participants from the IOC countries as well as from the Maldives and the French island of Réunion.

No Tradition of Regionalism

The absence of a regional approach in the Indian Ocean is noted in the Commonwealth report on Vulnerability. "Given the vast distances separating Mauritius, the Maldives and the Seychelles, they form a regional grouping only in a nominal sense (and) each has tended to pursue its own individual course in establishing economic and political relationships with other countries", says the document.

The report also makes the point that "the strategic location of the Indian Ocean states has meant that they are the subject of superpower rivalry, particularly in respect of the desire to co-opt them into the global strategic network by way of their hosting bases", adding "the prospect of an expansion of the nuclear presence in the Indian Ocean is also a primary concern".

These observations apply with equal relevance to the Comoros, the one non-Commonwealth member of the small island group. The Comoros are on the other hand being urged by the IOC countries to actively join the fledgling regional organization.

Differences among the small island states are no less relevant, however. Two of the four cases under study, namely the Maldives and the Comoros, may be termed "Old World societies" while the other two, Mauritius and the Seychelles, look more like "New World countries".

Maldivians are Moslems, of Aryan-Arabic descent, and speak Divehi, a language close to Sinhalese; Comorans are Moslems, of Arab-African descent and speak a variety of Swahili. Both peoples inhabited their islands before the advent of European colonialism in the region, the Maldives naturally looking to the Gulf and the Comorans identifying with
East Africa. In the case of Mauritian and Seychellois, both peoples are creole-speaking products of modern colonial times, admixtures of European masters, Afro-Asian slaves, Indian indentured laborers and Chinese immigrants thrown together for less than three centuries. Their sense of national identity is still in the process of formation.

The closest that all four small island states have come to a regional approach regarding their peace and security concerns is their support for the long-standing call of the UN General Assembly, dating back to 1971 and initiated by Sri Lanka, for the Indian Ocean to be declared a "Zone of Peace".

Since then, this call has been taken up repeatedly by the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Organization of African Unity (OAU). All four belong to the NAM and, except for the Maldives, the other three belong to the OAU.

Mauritius, the Maldives and the Seychelles are also members of the Commonwealth, but only Mauritius, independent since March 1968, has remained a stable though struggling pluralistic democracy with a free press and a Westminster-type Parliament.

The Seychelles have been a one-party State since the coup d'État of June 1977. The Maldives changed from a Sultanate to a Republic in November 1968 but they have no political parties and candidates for the 40 elective seats of the 48-seat People's Council or Majlis run as independents.

Mauritius, the Comoros and the Seychelles participate as well in the Agence de Coopération Culturelle et Technique (ACCT). Neither the Commonwealth nor the Francophone community have taken a position on security issues and all four small island states have special economic ties with either Britain or France, if not with both.

**Coups d'État: The Comoros**

Such constraints led political leaders searching for dignity and viability to resort to so-called "progressive" coups d'État in the Comoros in August 1975 and in the Seychelles in June 1977.

In the Comoros, with a per capita GNP of $230, more than 80 per cent illiteracy and 0.70 doctors per 10,000 population, the coup was carried out by about 30 armed men in the name of the Front national uni (FNU), a coalition of opposition parties led by Ali Soilih. The FNU proposed a secular, socialist revolution.
France suspended its financial aid, amounting to 41 per cent of the territorial budget in 1975, ceased all services it was providing and withdrew all technical assistance to the already amputated country whose economic mainstays were perfume oils, spices, and fishing.

Reports began to circulate about the Soilih regime's brutality towards the Comoran people. Many counter-coups failed. Finally, in May 1978, a self-styled "Clandestine Liberation Force" led by French mercenary Bob Dénard, alias Said Mustapha Madjoud, sailed in through the night, toppled the Soilih regime and reinstated Prince Ahmed Abdallah, overthrown by Soilih in 1975.

Soilih was killed, allegedly trying to escape. Under the watchful eyes of Bob Dénard's mercenaries, the Abdallah régime conducted a national referendum in October 1968 in which Mayotte did not participate. It provided for a federal system with a large degree of autonomy for each island government.

France thus made a strong comeback in the Comoros, taking over defense and security of the fragile new state. But the then regime of President Giscard d'Estaing continued to keep the island of Mayotte jealously French.

"We restored special ties with France in the hope that the French would eventually right the wrong inflicted on us and restore Mayotte to our rightful sovereignty", said a Comoran official.

"But even with the Socialist regime of President Mitterand, elected in 1981, things are going nowhere and I am afraid that the younger generation of Comorans may not be as amenable as those in power now", he added.

In December 1981, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution supporting Comoran claims to Mayotte and calling on the French government "to resume and actively pursue negotiations with the Comoran government with a view to ensuring the effective return of the island of Mayotte to the Comoros as soon as possible".

The Seychelles of Albert René

In the Seychelles, independent since June 1976, Prime Minister France Albert René, with the help of a handful of armed policemen, engineered a coup in June 1977 against President James Mancham, citing his "lavish spending".

With a per capita GDP of $1,330 in 1982, an illiteracy rate of less than
40 per cent and a well-developed public sector and nearly 100,000 tourists a year, the Seychelles exhibit stronger features of "development" than the Comoros.

Until recently however, its development prospects remained limited and the country was heavily dependent on external assistance, mainly from the United Kingdom.

Denying the charges of Soviet influence levelled by Mancham, the René regime called in a few hundred Tanzanian troops. This cooperation soon led to the signing of a mutual Defense Pact under which the Tanzanians were to facilitate deployment of the Seychelles Popular Defense Forces.

A new Constitution proclaimed in March 1979, established a one-party socialist system, based on the Seychelles People’s Progressive Front (SPPF), with a unicameral Assembly of 25 members and executive power vested in the President.

As in the Comoros, coup attempts multiplied, centering around the London-based Mouvement pour la Résistance (MPR) led by Mancham.

The René régime kept the Seychelles within the Commonwealth, joined the World Bank, strengthened defense relations with Tanzania, denied ceding a military base to the USSR on the island of Coetivy, and extended until 1990 the lease of the US Air Force tracking station in Victoria, the capital, for an annual rent of $2.5-million, four times the previous figure.

At the same time, the Seychelles cut a high profile in the NAM and developed ties with Cuba and Algeria in the fields of health, education, agriculture and diplomacy.

It is against this background that the mercenaries of Mad Mike Hoare landed at Victoria on November 25, 1981. New Tanzanian troops were called in to crush the coup attempt. The aftermath of this spectacular affair pointed directly to South Africa. Kenyan and US Central Intelligence Agency involvement were also suspected.

Seven mercenaries captured in the Seychelles, including a woman, were charged with treason. One government officer was killed in the fighting. The woman was set free and one of the men, Martin Dolinchek, confessed to being a senior South African Intelligence officer and was sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Another South African was jailed but the four others, two white Zimbabweans, one Briton and one South African, were sentenced to death. President René pardoned all six convicts in 1983 and deported them to South Africa.
The South African Connection

In South Africa, the government released in December 1981 40 of the 45 mercenaries who had hijacked the Air India plane to Durban. The others, charged with kidnapping, were freed on bail. The following month however, Pretoria brought hijacking charges under the Civil Aviation Offenses Act against all 45, and the Rand Daily Mail reported the government warned them not to co-operate with a special UN Commission investigating the affair.

They were sentenced in July 1982: Hoare got 10 years in jail for hijacking. The others were jailed for between five years and six months. The judge said he had taken into account Hoare’s age, 63 years, and the fact that he was “a dedicated anti-Marxist”, and he rejected as “pure hearsay” the charge that the South African government was involved in the coup attempt.

This episode was hardly closed when an army rebellion shook the Seychelles in August 1982. The René régime survived but again it had to call in reinforcements of Tanzanian troops.

In November 1982, René shuffled his cabinet, signalling a move away from his leftist foreign policy to a more evenhanded diplomacy. He replaced Marxist hard-liner Jacques Hodoul with bon vivant gynaecologist Dr Maxime Ferrari as Foreign Minister.

Eight months later, Seychelles’ one-woman delegation to the UN and the USA presented her credentials to President Ronald Reagan in Washington and said:

“We attach great importance to maintaining and further strengthening the close bonds of friendship and co-operation between our countries which, though unequal in size and power, have a common belief in freedom, democracy and human dignity”.

In his remarks, Reagan commended the Seychelles for its “pragmatic approach” to development and self-sufficiency: “I share your hope that through careful management, the Indian Ocean can provide economic resources to enrich the lives of all peoples on its shores without suffering from industrial pollution. The US is also firmly committed to a policy that has assured the freedom of ships of all nations to use the Indian Ocean in peace”.

President René lifted a ban requiring American and British warships requesting docking facilities to sign a declaration that they were not carrying nuclear weapons. The USSR had agreed to observe this requirement but not the US and Britain. US estimates show the ban cost
the Seychelles $1 million a year in terms of revenues lost from the US fleet alone.

**Mauritius: The Diego Factor**

In Mauritius, the months preceding the 1982 general elections were rife with reports of assassination plots hatched by the CIA against leaders of the opposition MMM-PSM Alliance, which had adopted a militant stance on the Diego Garcia issue. Rumors also spread of ghastly manoeuvres by the outgoing Labor government to engineer a break-up of the Alliance or postpone the elections.

Polling went off peacefully however, as scheduled, and the Alliance swept the totality of 62 elective seats with more than 65 per cent popular support. But a seemingly bizarre self-destructive bid for absolute power by the MMM secretary-general Paul Bérenger soon led to the break-up of the Alliance in 1983, followed by new elections. This time, Prime Minister Anerood Jugnauth’s new MSM, itself a new alliance comprising a large breakaway MMM faction and Vice-Premier Harish Boodhoo’s PSM, won handily, helped by the old parties, Ramgoolam’s Labor and Gaëtan Duval’s PMSD.

Bérenger, who ten years earlier had already turned his back on the fundamental MMM commitment to a class-based assault on race politics in Mauritius, carried his “apartheidistic” manoeuvres to their ultimate conclusion, going down to personal defeat in the process: he tried to repeat the French plantocracy’s 1967 anti-independence gambit, through Gaëtan Duval, of coalescing all minorities and subminorities against, the pro-independence Hindu majority and, like Duval, he failed.

However, the forces which came together explicitly “in defense of democracy and pluralism in Mauritius” in 1983 are the same ones which continue to want the return of the Chagos to Mauritian sovereignty and the proclamation of the Indian Ocean as a “Zone of Peace”.

For the two old parties, Labour and PMSD, the crusade for democracy, the Chagos and the IOPZ concept was a rather delayed conversion: Labor was in power when Mauritius was amputated of the Chagos, and Labor and PMSD joined in a coalition government after independence, remaining silent about Diego Garcia, putting off elections until 1976, harassing, arresting and detaining MMM activists, and generally curtailing freedoms of expression and association.

In his speech last month to the 40th session of the UN General
Assembly, Mauritian PM Jugnauth said:

"There are policies based on the assumption that nuclear weapons can be limited to selective employment in battle areas and damage limited. There are powerful groups which believe that the nuclear threshold can be crossed and its consequences controlled. The nuclear arms race finds abettors who believe that nuclear superiority confers political advantages. Within certain circles, the insane perception is developing that a nuclear war can be fought and won. It is inadmissible that they should be allowed to inflict the possible consequences of their obsessions and paranoias on the world ... The tensions between the superpowers and bloc rivalries threaten us with the terrifying prospect that the third world war might be unleashed anywhere at any time".

The Maldives: Breaking Out

Caught up in this kind of a no-win situation, buffeted by economic, political and military pressures, small island states can perhaps look to regional co-operation as a first circle of defense and, beyond that, to bilateral security arrangements unless they wish to seek a formal neutrality status and to multilateral co-operation in the field of economic development.

As the Commonwealth report on "Vulnerability" puts it: "... Most small states possess only a minimal deterrent capacity in virtually all spheres ... They require initial assistance to acquire self-help techniques but also semi-permanent support bilaterally and multilaterally ... Small states should recognize the enormous value of a sustained and sharply focussed effort to foster programs of political and technical co-operation with other small states in the same geopolitical grouping".

The Maldives, with a fishing-based economy and a per capita GDP of $462 in 1982, have done a lot in the past five years to break out of isolation and establish the kind of global diplomatic, commercial and transportation links with the rest of the world that Mauritius, the Comoros and the Seychelles have had for some time.

Since the British closed down the RAF base at Gan in 1976, more than a decade after the nation became independent, the Maldives signed an economic, technical and educational agreement with Iraq, opened full diplomatic relations with Sri Lanka and India, opened up the economy to IMF and World Bank inspection, set up air links with Europe, the Middle East and the Far East, struck a rapprochement with Britain, and
achieved membership of UNESCO and the Commonwealth. It also hosted in July 1984 in Male the second meeting of Foreign Ministers of SAARC, attended by the representatives of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who had already committed the Maldives to search, jointly with Bangladesh and India, for implementation of the UN resolution declaring the Indian Ocean a "Zone of Peace", opened the Male ministerial meetings saying:

"Our societies are quite diverse but their hopes and expectations do not vary. Together, our peoples are sure of themselves, confident of their identities and confident too of their ability to control their own destinies".

This confidence is shared by the other three small island states of the Indian Ocean. But confidence alone has proved insufficient up to now to protect the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of small countries.

The Strange Concept of Regional Unity

The continuing occupation of the Chagos by Britain and Mayotte by France, together with the increased militarization of Diego Garcia by the United States and the ever-threatening presence of South Africa, indicate that the ample exercise of international relations and prudent management of foreign policy have failed to restore the territorial integrity of Mauritius and the Comoros.

The Law of the Sea concept of "archipelagic states" may on the other hand give renewed relevance to the question of the "unfinished decolonization" of these two countries.

In purely military terms, the four small island states of the Indian Ocean need to intensify co-operation among themselves, exchanging news, security and intelligence information. Economically, regional co-operation seems essential for market widening, regional management and development, defending common interests vis-à-vis multilateral aid agencies or multinational corporations, and the proper protection and use of EEZs.

These points are all well made in the Commonwealth report on "Vulnerability". However, the document, drafted as a result of one year's reflection after the invasion of Grenada, seems to approve of the invasion by giving primacy to "regional unity" over "sovereign rights of individual States".
This notion of "regional unity" is particularly difficult to understand in light of the "underlying principle of the study" outlined in preliminary remarks to the effect that "national sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence, underwritten in the UN Charter, (are) no less applicable to small states than to larger nations more capable of defending the vital attributes of their sovereignty".

Politically, the need arises for small states all at once to avoid getting drawn into superpower and bloc rivalries and to enhance internal democratic and human rights procedures because security also lies in strengthened internal cohesion and core values.

Denunciations of human rights abuses and reports of coup attempts are now plagues the Abdallah regime. Two groups in exile, the National Committee for Public Salvation and the Comoran United National Front, in October 1981, formed a "patriotic alliance to fight the anti-democratic regime of Ahmed Abdallah", to steer Comoran foreign policy towards "active nonalignment and to "return Mayotte to the Comoran national entity".

Comoros, New Murmurs; Seychelles, New Peace?

The Abdallah government has also been beset by corruption and reshuffles. In April 1984, a former British soldier, Walter John Pilgrim, was sentenced to two years in prison in Perth, Australia, where he was trying to recruit 50 mercenaries to overthrow the Comoran regime.

Early this month, the trial of 68 Comorans, charged with plotting a coup d'Etat on March 8, 1985, came to a close in Moroni: 17 of the accused, including Moustapha Said Cheikh, secretary-general of the outlawed Democratic Front, were jailed for life and only one was acquitted.

Threats against the René régime on the other hand have dwindled considerably. Tanzanian forces have been "phased out" and replaced by Seychellios troops. New Assembly elections were held in August 1983.

On a visit to Mauritius in 1982, President René said the Seychelles supported the new Mauritian government in its efforts to regain Diego Garcia and achieve demilitarization of the Indian Ocean. In 1983, he congratulated the Mauritian Prime Minister on his re-election, saying he was convinced Jugnauth would continue "to guide Mauritius in the interest both of the Mauritian people and other brotherly nations".
In December 1983, South Africa arrested three Britons and two French men at a camp near Johannesburg where they were training in preparation for a “sixth coup attempt” in the Seychelles. South African police said the plot was instigated on behalf of Mancham’s London-based MPR.

René himself was re-elected President of the Seychelles in June 1984. In July 1984, Seychelles established diplomatic relations with the Vatican, undercutting the London-based opposition’s efforts to pit the Church against the State.

In November 1984, President René formally denied that the Soviet Union was using the Seychelles as a military base. He admitted that part of the Seychelles’ defense system depended on Soviet-made missiles and that 40 North-Koreans were training the national army. He described the Seychelles’ foreign policy as “a small country trying not to fall into any of the superpower camps”.

**Colombo, a Key Out of the Cold-War Trap?**

The burning question is: Can these small island states avoid the Cold War trap? And if so, how?

Just as the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan presents a major security concern for all countries of the Indian Ocean region, so, it would seem, should the continued Anglo-American and French occupation of the Chagos and Mayotte be equally disturbing. The small island states of the Indian Ocean and Afghanistan are mirror images of the East-West Cold War.

The Big powers, whether of the East or of the West, will continue drowning Indian Ocean opinion under the deluge of pious and self-serving pronouncements while furthering their own global interests at the expense of the countries of the region, big and small.

There can therefore be no alternative to regionalism when it comes to furthering the IOPZ concept, which means closing the door on opportunities for foreign interference as well as an ongoing coming-together of the 40 or 50 Indian Ocean hinterland and littoral countries in the interests of regional peace and co-operation on the basis of mutual benefit and respect.

Called upon by the US State Department to study “Soviet Penetration in the South Pacific”, Professors Robert Kiste and R.A. Herr, in a report completed in December 1984, expressed the view that the South Pacific
region was "for the time being one of the freest in the world from Soviet or allied influence".

The authors pointed out, however, that "the most concrete examples of opportunities (for eventual Soviet involvement) could follow from the controversies created by Western nations", adding that instability in that region could in fact result from US and French activities.

The US State Department swiftly denied that the authors of the report had "accused" the US and France, and stressed that this document was only one of many working papers and did not reflect "the positions or opinions of the US government".

The following day, and this was only on November 14th 1985, a US Navy spokesman said in Hong Kong, during the annual visit there of the USS Blue Ridge, flagship for the US 7th Fleet, that the Soviet Union had "substantially reinforced its naval presence in the Pacific".

What lessons can the Indian Ocean small island states derive from all this? Short of getting Greenpeace International, the militant ecological movement, to show for the Indian Ocean the kind of interest it has shown up to now for the Pacific, the words of the Seychelles ambassador to the UN remain valid:

"... There should be, under the umbrella of the UN, discussions between countries of the region and the big powers to see what the problem is. Is it really oil routes that have to be protected? If so, from whom? ... Why don't the superpowers choose a battleground in their own backyard? No one has appointed anyone as policeman in international affairs. Imperialist arrogance will endanger peace and security in the world... We must do everything within our power to get the UN conference of Colombo held..." Is anyone listening?

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