

Adjusting Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS) Foreign Policy towards East Asia

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Short Communication

For the past decades, PSIDS engagement with the International community through their foreign policies has been limited. There are few reasons to this, ranging from our failure to implement it or just the fear of running the risk to a loss, to pressures from traditional partners.

During the cold war era, the Pacific region came under the sphere of influence of the West and the scenario remains to this present, however cold war gestures should be reserved aside and PSIDs must start looking beyond these old lines to explore opportunities in the wider world. This 21st century international relations call for more constructive engagement rather than confrontation.

The current trend of relying too much on Traditional Partners put PSIDS in a state of standstill and to the extent that they tend to see the moving world from a "stranger's perspective", and failing to acknowledge their role in this competitive globalized world.

As East Asia is experiencing healthy growth in their economies, many opportunities are also available in that region. China's booming economy has created an avenue for the East Asian region to enhance their economic and trading postures to a more competitive market.

PSIDS can learn more and benefit from this region, despite our many similarities in cultural diversity, food or climate etc. However their technological advancement, creativity and their entrepreneur skills and attitude is the key to PSIDS success. PSIDS need to establish the "Asian Approach with Pacific Characteristics" to meet their aspirations practically.

Records shows that a good number of PSIDS are starting to enhance their engagement with the region. This is a good path; however adjusting foreign policy towards this region needs a thorough assessment and calculation based on both the economic opportunities and the political dynamics of this region as well. PSIDS priority is to create new friends; however they have to ensure that there are no miscalculations between their new friends and their existing ones.

Therefore their strategy would not be to over-estimate their beliefs and hopeful assumptions on their traditional friends. This is to allow their confidence in setting new visions and goals with their new friends, based on strategic partnership and mutual cooperation. This

will allow them to set standards and conditions that are favorable to their context, and which heavily connects to their domestic policies. And this will keep them abreast on a win-win position.

At the same time they will formulate their uncertainties, by preparing to engage with East Asia on the issues that their traditional friends cannot provide to them. In this, they are creating a balanced means of engagement from their side towards both their traditional partners and their new strategic partners.

The United States is re-dialing its engagement in the Asia Pacific with its so-called "Pivot to Asia", the rising China's influence and soft diplomacy is also absorbed highly in the region, and Russia is also inventing its version of "Pivot to Asia". Japan under Shinzo Abe's administration is getting more conservative and Taiwan and China has imposed a diplomatic truce in 2011 vowing not to disturb each other's allies. ASEAN is entering into its economic integration in 2015, yet one of their key issues, the South-China Sea issue is still pending.

All these will have an impact towards PSIDS engagement in the region; therefore PSIDS policy would be to position their neutrality towards the political dynamics, at the same time pressing their economic engagement with the region. By this, their policy is preparing them for the best in terms of economic achievements and also prepares them to avoid the worst, (in any event a conflict occurred in the region).

By pushing economic incentives over political postures towards the East Asian region, PSIDS also limits the avenue for third party interference and politicization of decisions to penetrate their capitals, and this will help strengthen their governance structures and political systems. In this, PSIDS are placing their bargaining chips rightly at the center of a "many choice", thus pulling them out from the "only option syndrome" of "abiding to receive" that imposed to them by their traditional partners. After all, PSIDS foreign policy engagement with the wider world does not only seek to explore opportunities but to also examine approaches that directly anchor their solidarity domestically. This is what foreign policy should be for PSIDS if PSIDS continue to refer to their foreign policies as "an extension of their domestic policies."