

Sri Lanka-China Bilateral Relations: Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean Region

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Since ancient times, Sri Lanka and China have maintained cordial relationships in the political, social and economic arena to promote development and prosperity among the two nations. Furthermore, Sri Lanka was among the first few countries to recognize the People's Republic of China after the political revolution in 1949. During the era of internal war, China played a key role in supporting Sri Lanka by providing assistance to deter the separatist movement in the northern part of Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka-China bilateral relations improved tremendously under the leftist governments, especially under the former President, Mahinda Rajapaksa. The election manifesto called "Mahinda Chinthana 2005/2010" mainly pointed out that Sri Lankan foreign policy and relations for the next decade will focus on traditionally friendly nations in the Asian region. Meanwhile, China became a foremost aid donor and financial facilitator to Sri Lanka during the war and post-war era. In addition, they were able to secure their regional interest by gaining strategic projects which helped to boost both nations' economic and political relations in recent decades. The main objectives of this paper are to evaluate the Sri Lanka-China relations focusing on Chinese interest over the "New Silk Route" and the maritime security in the Indian Ocean. Through that, the understanding of Chinese and Sri Lankan interests on bilateral relations and interdependency in the policy making process is also examined. In addition, utilization of soft power in state relations in a bilateral scenario will be examined to understand the significance of maritime security in the Indian Ocean. The key finding of this research explains how China became successful in soft power utilization in gaining certain outcomes in the economic and political scenario and how they secured their interest in the Indian Ocean. Primary sources such as government press releases, reports, speeches and statements made by foreign policy decision-makers were used to examine the relations between China-Sri Lanka and to identify the national interest of countries and highlight significant issues. Secondary sources will be referred to in order to understand the context. The research will take a qualitative approach in the social science field to achieve the main objectives.

Keywords: New Silk Route, Indian Ocean, Maritime security, Soft power