REFLECTIONS ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Acknowledgements

The year 2025 marks two significant milestones for the Department of International Relations (IR) at the University of Colombo. First, we celebrate 15 years since the establishment of the Department - the first and still the only Department of International Relations within Sri Lanka's state university sector. Second, we commemorate 40 years of the Master of Arts in International Relations (MAIR) programme - the oldest postgraduate degree in IR in the country. This publication is issued in honour of these momentous occasions.

This volume is the result of a collective endeavour involving the commitment and intellectual generosity of many individuals. On behalf of the Department of International Relations, I extend my sincere gratitude to all contributing authors for sharing their knowledge, insights, and time in bringing this project to fruition. Contributors were invited for their subject-matter expertise and longstanding engagement with the development of IR in Sri Lanka. They include members of our academic staff, distinguished MAIR alumni who continue to shape the field as practitioners, and esteemed scholars from sister universities and research institutes.

I wish to express special appreciation to Senior Professor Nayani Melegoda, the founding Head of the Department, for graciously agreeing to write the Preface, and to Professor Emeritus Amal Jayawardane for writing the Introduction - both of whom have been foundational to the growth of IR in Sri Lanka. My sincere thanks also go to the reviewers whose rigorous evaluations ensured the scholarly quality of this volume.

A note of heartfelt thanks goes to Professor Maneesha Wanasinghe-Pasqual for her tireless efforts in coordinating with all contributors and and Ms Nishali Ranasinghe for her assistance. Finally, I am grateful to Mr Turrance Nandasara of the University of Colombo Press and his team for their professionalism and efficiency in managing the production and printing process.

Dr Pavithra Jayawardena
Head/ Department of International Relations
University of Colombo
July 29, 2025

Preface

The Department of International Relations at the University of Colombo, the first in the University system in Sri Lanka is celebrating its 15th anniversary. This publication is to commemorate the achievements of this newly created relatively small department (small in terms of staff) which has contributed to Sri Lanka's International Relations education in a major way. The Department of International Relations can be proud of its alumnus in various sectors strengthening human capital of Sri Lanka and overseas. Similarly, we are humbled that we have made an impact in Sri Lanka first introducing and then taking the subject of International Relations (IR) to our academic curriculum, training and educating a cohort of academics who will oversee the further development of the subject in Sri Lanka. Simultaneously a group of professionals who will see the praxis of international relations in their chosen field have graduated from this Department, having completed the Master of Arts in International Relations (MAIR), which is even older than the Department of IR by few more decades.

The Department of IR can boast of training many career diplomats of the country, several of them reaching the status of Secretary to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sri Lanka. Similarly, the top brass of the military establishments was trained in International Relations by us, a former commander of the Sri Lanka Air Force and a Chief of Staff of the Sri Lanka Army among the many who obtained insights on International Relations. Almost all diplomatic missions in Sri Lanka, with a large number at the Embassy of the United States of America have recruited the graduates of Department of International Relations. Further, judges of the Supreme Court, top civil servants, institutional heads, think tank experts, and academics have opted to do MAIR at our Department. The list goes on. We are pioneers in introducing tracer studies at an academic department hence we have kept track of the progress of our graduates.

As we look back to our humble beginnings, we introduced IR as a subject from 1979 in the oldest Department in the Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo, that is in the Department of History. That was as a subject for the undergraduates on International Affairs. The great mentors we had in M.G.A. Cooray, Amal Jayawardane and Shelton U Kodikara should be mentioned in the context of laying the foundation stone in IR education in Sri Lanka. In 2000, we started offering four-year IR Honors Degree programme for the undergraduates. By 2010, IR was a fully-fledged academic program in the Faculty of Arts. Bifurcated from the then existing Department of History and IR, the Department of IR was created in 2010. The transition was not without pain, the limited and shared resources, very few academics and many other constraints. Yet, the popularity of the department from the undergraduates, the support from the academia and the international expertise brought by our staff gave us strength to do well. Our academics strengthen the department further by quickly completing their postgraduate and teaching qualifications. By having internationally qualified and recognized staff, we were able to bring Sri Lankan perspectives to expand the discipline of

IR. The history and the timeline of development is discussed elsewhere in this volume hence it is not dealt here. Today, the Department is one of the strongest with its accomplished and skilled academics who bring new knowledge to their teaching and research. It is also one of the most popular degree programmes with the largest number of students in the Faculty of Arts. In the first year, almost 400 students read for IR. Similarly, the oldest and only two-year Masters in International Relations at a state university, annually takes a batch of nearly 50 students for its postgraduate program. Further, the Master of Philosophy leading to Doctor of Philosophy in International Relations has been introduced.

Though the number is small, the Department of IR can boast of internationally trained academics from the United Kingdom, United States of America, India, New Zealand, Sweden and Japan. They all began their academic journey from the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. Apart from doctoral studies, they have also competed and secured prestigious international fellowships and awards such as the Fulbright, Japan Foundation, Commonwealth scholarships, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Department of State – USA Foreign Policy summer institutes and India – Sri Lanka grants to name a few. They also work as international consultants in many research programs and serve as examiners in the region and beyond, far too numerous to mention here. For a new department the highest achievement in recent times has been the award of the HETC grant for 18 million LKR in a World Bank grant in an open competition. The staff also secured memorandums of understandings with universities such as Uppsala, Sweden and Warsaw, Poland.

The staff have from time to time provided the expertise to various national-level institutions such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defence, the National Defence College, Defence Services Command and Staff College, Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, the Bandaranaike International Diplomatic Training Institute. They have also collaborated with regional and international institutions such as Regional Center for Strategic Studies through its Rule of Law Collaborative with University of South Carolina, USA. They are also invited by the media outlets for many of the programs relating to International Relations on regular basis. This book consists of well researched articles that reflect the expert knowledge of the academics of the Department and the invited authors. The articles showcase the depth and breadth of the discipline of IR and where it is as of 2025.As the founder Head of the Department of IR, it has given me great pleasure to write this Preface. On behalf of my colleagues, I wish to thank all those who contributed to this anniversary publication.

Nayani Melegoda
Senior Professor in International Relations
University of Colombo
July 29, 2025

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The Authors

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Chandana Wickramasinghe, a retired Major General, is a distinguished military officer with over 36 years of service to the nation, marked by honour and dignity. An alumnus of both the Sri Lanka and Indian Military Academies, served as Chief of Staff of the Army before retirement. Expertise includes military leadership, international security, and strategic studies. Contributed as a motivator to Sri Lankan cricket and strengthened civil-military relations in Jaffna. Holds a Master's in International Relations from the University of Colombo and in National Security Studies from the Korean National Defence University. Currently pursuing a PhD in National Security Studies.

Chanaka Talpahewa obtained his PhD in Politics and Internationals Studies from the University of Cambridge, UK. During his doctoral studies he has been awarded the Cambridge Commonwealth Trust Scholarship, Developing World Education Fund Scholarship & Smuts Scholarship in Commonwealth Studies. He obtained MPhil in Politics and International Studies from University of Cambridge (recipient of the British Chevening Scholarship) and MBA, MA (IR), MDS and BSc. degrees from the University of Colombo. In November 2021, Dr. Talpahewa was felicitated as one of the 'Distinguished Alumni and Academics' by the University of Colombo. A career diplomat, he currently serves as the Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the Philippines.

George I. H. Cooke possesses a PhD in International Relations from the University of Colombo. An alumnus of the Netherlands Institute of International Relations, *Clingendael*, he was a Visiting Fellow at Ubon Ratchathani University, Thailand. He founded the Awarelogue Initiative, teaches International Relations at several seats of higher education in Sri Lanka, has curated exhibitions which have toured across the island, while also having authored and edited several publications within the sphere. His areas of research interest include foreign policy, diplomacy, regionalism and integration.

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Nayani Melegoda is a Senior Professor of International Relations at the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. Having graduated with a First Class from the University of Colombo she obtained her Masters from the University of British Columbia, Canada, Ph.D. from the University of Leeds, UK and an Advanced Diploma in Conflict Resolution and Peace from Uppsala University Sweden. She is a recipient of the Senior Fulbright – Hays Fellowship and Japan Foundation Fellowship. She served as a member of the Fulbright commission Sri Lanka, University Coordinator in the establishment of the National Defense College, Sri Lanka, Member of the International Research Committee of the National Science Foundation, Member of the Prime Minister's Office Task Force on Indian Ocean, 2017 – 2018. At present serves as the Senior advisor at the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies and country expert for Sri Lanka in the Varieties of Democracies (V-Dem) Project, University Gottenburg, Sweden since 2015.

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Introduction
The Development of International Relations (IR) as an Academic Discipline in Sri Lanka

Amal Jayawardane

A few years back, the world celebrated the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of the academic discipline of International Relations (IR). The World's first Chair in International Politics was founded at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth in 1919. 'International Affairs' were traditionally taught under subjects such as History, International Law, Philosophy, and Economics. After the First World War, however, it started developing as an independent and separate academic discipline. Even though it is a multi-disciplinary subject, it has now been recognized as a separate discipline with its own identity, concepts and approaches.

This year (2025), the Department of International Relations at the Colombo University is celebrating the 40th anniversary of the commencement of its Masters Degree program in International Relations (MAIR) and the 15th year of the inception of the Department of IR as a separate entity. These are of course chronological markers in the unfolding history of the evolution of academic disciplines, but they also provide us an occasion to reflect on our past. It is in this context that an attempt has been made to look back at the development of IR as an academic discipline in Sri Lanka.

The academic study of International Relations is a late development in Sri Lanka (Jayawardane, 2001). For a small country, Sri Lanka played a prominent role in international affairs from the very beginning of its post- independence period. As evident from the debates in parliament, quite a few politicians both in the government and opposition had taken a keen interest in foreign policy matters. However, there was hardly any academic discourse in international affairs during the early period. Sir Ivor Jennings, the first Vice-Chancellor of University of Ceylon, had observed in an article written in September 1954: "It is not unfair to say that Ceylon has not a single expert on international affairs. It would take a whole

generation to create that elite of instructed opinion which is so influential in the policies of other countries" (Jennings 1954: 346). He further observed that "it is the only independent country in the commonwealth which has no Institute of International Affairs." (Jennings 1954: 343).

The situation had not improved even by the end of the decade. Howard Wriggins observed in his book, *Dilemmas of a New Nation*,

> Apart from a few individuals in the democratic parties, articulate Marxists, and a handful of journalists, few seriously debated foreign policy alternatives. There appeared to be a notable unconcern with foreign affairs for a people so much affected by developments abroad. (Wriggins 1960: 390).

The University of Ceylon made no effort to introduce this subject into the curriculum, even though it was a major area of study in many universities abroad. Dr. Shelton U. Kodikara (First Professor of International Relations at the Colombo University, appointed in 1986) returned to Sri Lanka in 1962, having completed his Master's in International Relations at the University of Denver, U.S.A. (1958) and a Ph.D. in International Relations at the London School of Economics (1962). His doctoral dissertation was published in 1965 under the title *Indo-Ceylon Relations since Independence,* which was an important contribution to the development of International Studies in Sri Lanka. It was ironic however that in his own university (University of Ceylon, Peradeniya), he was unable to offer a separate course in IR until the late 1960s. It was in 1968 that he started teaching a course in IR under the Political Science Department, Peradeniya, which the present writer had the good fortune to attend.

In the preface to his book, *Sri Lanka's Foreign Policy* (published in 1984), H.S.S. Nissanka has noted:

> The foreign affairs of Sri Lanka (Ceylon) during the recent past seemed to have been a field outside the scope of research by scholars. This was largely due to the lack of research facilities. Valuable documents relating to the foreign policy of Sri Lanka are kept in dusty files untouched by human hands even though twenty five years have lapsed since the events occurred. So far there is no department of International Relations at any of the seven universities of Sri Lanka. These two factors – the non-cooperation by the Ministry of External Affairs and the absence of academic interest in the field of foreign affairs have brought about a state of inertia of which I too was a victim. (1984: iii)

Professor Frank Thistlethwaite, Vice-Chancellor, University of East Anglia, who was invited to advise the National Council of Higher Education (NCHE) on the creation of the Colombo Campus as a separate University, made an interesting observation in his final report in 1967:

> Colombo (University) should capitalize its position as the university in the hearts of the country's metropolis. It should draw strength from and contribute so the characteristic activities of the capital city: government and administration, diplomacy and international relations, law, finance, trade and commerce and communications. (1967:7).

It is interesting to note that the *Ceylon Institute of World Affairs* was founded by a group of eminent scholars and diplomats on March 31, 1959 (Ceylon Today 1959: 22-23). Speaking at the inaugural meeting held at the University of Ceylon, Colombo, Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike said that world affairs concerned all of us very closely and what happened in Berlin or Suez was almost as important to Ceylon as it might be to Europe, America or Russia. However, the available sources of information in Ceylon were limited. The government had to rely on the envoys stationed in those countries or on the Ambassadors in Colombo. Therefore, he appreciated the efforts to establish this institute on the lines of bodies such as Chatham House in London, Council of World Affairs in Delhi and a similar institute in Karachi. He added that the institute that was being set up could by its discussions create live interest in world affairs, and still more important, it could impart reasonably accurate information on international problems.

The new institute organized a series of lectures and sponsored the publication of Dr. Shelton U. Kodikara's book *Indo-Ceylon Lanka Relations Since Independence* (1965). Unfortunately, however, it became a defunct organization after a few years of its short existence. The loss of this institute created a vacuum in scholarly activities in Sri Lanka in the field of International Affairs at a time Sri Lanka was heavily involved in global affairs.

In this context, it was the Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies (BCIS), established in 1974, which should be credited for playing a pioneering role in the development of IR as an academic discipline in Sri Lanka. It was started as a teaching and research institute in the field of international affairs. However, the BCIS was not a degree awarding institution, and as such, it could offer only certificate and diploma courses.

Teaching of IR at the University Level

The University of Colombo was a pioneer in the development of IR at the university level. The Department of Modern History and Political Science started offering IR courses under the subject of History since the late-1970s. First, the 'Introduction to International Relations' was offered as one module under the subject of History, and this course was taught by Professor George Cooray. Later more courses were added, such as 'Theories and Approaches to International Relations,' and 'Disarmament and Arms Control.' However, the big breakthrough came when the Department of History and Political Science started an academic link-programme with the School of International Service (SIS) of the American University in Washington, D.C., USA in 1984 during the tenure of Prof. Stanley Wijesundera, the Vice Chancellor of the Colombo University at the time.

A three-year educational program was signed in August 1984 by Richard R. Berendzen, President of the American University, and Ernest Corea, Sri Lanka's Ambassador to the United States. Professor William C. Olson, Dean of the School of International Service (SIS) visited Sri Lanka in 1984 as a participant of the 'American Specialists Program' of the United States Information Agency (USIA) and assisted us in the preparation of syllabi for

the Masters degree. Professor Stanley Wijesundera visited the SIS to discuss the logistics of the exchange program. As a result, a two-year Master's Degree Program in IR was established in 1985, the only one of its kind in Sri Lanka at the time. One of the expectations in establishing the Masters degree program was to give an opportunity to full-time employees of the public and private sector to take courses on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings.

Prof. Shelton Kodikara was appointed the first Professor of IR at the University of Colombo in 1986. Under the faculty exchange program, three reputed scholars from the American University came to Sri Lanka to teach in the MAIR degree programme over a period of three years (Professors Garry Weaver, Nicholas Onuf, and John Richardson). Likewise, three staff members from the Colombo University (George Cooray, Shelton Kodikara, and Amal Jayawardane) taught at the American University, one semester each.

Professor Nicholas Onuf, who is considered one of the founders of the theory of Constructivism completed his most famous work *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (first published in 1989) while he was residing at the University Lodge in Bagatalle Terrace (Presently the Vice Chancellor's Lodge) during his teaching assignment in Sri Lanka. Professor John Richardson became a regular visitor to Sri Lanka and wrote many scholarly works about Sri Lanka, including the book, *Paradise Poisoned: Learning about Conflict, Terrorism and Development from Sri Lanka's Civil Wars* (Published in 2005).

In addition to the MAIR degree, IR was later introduced as a separate subject for the general degree. The University of Colombo also became the first university in the country to introduce a four-year special degree program in IR at the undergraduate level in 2000.

With a grant from the Ford Foundation, New Delhi, the Colombo University was able to organize one national seminar and two international seminars in the late 1980s, which enabled the publication of three books under the editorship of Professor Shelton U. Kodikara (in 1989, 1990 and 1993.

Professor Shelton U. Kodikara, together with several South Asian scholars, established the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (RCSS) in 1993, supported by an endowment grant from the Ford Foundation, New Delhi, India. The RCSS is a South Asian Regional Think Tank, located in Colombo, which supports research on strategic and security issues and promotes interaction among scholars and professionals in the field of IR. Its Executive Directors are appointed from among scholars in the South Asian region and its founder Executive Director was Professor Shelton U. Kodikara. Since its inception, Professor Amal Jayawardane and Professor Nayani Melegoda from the Department of IR served as Executive Directors.

Conducive Environment for the Development of IR Since the 1980s

What was the background of International Relations becoming a popular subject in Sri Lanka since the 1980? Even though defence and security considerations played an important part in the formulation of the country's foreign policy from the very beginning of its post-independence period, there was no serious military threat to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country till the 1980's. Therefore, there was no sense of urgency to engage in a serious discourse about security problems in the country. The security crisis which took place in the 1980's with the aggravation of the ethnic problem created a situation very conducive to the development of international studies in Sri Lanka. The country's ethnic problem, which was considered an internal problem until the anti-Tamil ethnic riots in 1983, became highly internationalized thereafter. The Indian intervention in the internal affairs of the island became a subject for intense public debate. The internationalization of the ethnic crisis created an increased public awareness of the importance of international affairs as a crucial determinant of the island's destiny.

With the aggravation of the ethnic issue, Sri Lanka became a security problem in the South Asian subsystem. India viewed the alleged foreign involvement in the island's internal affairs in the 1980's as a threat to her own security, whereas Sri Lanka and other South Asian neighbours were very critical of India's own role in Sri Lanka. The increased interest in the Indo-Sri Lanka problem saw the appearance of many writings analysing strategic issues in South Asian Politics.

In the 1980's Sri Lanka became a subject for international concern too. The Indo-Sri Lanka problem, the refugee problem, terrorism, and human rights issues attracted international attention. The increased international interest in Sri Lankan affairs was a contributory factor for generating financial resources for the promotion of security studies in Sri Lanka. The movement for South Asian Regional Cooperation (SARC) that was launched in the early 1980's also spurred considerable scholarly activities within the region. The interaction among South Asian scholars and research institutes also increased with unprecedented intensity.

The Development of the First IR Department in the Country

History is one of the oldest departments which came into existence when the second Arts Faculty at the University of Ceylon was established in Colombo in 1963. The department was initially named as the Department of History and later renamed first as the Department of Modern History, and subsequently as the Department of History and Political Science. Some of the staff members who served in this department at various stages of its transformation included Professors Lakshman U. Perera, Tikiri Abeyasinghe, Lorna Devaraja, G.P.V. Somaratna, Indrani Munasinghe, Bertram Bastiampillai, R.A. Ariyaratna, Frank Perera, L.D. Wijegunasinghe, Marina Wickremanayake, Christine Angie, Hema Ratnayake, George Cooray, W.M. Karunadasa, Amal Jayawardane, Nayani Melegoda, Nira

Wickremasinghe, Janaki Jayawardena, Maneesha Wanasinghe-Pasqual, Nirmali Wijegoonawardana, Nirmal Ranjith Devasiri,, Devi Widyalankara, and Ajith Balasuriya.

The subject of Political Science was earlier taught under the Department of Economics but in the 1970s it was brought under the Department of Modern History. Those who joined the Department of History and Political Science included Kumari Jayawardena, Tressie Leitan, Jayadeva Uyangoda, Laksiri Fernando, Dayan Jayatilleke, Keerthi Ariyadasa, D.G.N. Rambukwella, S. I. Keethaponcalan, Mahesh Senanayake, Dhamma Dissanayake, and Dharshani de Silva.

Prof. Lakshman S. Perera was the Head of the Department of History, when the present writer joined the department in July 1970. Even though Professor Perera's academic specialization was ancient history of Sri Lanka[1], he had a new vision for the department. He introduced several new courses which were quite different from what was traditionally taught under the history syllabus at Peradeniya University. I was asked to teach two new courses: History of the Twentieth Century and History of Russia and the Soviet Union. I still remember the first conversation I had with Professor Perera after joining the department. He fondly talked about Geoffrey Barraclough's provocative book, *An Introduction to Contemporary History* (first published in 1964), and said that we are living in a new world and we need to develop new tools to understand the dynamics of the present era. What Barraclough had tried to argue in his book was that the 'Contemporary' or 'post-modern' era was structurally different from the so-called modern era, and the conventional methods used in interpreting history were hardly sufficient to explain the paradigm shift that had taken place in the contemporary era. Professor Perera left the department in 1973 to join the Commonwealth Secretariat in London as a Senior Consultant on Universities and Higher Education, but the new orientation he introduced to the department had a long-lasting effect on its future developments. In 2002 when the present writer was its Head, the Department of History and Political Science was bifurcated, and two new departments were created: the Department of History & International Relations and the Department of Political Science & Public Policy. A few years later a request was made for further bifurcation to create two separate departments: Department of History and the Department of International Relations.

There were two major reasons for the bifurcation. Among the Sri Lankan universities at the time, it was only the Colombo University which offered a special degree program in IR, and therefore, IR had become a very popular subject. As a result, there was a steadily increasing demand for a special degree program in IR. The department found it difficult to conduct two separate special degree programs in History and IR due to inadequate facilities and staff shortages. Secondly, rather than offering combined subjects for both degree programs, the need was felt to offer more subject-specific courses. History was moving towards a more critical and theoretically grounded discipline, and as such, it was thought that a separate Department of History would be able to provide students with courses geared to providing a

[1] Professor L.S. Perera's doctoral dissertation has been published in two volumes by the International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Kandy, titled*: Institutions of Ancient Ceylon from Inscriptions*.

deep understanding of History. Likewise, a separate department of IR would also be able to develop other sub-fields belonging to this discipline such as Security Studies, Strategic Studies, Development Studies, and Area Studies. It was argued that the bifurcation of the department would enable both subjects to explore their full potential. The proposal was approved by the Senate on January 28th, 2009, and by the Council on February 11, 2009. After obtaining the UGC approval, the bifurcation was implemented on 29th July 2010 during the tenure of Professor Nayani Melegoda, who was the Head of the Department at the time.

In many foreign universities, the subject of IR developed within the discipline of Political Science or Economics. At the University of Colombo, however, IR grew under the umbrella of History. After remaining as a specialization within the Department of History, IR finally achieved full-fledged status in 2010 as a separate department that could grant its own degrees. The Department of International Relations can now claim to be a very strong department within the university set up with a well-qualified academic staff. The Department of IR and its products have contributed in no small measure towards the development of IR in other universities too[2]. Today the subject of IR is being taught at several universities and defence establishments in the country including the National Defence College (NDC), the General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University (KDU), and the Defence Services Command and Staff College. Beginning from the academic year 2020 General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University (KDU) launched a new degree program which is called the Bachelor of Science (BSc.) in Strategic Studies and International Relations. This is a hybrid degree, combining both Strategic Studies and International Relations.

In Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, the academic study of IR is a late development in Sri Lanka. However, there has been a rapid expansion of the study of IR during the last four decades and this has paved the way for the formation of an 'IR Community' in Sri Lanka. This includes not only university academics but also the practitioners in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, researchers, journalists, and students. Many subjects taught in our universities have their own professional associations. It is high time to establish an Association of International Relations to build capacity and promote professional interest in the field. The establishment of such a professional association would provide a forum for those studying and working in the IR field to meet, discuss, and plan future activities.

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[2] A large number of the academic staff who teach IR at other universities have obtained their undergraduate or postgraduate qualifications from the Colombo University. The present writer who joined the KDU as a Senior Professor in 2016 was instrumental in introducing its BSc degree in Strategic Studies and International Relations.

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Approximating the Foreign Policy Postures of Sri Lanka

Ravinatha Aryasinha

Context

Sri Lanka's location at the centre of the Indian Ocean, less than 10 nautical miles off the main East-West maritime trade routes and lines of communication, is its greatest strategic asset. Its rich civilization, democratic tradition, and strong social development indicators in literacy, education, and health, together with its hospitable people, have made it a vibrant and endearing community in the world. However, the island has endured considerable socio-political upheaval and has been exceptionally tested in foreign policy terms throughout its over 2500-year-old recorded history. This was most recently evidenced during the nearly 30-year internal armed conflict between the Sri Lankan State and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who sought the creation of an independent Tamil State in Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka, supported by a small but influential Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora spread in Western countries, and from time to time had the sympathy and even the support State and non-state actors.

Despite the military defeat of the LTTE in May 2009, a post-conflict peace dividend was expected to herald a new thrust towards economic development for Sri Lanka with external investment/assistance at the forefront. However, 16 years later, this is yet to materialize.

Internally blamed for this failure were poor economic policymaking, poor governance, corruption, challenges to its human rights image, and disruptions to tourism and foreign remittance flows caused by the Easter Sunday attacks in April 2019 followed by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021, culminating in the unprecedented economic crisis in 2022 (Aryasinha, 2024). Externally, over the past decade, besides a multitude of global issues faced, Sri Lanka has also been forced to contend with an unprecedented power rivalry in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) that has revolved around India, China, and the US (Aryasinha, 2023).

In seeking to analyse Sri Lanka's predicament, the body of theoretically informed analytical studies on early post-independence Sri Lanka foreign policy is limited (Phadnis, 1964). Jayawardane (2021), in a critical review of the growth of the IR field in Sri Lanka, notes that "the academic study of IR was a late development" and, underscoring the intrinsic link between domestic crises and the evolution of foreign policy analysis in the Sri Lankan context", observes that "the national security crisis that took place in the country in the 1980s with the internationalization of the ethnic problem created an environment conducive to the growth of the academic discipline of IR" (Jayawardane 2021: 231). Melegoda and Hasangani (2020) trace the evolution of IR scholarship and its praxis in Sri Lanka and provide details of more recent events.

To charter a path for a more theoretical approach to the study of 21st century foreign policy making in Sri Lanka, there is an urgent need for greater conceptual clarity with regard to its fundamental grounding. This task is complicated, for as with most developing countries, in Sri Lanka too since independence the conceptualization of its 'national interest' and 'worldview' has fluctuated considerably, depending on the respective ideologies of the political administrations in power and the personalities of its leaders. There has also been the reality that given Sri Lanka's multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-lingual composition and resulting polarizations within the country, for some sections of Sri Lanka's population there is difficulty in identifying with the concepts of these terms as they are broadly used. Additionally, let alone globally, particularly in the IOR, the main conflicting parties and issues have also seen rapid change over time, which has further challenged Sri Lanka's ingenuity.

It is in such context, and conscious of the difficulty in seeking to pigeonhole Sri Lanka's diplomatic practices into a single theoretical framework, that this study reviews developments in the post-independence period availing of policy statements and accounts of events of the past, as well of the critiques thereof. It seeks to arrive at an 'approximation', referred to as a value or quantity that is nearly but not exactly correct, of what could constitute a more realistic explanation of 'Foreign Policy Postures' adopted over time.

Bandwagoning, Balancing, and Non-Alignment

Historically, even prior to Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) regaining independence on 4 February 1948, as to how the island nation would continue its independent existence maintained for 25 centuries, apart from the period of British rule, remained the central question in its foreign policy thinking. Early concerns in this regard were prompted by pronouncements in particular by Pannikar, who was a strong proponent of the view that the 'security vacuum' created by the liquidation of the British Empire in South Asia should rightly be filled by India and had claimed in unequivocal terms that Ceylon had to be an integral part of India, if not for anything else, for defence purposes (1944: 17).

Sri Lanka's foremost foreign policy scholar Kodikara (1979) observed that such pronouncements emanating from India, which were taken by her neighbours to be

'declarations of intent' suggested that India had been unable to reconcile the existence of sovereign, independent states around her and that she was bent on undermining their independence. In a recently published account, citing cables at the time to Whitehall, Barnes observes that,

> Senanayake [D.S.] revealed to the Governor of Ceylon, Sir Henry Moore, that he was gravely concerned for the future defence of an independent Ceylon. Senanayake feared his small and militarily weak country was at risk of being absorbed by India" (2022: 1096).

This led Sri Lanka to resort to 'bandwagoning', which Mearsheimer terms "a strategy for the weak" (2001: 163), and observes, "happens when a state joins forces with a more powerful opponent, conceding that its formidable partner will gain a disproportionate share of the spoils they conquer together" (2001: 162–163).

Accordingly, Sri Lanka on the eve of independence in November 1947 entered into a Defence Agreement and an External Affairs Agreement with the UK for the continuation of their naval bases in Trincomalee and air bases in Katunayake, in return for a guarantee that the UK would come to Ceylon's assistance if attacked by an outside power and, with respect to foreign relations, to assist Sri Lanka's representation abroad. Although not officially abrogated, in 1957 the Government of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike asked the British troops to vacate the bases, which they did (Mendis 1983). Additionally, there have also been a number of instances where Sri Lankan leaders have consciously chosen or have been compelled to pass on suggestions to bandwagon, in order to maintain a neutral foreign policy. This is true of the resistance faced in respect of suggestions during Prime Minister Sir. John Kotalawela's period that Sri Lanka join the Western defence alliance of the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in the early 1950s, for fear that such an act would antagonize India and the Socialist bloc (Kodikara 1982: 108). It was also evident when Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake turned down an invitation by the Malaysian Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman to join ASEAN when it was founded in 1967, due to reservations on ASEAN's anti-Chinese orientation at the time and his sensitivity to ASEAN's implied military and defence implications (Kodikara 1982: 187).

However, while continuing to remain within the UK security umbrella, Sri Lanka took bold stands. For instance, at the Japan Peace Conference in 1951, by signing the Sino-Lanka Rubber-Rice Pact in 1952, playing a pivotal role in fostering Afro-Asian solidarity during its formative years (1954-1955) which eventually led to the emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961, the mediatory efforts during the Indo-China Border War in 1962, the Maritime Agreement with China in 1963, and the controversial decision taken to permit Pakistan International Airlines to refuel in Sri Lanka during the Indo-Pakistan War in 1971. These displayed the country's self-assurance in foreign policy matters (Mendis 1983; Kodikara 1992; Kodikara 2008).

The above actions were to reflect 'balancing', albeit posited within the overarching context of neutrality/non-alignment. While classical IR theory studying 'the balance of power' envisaged a scenario of smaller states joining a countervailing alliance to mitigate the effects

of a rising power (Waltz 1979), in the Sri Lankan context, the term 'balancing' has been used more functionally, to describe the actions taken by the states to strike a balance between two or more competing powers.

While since regaining independence in 1948, Sri Lanka had consistently sought to balance major powers in the region and leverage its neutrality on the international stage, in 1956, Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike was the first to comprehensively articulate an independent foreign policy for Sri Lanka, which Nissanka has referred to as "the philosophy of neutralism" (1976: 189). Nissanka observes that Prime Minister Bandaranaike argued that

> It is not something dishonest; it is not a matter of sitting on the fence to see whether we can get the best of both worlds. It is a position that is inexorably thrust upon us by the circumstances of the case. It is a position that will be of great help in the world situation today, for we do provide a bridge over the gulf between the two opposing factions" (1976: 189).

Later championed by Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike, among others, the concept of 'Non-alignment' which was to grow, has been, no doubt, the most consistently invoked posture in post-independence Sri Lanka Foreign Policy. In this context, Gunasekera (2015) has noted that

> Sri Lanka's collective decision with other Non-aligned members to propose the Indian Ocean Peace Zone (IOPZ) in 1971, was reflective of the desire to balance itself against threatening powers during the Cold War (2015: 215).

At the time the Cold War was at its height, and India was seen as pro-Soviet, while Sri Lanka was more strictly non-aligned.

In the subsequent years, it was sought to be more tangibly operationalized by Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike, who, as one of NAM's founding leaders, later chaired the 5th NAM Summit Conference held in Colombo in August 1976. Addressing the 31st session of the UNGA as NAM Chair on 30 September 1976, Prime Minister Bandaranaike observed a shift in the movement from rhetoric to action, noting that

> … the Non-Aligned have advanced today from the mere exhortations of the past for assistance and concessions from the developed countries, to devising systems of active co-operation among themselves as a basis for co-operation with the developed nations.[3]

It is noteworthy that despite the change to a United National Party (UNP) government in 1977, which ushered in what was regarded as more West-friendly political and economic policies, Sri Lanka continued to faithfully Chair the NAM until handing over leadership to Cuba in 1979. President Jayewardene,[4] in an address to the Non-aligned Coordinating

[3] The 1970s also saw the expansion of developing country solidarity with a spillover from the Non-Aligned Movement to the quest to establish a New International Economic Order (NIEO), as well as a New International Information Order (NIIO).

[4] Research suggests that this was despite President J.R. Jayewardene lacking personal conviction about non-alignment (de Silva & Wriggins, 1994, p. 397), despite having once commented that there were only two non-aligned countries in the world - the United States of America and the Soviet Union (Deen, 2016).

Bureau in Colombo in 1979, re-affirmed Sri Lanka's commitment to non-aligned principles, stating that

> non-alignment runs like a golden thread through the fabric of our country's foreign policy, though changes may take place in the quality, colour and shape of that fabric from time to time. At no stage has our country deviated from that policy. At no stage, I will make bold to say, will it do so in the future (de Silva & Wriggins, 1994, p. 405).

Notwithstanding Sri Lanka's non-aligned positioning, challenges were to re-emerge in the early 1980s with the context of the Tamil separatist struggle in Sri Lanka and its multifaceted ramifications in the context of the '*Indira Doctrine*'[5] which was propagated at the time. On 29 July 1987, the exchange of letters that accompanied the signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord between Sri Lanka and India was to include several strict conditions constraining Sri Lanka's strategic latitude in relations with Western powers, particularly the USA. Indian High Commissioner in Sri Lanka at the time, Dixit was to observe retrospectively that "the ethnic conflict and the counterterrorism imperative had allowed Sri Lanka the justification to seek extra-regional intrusion into the region, which was a threat to India" (1998: 35).[6] However, following the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi by the LTTE in February 1991 and India's banning of the LTTE in 1992 for the Rajiv Gandhi assassination, Koshy (2009) observes, India's previous centrality in the Sri Lankan equation relating to the Tamil separatist struggle was to recede.

In this period which was to coincide with the ending of the Cold War and also India liberalizing its economy in 1991, there has been a diminution of the operational relevance of 'non-alignment' in the South Asian region, as also seen globally.[7] Nonetheless, countries in the region continued to outline their traditional posturing through regular references to non-alignment, yet with little clarity concerning its concepts or its operationalization. Accordingly, it can be stated that in the post-Cold War era, many countries proclaiming to follow non-alignment, appear to have in fact followed a policy of ambiguity in their foreign policies. This was also true of Sri Lanka.

Throughout the 30-year separatist terrorist conflict with the LTTE this served Sri Lanka well. During both the United National Party Presidencies of Ranasinghe Premadasa (1990-1993) and D.B. Wijetunga (1993-1994), and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party led coalitions of

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[5] This was to be propounded by Prof. Bhabani Sen Gupta that "India will neither intervene in the domestic affairs of any states in the region, unless requested to do so, nor tolerate such intervention by an outside power; if external assistance is needed to meet an internal crisis, states should first look within the region for help" ~Indira Doctrine, As quoted in Rao (1985).

[6] Dixit was to add that "Unilateral adherence to morality, if it affects your very existence as a united country, may be admired as an idealistic principle. But it is neither desirable nor practical if another country deliberately indulges in policies which are amoral and at the same time pose a threat to you. So practical corrective action has indeed to be taken" (p. 35).

[7] The 120 member NAM has seen a steady decline in the participation of Heads of States or Governments at its periodic Summit meetings, with the 18th Summit held October 25–26, 2019 in Baku, Azerbaijan attended by delegations from 120 member states (2/3rd the UN membership and 55% of the world's population), but less than half of these countries were represented at Head of State or Government level.

President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga (1994-2005)[8] and President Mahinda Rajapaksa (2005-2009), non-alignment helped the country to receive military assistance to fight the LTTE from some countries, while maintaining trade and economic cooperation with others, despite the simmering geo-political tensions that existed among such countries. However, since the ending of the armed conflict in 2009, this approach proved to be difficult to sustain, and successive Sri Lankan administrations appear to have been in search of greater exploration and refinement of its foreign policy posture.

Besides the aspirations pronounced in election manifestoes, Sri Lanka government's positions relating to foreign policy have from time to time been incorporated in policy statements of the Heads of State in inaugural addresses, at the opening of new sessions of Parliament, stated in specific foreign policy related debates, and/or conveyed through the 'Annual Progress Report' presented in Parliament ahead of the vote of the Foreign Ministry during the budget debate. Given the absence of a White Paper or cohesive enunciation of the foreign policy perspectives of recent political administrations, in assessing Sri Lanka's national interest, one is compelled to rely on the 'Foreign Policy directives' issued by the respective political administrations. These pronouncements have been explicit in certain periods and more loosely articulated in others. These codified directives provide the only window to assess the reading of those administrations as to what constitutes Sri Lanka's national interest and world view and the means of achieving them within the prevailing global conditions. This in turn rationalized the foreign policy posture each of these groups adopted.

It is in such context that the election manifesto of President Maithripala Sirisena for the Presidential elections held on 8 January 2015 must be read. It did not contain any explicit reference to non-alignment and instead sought to ensure what it called a "balanced Asia-centric foreign policy".(thediplomat.com). The National Unity Government (NUG) that President Sirisena formed with Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, in its 'Key Foreign Policy Directives 2015-2019', referred to a "progressive foreign policy based on national interests, forging close ties with all countries, in particular with our important strategic and trading partners in Asia and beyond" (mfa.gov.lk: 9-10).

Hedging

Even as the question appeared to be - as to 'how non-aligned?' each administration in the 21st century was, post-2014 Sri Lanka's positioning in the Indian Ocean was to become even more consequential in the context of the rapid escalation of the Indo-China rivalry, besides the ongoing US-China rivalry. When tracing the dynamics of Sri Lanka's relations with the major powers, this has been both availed of, and also blamed, for Sri Lanka's predicament.

[8]The 2001-2003 period was to see her govern as President, with Ranil Wickremasinghe who at the time was not a firm believer in 'non-alignment' as Prime Minister.

There has been an increasing tendency to refer to this pattern of behaviour as *'hedging'*. Though widely used in an economic context, hedging is a comparatively new conceptualisation in International Relations to explain state behaviour in situations where a state pursues opposite or contradictory foreign policy choices without entering into a rigid alignment with any power. Goh defines 'hedging' as

> a set of strategies aimed at avoiding (or planning for contingencies in) a situation in which states cannot decide upon more straightforward alternatives such as balancing, bandwagoning, or neutrality. Instead, they cultivate a middle position that forestalls or avoids having to choose one side [or one straightforward policy stance] at the obvious expense of another (2005: 2).

Manatunga, who applies hedging to a case study of Bangladesh, observes that for Smaller South Asian states (SSAs) hedging appears to have moved beyond being a 'survival mechanism' as seen in the Southeast Asian context, and to have helped states in leveraging power rivalries in order to maximize national gains (2023: 31) - a trait which she notes is also applicable in the case of the other SSAs, including Sri Lanka. While Abeyagoonasekera notes that "Rajapaksa's foreign policy was tilted towards China, but sometimes preferred to hedge between India and China" (2023: xxi), Kandaudahewa observes that

> Unlike the Rajapaksa regime, Wickremesinghe recognized the interests of the trio [India, China, and the US] in Sri Lanka's strategic location as a favourable factor for his administration" (2023: 122).

He adds that "By adopting a hedging foreign policy, the country has managed to secure investments, economic assistance, and relief from various players in the region," but cautions that "this approach comes with risks and costs. Sri Lanka must navigate the delicate balance between appeasing competing powers and safeguarding its sovereignty and independence" (2023: 125).

Herath (2025), who applies the more classical conceptual model of hedging developed by Kuik in relation to the Southeast Asian region, which identifies three distinct features of hedging – eschewing rigid alignments, inclusive diversification for fallback options, and pursues contradictory measures to manage the risks, also concludes that "the analysis strongly indicates that Sri Lanka's foreign policy behaviour in the post-2009 period exhibits all three features of hedging as outlined by Kuik" (2021: 62).

However, closer study is merited in Sri Lanka's case, as to whether Kuik's three indicators were consciously satisfied through calculated actions that were exhausted in arriving at the desired outcome, or whether the eventual outcomes were by default, following muddling through and failing to realize other options that were previously sought. For this, the counterfactual circumstances-whether sought, if achieved, and if not, why-must also be factored in.

This has led Sri Lanka's foreign policy behaviour to be often caricatured, in the immediate aftermath of the extension of the lease on the Hambantota Port in 2017, using the term

'strategic promiscuity' (Hewage, 2017) and subsequently, in the post-*aragalaya* period, as *'enforced agnosticism'* (Hewage, 2023).

Palihakkara commenting on the tendency by successive Sri Lanka governments to engage in transactions in order to appease India, China and the US, has opined that

> rather than demarcating 'zones' for different investor States thus 'parcelling out' our sovereign assets including land to contending powers (e.g. quasi-vasal state projects in Trinco, Hambantota etc.), the whole of Sri Lanka can become a venue supporting multinational investment and multilateral cooperation for growth and development. (Palihakkara 2023)

Elsewhere Palihakkara also observed that "the overarching challenge that is faced by Sri Lanka in its foreign relations, is demonstrating that it is after tangible economic benefits and not geopolitical mischief in the Indian Ocean" (2023)

Neutrality

Following his victory at the Presidential elections held in November 2019, the Gotabaya Rajapaksa administration's early efforts at a more balanced relationship with the major powers involved in Sri Lanka was reflected in the centrality given in his manifesto to the concept of 'neutrality'. Lottaz and Jayathilake observe that

> **"**despite good reasons to doubt the sincerity of the approach … It [neutrality] also gives the government the possibility to fence off encroachments from all sides, including China. In particular, worries about territorial sovereignty over ports make a neutrality policy a viable and sensible option" (2021: 3).

While new concepts such as strategic autonomy, omni-alignment and multi-alignment have been variously used as substitutes to non-alignment in his election campaign, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in 2019 made a foreign policy based on "neutrality" a key slogan (scribd.com). His administration's 'Key Foreign Policy Directives for 2020 and Beyond' pledged to "maintain friendly relations with all sovereign countries as an equal partner, whilst upholding a policy of neutrality and non-alignment without being involved in the superpower rivalry" (Ceylon Today 2021). Subsequently, the references to 'non-alignment' were dropped, keeping the emphasis on 'neutrality' intact, while in parallel some of the government´s spokespersons articulated a concept of 'India First" - leading to questions as to whether the two concepts were compatible (dailymirror.lk).

Despite the absence of a formal foreign policy document, President Ranil Wickremesinghe who assumed duties in August 2022, following President Gotabaya Rajapaksa leaving the country and resigning (reuters.com), has referred to the multiple outlooks on the IOR as "constructs" on security and economics "that are there for some time and then disappear", and highlighted "the uniqueness of the Indian Ocean as a civilization" (pmd.gov.lk). He has also distinguished the Pacific Ocean from the Indian Ocean, and expressed concern that the problems of the former were being brought into the latter, and stated that the island nations in the Indian Ocean and South Pacific have distinct priorities unrelated to the QUAD (comprising the US, India, Japan, and Australia) or China's objectives. In September 2023,

during a discussion on the dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region, asked whether Sri Lanka's loyalties lie with China or India, President Wickremesinghe was to state that "it was neither", emphasizing that "it doesn't necessarily mean that Sri Lanka is neutral", but rather "pro-Sri Lankan"(adaderana.lk).[9]

Ladduwahetty (2023) advocates that presently

> the policy of neutrality is the best defence Sri Lanka has to deter global powers from attempting to gain control of Sri Lanka because of its strategic location on grounds of internationally recognized norms of conduct applicable to a Neutral State. (2023)

The International Committee of the Red Cross describes neutrality as the formal position taken by a State which is not participating in an armed conflict and also intends to remain uninvolved. This status entails specific rights and duties where, on the one hand, the neutral State has the right to stand apart from and not be adversely affected by the conflict, while, on the other, it has a duty of non-participation and impartiality (ICRC 2002: 6). However, whether Sri Lanka has conducted itself as a strictly neutral country in international affairs and also whether its declarative neutrality has been respected by the parties with which it seeks to remain neutral requires closer scrutiny.

This realization appears to be increasingly appreciated within the political establishment, as all parties in the September 2024 Presidential Election were cautious in treading on this issue, and in contrast with previous elections, foreign policy was hardly a point of substantive debate. In what can be regarded an early articulation of the new National People's Power (NPP) government's foreign policy, at a cabinet press briefing held on 8 October 2024, Foreign Affairs Minister Vijitha Herath emphasized that Sri Lanka maintains balanced diplomatic relations with all countries, reaffirming that no nation is given special treatment.

Herath noted "We are doing business with China just as we are doing business with India." Responding on the government's decision to allow a Chinese military training vessel to visit Sri Lanka that month it was noted that it falls within the framework of the country's diplomatic engagements. "American, Indian, and German warships have visited before. In such diplomatic relations, we engage with all countries equally," he said. The Minister elaborating the government's foreign relations policy observed,

> We don't consider any country to be special. Whether it's China, India, the United States, Russia, Cuba, or Vietnam, Sri Lanka maintains diplomatic relations with all countries-big or small. We have no bias in our approach." (asiannewspost.com).

Coming the Full Circle

Despite the NAM as a multilateral organization having diminished in influence in global affairs due to the diverse interests and alignments of its member states, however, the voting

[9] This was during a conversation at the 'Ocean Nations: The 3rd Annual Indo-Pacific Islands Dialogue,' in New York on the sidelines of the UNGA.

patterns of NAM countries in the UN during recent crises – particularly on Ukraine and the Gaza, provide a barometer to judge as to how Non-aligned states respond to issues in real-time and the shifting trends in the exercise of global power. Recent votes in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) and the Human Rights Council (HRC) have demonstrated that while the US-led Western allies eventually win votes related to crucial matters such as the conflict in Ukraine, there has been growing resistance by a group of 'traditionally Non-aligned countries' to take sides.[10]

As Spektor observes

> As countries in the global South refuse to take a side in the war in Ukraine, many in the West are struggling to understand why. Some speculate that these countries have opted for neutrality out of economic interest. Others see ideological alignments with Moscow and Beijing behind their unwillingness to take a stand-or even a lack of morals. But the behaviour of a large number of developing countries can be explained by something much simpler: the desire to avoid being trampled in a brawl among China, Russia, and the United States. (2023)[11]

It is noteworthy that despite its current pre-occupations within and the fierce geo-political rivalry Sri Lanka faces, its voting patterns in the UNGA is consistent with the leading 'traditionally Non-aligned countries'. Peris (2024), in a recent study that analyses the UNGA voting coincidence rates between Sri Lanka and the Major Powers, notes that

> … the Gotabaya Rajapaksa administration saw a partial return to the Non-Western orientation characteristic of the Mahinda Rajapaksa era" and "the Wickremesinghe administration, while showing a slight rebalancing, continued to exhibit a stronger voting coincidence with the Non-Western powers, this was in contrast to the period when Mr. Wickremesinghe was Prime Minister during the Sirisena Presidency. (Peris 2024: 26-32).

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[10] On the first anniversary of the commencement of hostilities, on an UNGA resolution carried 141-7 calling for Russia to end hostilities in Ukraine and withdraw its forces, Sri Lanka was among 32 countries that included India, Pakistan, China, and South Africa – who abstained on this issue (India Today, 2023). Furthermore, China's ability to have the HRC reject a draft decision to debate human rights abuses in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region through a Roll-Call vote 19 – 17, with most Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member States supporting China, and the 11 abstentions including by India, underlines the increasing influence China continues to have in rallying against the West in multilateral fora on some issues (Reuters, 2022).

[11] The broader discussion titled 'The Nonaligned World : The West, and the Rest, in the New Global Order', observes that with reference to the war in Ukraine, while "the United States and its allies in East Asia and Europe have demonstrated remarkably deep resolve and minimal dissension in their support of Kyiv", "The unity among Washington's closest partners has made clear just how differently much of the rest of the world sees not only the war in Ukraine but also the broader global landscape" - "Governments and populations across much of the developing world have met gauzy "free world" rhetoric with a series of increasingly vehement objections: about Western double standards and hypocrisy, about decades of neglect of the issues most important to them, about the mounting costs of the war and of sharpening geopolitical tensions". In the same issue Western and European views on the war are juxtaposed with those by policymakers and scholars from South Asia, Southeast Asia, Africa and Latin America, that "explore the dangers, as well as the new opportunities, that the war and the broader return of great-power conflict present for their countries and regions."

This suggests that despite the bilateral antagonism and contestation between China and India concerning Sri Lanka, at least with respect to their multilateral behaviour, with a few exceptions such as on the Israel-Palestine crisis, notably in recent times all three countries [Sri Lanka, India, and China] voted similarly at the UN General Assembly.

However, as with most important domestic issues, there is no political or societal consensus on many of these matters in the realm of foreign relations. While 'balancing' (*balance karanawa*) continues to be the often-heard refrain in discussions on Sri Lanka foreign policy, although less cohesively developed or published, in recent public interactions some analysts go further, and believe that Sri Lanka should not remain ambivalent and must, in effect, adopt behaviour tantamount to, or in fact, 'bandwagoning'.

Kuruwita (2020) anticipated that "in the coming years, Sri Lanka like many of its South Asian neighbours, will be forced to pick a side as China-US relations continue their downward spiral." More recently, Dushni Weerakoon, noting that a non-alignment/neutrality policy denies Sri Lanka leverage in trade negotiations as economic decisions are no longer purely built upon economic principles but are now strategically aligned, has observed that Sri Lanka is losing out by pursuing this path (lki.lk).

Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu has also advocated that in today's geopolitical context, rather than rigid ideological stances, pragmatic decision-making is necessary, given that the balance of power is shifting towards China and India, and Sri Lanka must assess its foreign policy based on what it can gain from engaging with the rest of the world (lki.lk). Nilanthan Niruthan is more explicit that Sri Lanka must pick a side and that logically it should align with India, which he regards as a "strategic swing state" (ft.lk), while Palitha Kohona, who compares the virtues of development models among emerging Asian superpowers, has recommended that developing countries should covet the China model-focusing on industrialisation, coupled with strategic global partnerships, which has enabled its rapid ascent as the world's second-largest economy (island.lk). As Smith (2019) has noted, over the years there has also been some advocacy in support of bandwagoning with the US. The author believes that resorting to such a measure would be a mistake.

Conclusion: 'Ingredients' of a Sustainable Sri Lanka Foreign Policy Posture

In seeking to discern Sri Lanka's behaviour through classical IR theory, it is noted that post-2009, Sri Lanka's foreign policy posture has been palpably fluid, with successive political administrations having adopted varying strategies, particularly in dealing with the major power rivalry in the region. The economic crisis of 2022 could in retrospect be considered to have arrested the 'pendulum swings' in foreign policy taking place and enable Sri Lanka to gravitate to the middle.

However, at present there appears no effort among political parties at evolving a Sri Lankan foreign policy posture that would meet the country's vital needs in a sustainable manner.

However, it is noteworthy that such consensus did emerge among at least the Southern political groups in the first decade of the 21st century with regard to defeating terrorism, and more recently there was broad consensus seen in Parliament on seeking IMF assistance, notwithstanding the differences that were to emerge on the nuances of the eventual deal itself and aspects of its operationalisation. These provide hope that achieving consensus might be possible if we work hard enough on foreign policy as well. However, if unable to find a broad national consensus, at least 'political common ground' needs to be found on some aspects of it, while 'bracketing' others where we need to work harder to reconcile our disagreements internally, but must take a principled position not to allow them to adversely affect the image of our country abroad.

In such a context, the author's view is that rather than seeking to label what Sri Lanka's foreign policy posture ought to be, it would be more helpful to ascertain the 'ingredients' a sustainable foreign policy posture should include. The suggestions below may be considered in this regard.

Primarily, *Sri Lanka's foreign policy resilience will hinge on resisting the 'zero-sum' logic* through which competing major powers/blocs try to force the island into their exclusive spheres of influence (Aryasinha, 2023). Sri Lankan diplomacy must create the space for the country to engage in transactions with all countries on the basis of Sri Lanka's objective national interest-safeguarding the sovereignty, territorial integrity, economic sustainability, and national security of Sri Lanka.

In ensuring national security, conscious of the externally influenced security challenges Sri Lanka has faced in the past, *Sri Lanka cannot afford to drop its guard and to be over-dependent on any single outside power*. It should refrain from signing long-term, defence and strategic-assets-related agreements. While retaining sufficient vigilance on the ground, it must also maintain close scrutiny in the realm of ocean security and air security, where impermeability will be vital to Sri Lanka's strength-as both a state and an economy. Sri Lanka must also protect against the emerging practice where resident/visiting foreign dignitaries use Sri Lankan soil to mount propaganda campaigns against third countries-a trend that risks dragging the island into diplomatic crossfire. Public sensitivities over competing external footprints must also be managed carefully, lest disgruntled powers, together with their domestic allies, could resort to overt retaliation or covert destabilisation. Also, as the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, as well as the tensions in the South China Sea and Taiwan Straits, remind us, peace in this region cannot be taken for granted. Hence, Sri Lanka foreign policy needs to anticipate scenarios and vulnerabilities that it could be presented with in the future, over which it would have little control, and hence also develop policy options and levers to deal with such eventualities.

Sri Lanka must not leave cause for concern with respect to India's legitimate security interests that could emanate from Sri Lanka. In this context, the current demands for exclusivity could be averted through greater transparency in dealings so that when concerns arise, as happened during the final phase of the terrorist conflict with the LTTE, objective

verifiable processes are in place to ascertain the veracity of the same and to troubleshoot where necessary. Conscious of the rapid advances in military technology and particularly the increasing propensity for dual-use technology, Sri Lanka must also strengthen its own technical capacity to assess and determine the veracity of any concerns raised speedily, so that in the future such issues do not impede Sri Lanka's development nor tarnish Sri Lanka's image. Championing a rules-based maritime order in the Indian Ocean, which Sri Lanka has long called for since its 1971 'Indian Ocean Peace Zone' (IOPZ) proposal and ensuring strict adherence to the provisions of the 'UN Convention on the Law of the Sea' (UNCLOS), will reinforce Sri Lanka's credibility and also encourage cooperative stability in the Indian Ocean.

Within this strategic backdrop, given that geopolitics is inseparable from geoeconomics, while continuing international collaboration with the IMF and all creditors in managing the debt burden, *Sri Lanka must diversify its external markets for trade, aid, investment, tourism, and labour*, in order to regain latitude and to help guard against punitive shocks or being caught as collateral in great-power confrontations (Aryasinha, 2024). To this end, greater engagement with 'middle powers,' to whom sufficient proactive attention has not been paid in recent times is essential. Keeping the Colombo International Financial City genuinely open to investors from all quarters will be an important barometer in maintaining that balance. This broad basing of contact must also expand to the Overseas Sri Lankan Community (OSL) and Non-State Actors (NSAs) in order to harness their diverse skills, knowledge, expertise, and resources, and to facilitate their integration into the national development agenda.

Following a more realistic appraisal of issues*, Sri Lanka must also address the more credible human rights concerns that are being raised in the HRC*, *and regain the support of the Global South, including that of India, in resisting excessive impositions* (Aryasinha, 2025)**.** Given the rapidly changing global dynamics, in order to press for such an outcome and enable the return to a more principled stance concerning the multilateralization of Sri Lanka's human rights issues in Geneva, Sri Lanka must regain the moral high ground.

To this end, mindful of its global responsibilities and obligations, *Sri Lanka's foreign policy posture must enable engagement across the full canvas of international issues*-both pursuing its immediate national interest, as well as engaging on issues which have broader resonance and bearing. Sri Lanka must proactively re-project its historical global role played in areas such as disarmament, counter-terrorism, peacekeeping, and international law development, including the Law of the Sea; economic development, including South-South Cooperation; as well as in addressing emerging priorities such as migration, climate change, intellectual property, and the regulation of Autonomous Weapons Systems (AWS), on which it has developed considerable expertise in recent times.

This will assist Sri Lanka in regaining credibility in the eyes of its external partners, and overcome the looming political challenges and in rebuilding the economy. Having done its

fair share, Sri Lanka would then be better positioned to demand fair play from other states, international organizations, and non-state actors.

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The Importance of a Professional Foreign Service for a Developing Country: Investment or Expenditure?

Chanaka Talpahewa

Introduction

Foreign Policy can be defined as a government's policy on dealing with other countries while International Relations can be defined as the discipline that studies interactions between and among states and more broadly, the workings of the international system as a whole. Both are interlinked, with foreign policy serving as a crucial element of international relations. It reflects a country's goals and priorities in global interactions and extends its domestic aspirations and identity.

Historically, foreign policy has evolved. Over the past few decades, its scope has expanded to include trade, energy security, human rights, environment, and sustainable development. The Cold War's end and rapid advances in telecommunications have dismantled longstanding barriers. Today's interconnected and globalised world makes foreign policy more vital than ever for achieving national objectives in a complex, fast-changing global landscape.

A country's foreign service is the primary vehicle for implementing foreign policy globally. It should occupy a central role in state institutions. A professional foreign service drives diplomacy, representing national interests, negotiating treaties, fostering bilateral and multilateral relationships, attracting investment, managing crises and even projecting soft power. It functions both as a guardian and promoter of national interests amid rising global competition and shifting power dynamics. Without a strong foreign service, countries risk diplomatic marginalisation, lost economic opportunities and reduced influence internationally.

Developing countries face constraints like limited budgets, human capital shortages and high exposure to external pressures. This makes effective diplomacy even more crucial. Diplomats from these countries must deliver results in broader areas than traditionally expected, such as resource mobilisation, diaspora engagement, trade facilitation, security cooperation. These tasks demand a high level of technical skill and political acumen. For developing nations confronting limited resources, political instability and unequal global influence, a professional foreign service is indispensable (Berridge, 2015).

In a rapidly globalising world, developing countries must navigate a complex array of international institutions, economic blocs and diplomatic challenges. It is critical for development, attracting investment and protecting sovereignty. Yet, many face structural challenges hindering a professional diplomatic corps (Rana, 2007).

Modern foreign policy demands multidisciplinary expertise-from trade and environmental negotiations to cyber diplomacy and digital governance. Politically appointed envoys without training or technical capacity are ill-prepared for these demands (Hocking et al., 2012). Developing countries often grapple with political interference, politicised appointments, limited resources, lack of career focus, poor resource allocation, inadequate infrastructure and poor inter-agency coordination. In these countries, very often. diplomacy is viewed as ceremonial or elitist as an avenue for political and filial largess rather than as a core national development function. This perception undermines not only the efficiency and effectiveness of the foreign service but also the very legitimacy of the foreign service.

The modern international system is increasingly complex and multilayered, new areas emerging such as cyber diplomacy, climate negotiations and AI governance. Reliance on untrained political appointees can produce suboptimal or even detrimental outcomes. Effective diplomacy today requires more than rhetorical skill often catering to domestic audience; it requires interdisciplinary knowledge, digital fluency, emotional intelligence, global understanding and a strategic and pragmatic mindset.

This article examines the importance of a professional foreign services for developing countries. Following this introduction, it explores the historical context and current challenges, outlines the conceptual foundations and characteristics of a professional foreign service, discusses its strategic importance and concludes with recommendations for developing countries highlighting the importance strengthening diplomatic capacity as a central pillar of national development.

Historical Context and Current Challenges

After World War II, many African, Asian, Caribbean, and Latin American countries gained independence. As the trajectory of foreign service development in many of these countries was shaped and influenced by the colonial histories, paths to independence and postcolonial political economies, understanding this context is important to identify the existing challenges and reform pathways.

Post-Colonial Legacy and Initial Priorities

Many developing countries inherited diplomatic institutions from colonial administrations or established them post-independence. These institutions often lacked capacity, resources and long-term vision. The initial focus was on political independence and state-building, with diplomacy receiving limited attention [Clapham, 1996]. The inherited diplomatic institutions were either nascent or deeply embedded in the logic of colonial administration.

In the early decades after independence, priorities such as nation-building, internal security, economic self-sufficiency and decolonisation dominated state agendas. In most instances, diplomacy was considered primarily as a symbolic function focused ceremonial and pageantry representation rather than as a strategic instrument of statecraft. Foreign services were underfunded, understaffed and often viewed as a luxury rather than a necessity. Consequently, early diplomatic postings were often used as political rewards for political allies and favoured bureaucrats and even as exile mechanisms for unwanted or undesired stakeholders.

Cold War Dynamics

Soon after the end of the World War II the emergence of a bi-polar world was witnessed, and the world was soon engulfed in a Cold War between the USA led Western Bloc and the USSR led Socialist Bloc. Many developing countries aligned with either of these blocs in some instances being coerced and, in some instances, due ideological considerations even overriding national interests. The Cold War era further shaped diplomatic practices in the Global South, with many foreign services aligning with ideological blocs rather than pursuing autonomous, development-focused foreign policies (Westad, 2005).

The Cold War also brought both politically motivated aid which was mostly accompanied by overt or covert internal interference. The superpowers often bypassed national diplomatic systems to work directly with political elites or military regimes. This weakened the foreign services as institutional actors and entrenched patronage and politicisation.

During this period diplomats served not as strategic negotiators but as functionaries in ideological contests. However, some states like Yugoslavia, Egypt, Sri Lanka and India, sought a more autonomous path of being non-aligned to either bloc giving rise to the Non-Aligned Movement, which emphasised cooperation among developing nations. But whether this contributed to the development of professional foreign services in the context of individual and institutional development is somewhat questionable.

Globalisation and the Rise of Complex Diplomacy

The post-Cold War era ushered in globalisation, trade liberalisation, migration, digital transformation, terrorism and climate change, creating new diplomatic challenges and opportunities. Multilateral institutions like the WTO, COP regional trade agreements and the growth of multilateral environmental and health regimes introduced a new diplomatic landscape.

However, many developing countries struggled to adapt. Contemporary challenges include political interference, inadequate training, underfunding and the erosion of meritocratic practices (Rana, 2013). These issues hamper the ability of diplomats to effectively promote and defend national interests. Additionally, rapid changes in global diplomacy-such as digital diplomacy, climate negotiations and migration governance-require a level of specialization that many foreign services are not currently equipped to deliver (Melissen, 2005). Countries that fail to develop adaptive and responsive diplomatic institutions risk marginalisation in international fora and decision-making processes (Chaturvedi, 2012).

Although post-Cold War era, introduced new dynamics, giving rise to South-South cooperation, new regional alliances and multipolarity required more agile and well-resourced foreign services. In many developing countries training remained outdated; recruitment systems stagnated; and diplomats often lacked the technical knowledge to engage in complex issue areas. Political interference remained rife, with foreign posts still used as rewards for loyalty rather than merit.

Current Challenges

New global dynamics have transformed diplomacy's nature, adding pressures on foreign services:

- *Geopolitical Fragmentation*: Rising regional powers, blocs, and eroding multilateral consensus (e.g., post-Brexit, tensions between G7 and G20, the somewhat unclear foreign policy postures by the current US Administration etc.) make it imperative for developing countries to navigate a multipolar, contested world with greater strategic agility.
- *Digital Divide and Disruption*: Social media demands real-time engagement, crisis communication, and countering disinformation. Diplomats, often unfamiliar with new technologies, must become digitally savvy and also should be empowered and authorised to respond quickly. A good example of the changing of the usage of the social media is how incumbent President of the USA, Donald Trump, uses his social media platform Truth Social to disseminate important information and policy decisions prior to even the White House, the State Department or the relevant US Government Agency can issue a statement or a communication.

- *Transnational Challenges*: Issues like climate change, migration and pandemics transcend borders, requiring diplomats to operate with clear, long-term policy directions. In many developing countries, political expediency undermines consistent policy, complicating diplomats' roles. Technical knowledge and negotiation skills are essential but often lacking.

Additional persistent challenges include:

- *Underfunding*: Competing basic needs often push diplomatic budgets to the background, leaving embassies under-resourced, lacking research support, communication tools and even security.
- *Inadequate Training and Human Resource Gaps*: Many developing countries do not invest systematically in training, with programs carried out often being ad hoc or outdated.
- *Political Patronage and Non-Empowerment of career officers:* Ambassadorial and other diplomatic posts frequently go to political loyalists, military retirees, or elites lacking qualifications or experience. Short-term orientation programs fail to prepare them adequately. In many developing countries career foreign service officers are less/non-empowered *vis-à-vis* the political appointees undermining the morale of the career officers and their ability perform.
- *Lack of foresight in the allocation and the utilisation* of resources: Opening and closing of Embassies and random staff postings often reflect short-term political or personal motives rather than strategic national interests. In many instances the so called 'plum' positions are given based on loyalty, not merit.
- *Brain Drain and Retention*: Qualified diplomats leave for international organisations or the private sector due to low pay and frustrating political or bureaucratic environments.
- *Lack of Inter-Agency Coordination:* Despite expectations, government ministries often coordinate poorly with foreign ministries, leading to incoherent external engagement.

Conceptualising a Professional Foreign Service

A professional foreign service is characterised by merit-based recruitment, rigorous training, ethical conduct, transparent career progression, and continuous learning (Copeland, 2009). It is defined less by formal structure or past history and more by the quality, integrity and consistency of its personnel, adherence to rules and a strong institutional culture. At its core, it must ensure meritocratic recruitment, provide need-based and updated training, base promotions on performance and competence and operate under clear accountability and impartiality. Together, these enable diplomats to function effectively in complex, high-stakes international environments.

Such a service operates on principles of loyalty to the state-where national interests supersede personal or political agendas-maintaining neutrality, efficiency and distance from

political patronage. It ensures continuity of foreign policy regardless of domestic political shifts.

Professionalism also implies the existence of a code of ethics, standard operating procedures and accountability mechanisms that govern diplomatic conduct. These elements foster institutional memory and credibility in international engagements. For small and developing nations with limited bargaining power, consistency and reliability in diplomacy are invaluable assets (Neumann, 2012).

Key Features of Professionalism

This study identifies key features as:

- *Merit-based recruitment*: Entry through competitive, transparent exams assessing knowledge, analysis, communication and psychological suitability, to ensure capable, emotionally intelligent candidates are selected.
- *Continuous training*: Initial and ongoing training in international relations, protocol, negotiation techniques, cultural intelligence, international law and in emerging global issues such as digital diplomacy and climate negotiations.
- *Ethical standards and accountability*: Upholding high conduct standards, free from conflicts of interest and corruption, reinforced through codes of ethics and performance reviews.
- *Career progression and institutional memory*: Transparent promotion systems will foster long-term commitment of the officers. This will allow for officers to specialise to meet the envisaged requirements and will also strengthen institutional memory. This will ensure that knowledge and experience are retained and passed on to the successors, enabling the service to evolve and adapt.
- *Operational and strategic autonomy*: Empowered to provide candid advice aligned with national interests, without political interference.

New Competency Demands

Professional diplomats must possess competencies in international law, economics, negotiation, languages, and cultural diplomacy. Structured training and career development pathways ensure that foreign service officers are prepared to handle complex diplomatic assignments and represent their countries effectively (Kopp & Gillespie, 2011).

Today's diplomatic roles extend beyond traditional political reporting or consular services to include:

- *Economic diplomacy*: Understanding global/regional trade regimes, investment law and macroeconomic trends.
- *Climate and environmental diplomacy*: Engaging with UNFCCC, biodiversity treaties, and regional environmental initiatives.
- *Cyber and digital diplomacy*: Navigating internet governance, AI ethics, cybersecurity, and combating disinformation.
- *Public diplomacy*: Utilising media and social platforms to promote national interests and communicate policy domestically and internationally.
- *Diaspora engagement*: Mobilising diaspora communities for remittances, knowledge exchange and advocacy.

Thus, a 21st century diplomat must be both a generalist and a specialist, able to shift between global negotiations and local realities, supported by a system that encourages lifelong learning and specialisation without having a silo mentality.

The Role of Foreign Service Institutes

Sustaining professionalism requires well-resourced diplomatic academies or foreign service institutes that provide training, research and policy analysis to facilitate informed decision-making. Countries like India, Singapore and Brazil demonstrate the critical role of such institutions in shaping foreign policy. For developing countries, establishing or upgrading these institutes should be a national priority. Partnerships with international organisations (e.g., UNITAR, UNDP), regional academies, and foreign training institutions can help address resource and knowledge gaps.

Strategic Importance of a Professional Foreign Service

This study rejects the notion that foreign service is merely a bureaucratic tool managing embassies and consulates. Instead, it positions the foreign service as a strategic national asset central to a country's global engagement. For developing nations with limited geopolitical and economic leverage, a skilled professional foreign service compensates for deficits in hard power through soft power, negotiation skills and institutional credibility. In this section some of the key strategic areas where a professional foreign service provides measurable advantages are discussed.

Promotion of National Interests

A foreign service's fundamental duty is safeguarding and advancing national interests-political, economic, cultural and security-related. In a world of widening power disparities,

developing countries rely increasingly on strategic diplomacy to protect sovereignty, influence global norms, and attract cooperation.

Professional diplomats articulate and promote national positions internationally (Berridge, 2015). They perform a key function in shaping narratives, influencing policy and navigating complex geopolitics. They analyse global trends, anticipate other states' strategies and craft persuasive arguments in bilateral and multilateral settings. Coalition-building, especially within bodies like the United Nations, allows developing countries to amplify their voices and advocate for equity.

Diplomats must also advocate for development assistance, security cooperation, and favorable trade conditions. Through bilateral and multilateral negotiations, they contribute to shaping treaties, conventions and strategic partnerships that serve the long-term interests of their nations (Cooper et al., 2013).

A professional foreign service ensures policy continuity despite domestic political changes by preserving institutional memory and expertise, thereby fostering international credibility. Furthermore, professional diplomats play a critical role in correcting misinformation and rebuilding national reputations after crises, using strategic narrative management to attract goodwill and partnerships.

Economic Diplomacy

Diplomacy today is inseparable from economic interests. Beyond political recognition, diplomacy advances trade, investment, market access and integration into global value chains. Skilled diplomats identify economic opportunities, build investor confidence and support domestic businesses abroad (Okano-Heijmans, 2011). Economic diplomacy encompasses negotiating trade agreements, addressing barriers, facilitating technology transfers and fostering economic partnerships.

The foreign service must also coordinate closely with ministries of trade, finance and planning to align diplomatic efforts with national development strategies (Bayne & Woolcock, 2011]). Economic diplomacy thus becomes a core responsibility of any modern foreign service.

Key roles include:

- *Trade negotiations*: Shaping agreements that protect industries and promote growth through tariff reductions and dispute resolution.
- *Investment promotion*: Embassies serve as contact points for investors, facilitating regulatory navigation and coordination.
- *Supporting local businesses*: Providing market intelligence, regulatory guidance and trade facilitation.

- *Diaspora engagement*: Mobilising diaspora resources for remittances, knowledge transfer and advocacy. A proactive foreign service can work with diaspora networks to promote investment in home countries, facilitate technology transfer and encourage political advocacy for national interests abroad.

Professional diplomatic missions aligned with economic objectives become powerful engines of development.

Crisis Management

Crises – natural disasters, health emergencies, conflicts, or diplomatic standoffs – test a foreign service's responsiveness and competence. Diplomats act as frontline responders, ensuring timely communication, negotiation and citizen protection abroad (Sharp, 2009). Their rapid, decisive action can prevent escalation and facilitate resolution.

A professional foreign service is equipped to respond to crises through:

- Prompt communication between home and host governments.
- Coordinating consular services for citizen protection.
- Facilitating humanitarian aid, including visas and customs clearance.
- Engaging in multilateral conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, foreign services led repatriations, secured medical supplies and fostered international cooperation [Rana, 2020].

Multilateral Engagement

Multilateral diplomacy amplifies national voices, pools resources and shapes global governance. International institutions like the UN, WTO and regional bodies offer developing countries negotiation platforms, norm-setting influence and technical assistance. Engagement at these international organisations require expertise. Professional diplomats can better advocate for favorable positions, access development assistance and participate meaningfully in global governance [Karns et al., 2015]. Participation in multilateral diplomacy is particularly important for developing countries to ensure that their voices are not sidelined in global decision-making. Issues such as climate change, debt restructuring and development financing require a strong, coordinated presence at global fora (Thakur & Van Langenhove, 2006).

A professional foreign service guarantees:

- Consistent and articulate representation in multilateral fora.
- Mastery of complex international agreements and procedures.
- Building long-term alliances and voting blocs.
- Access to climate finance, development aid and global health resources.

As multilateral diplomacy expands into cybersecurity, AI, pandemic preparedness and migration governance, specialised training becomes ever more crucial.

Public Diplomacy

In the age of social media and global communication, countries can no longer rely solely on traditional diplomacy. Public diplomacythe practice of engaging foreign publics to influence opinion and policy-has become central to foreign policy (Nye, 2004). For resource-limited developing countries, public diplomacy counters stereotype, promotes tourism and engages diasporas. Exchange programs, international broadcasting, cultural diplomacy and global branding campaigns are all tools in the modern diplomat's arsenal (Cull, 2009).

A professional foreign service leads in:

- Organising cultural and academic exchanges.
- Managing official social media and online campaigns.
- Collaborating with diaspora communities to promote national branding.
- Countering disinformation and managing crises of perception.

Public diplomacy can also support tourism, attract foreign students and increase the visibility of national innovation in fields like science, architecture and environmental policy.

Conclusions

In an era of complex interdependence, no country-especially a developing one-can afford to operate in isolation. By definition, developing countries lack the economic and political power to resist external pressures through sheer leverage. Therefore, their most practical first line of defence is a strong, professional foreign service. Investing in such a service is not a luxury but a developmental imperative. Just as nations invest in infrastructure, education and health, they must also build and maintain diplomatic machinery that secures their place in the international system and preserves sovereign decision-making. Thus, this study highlights a critical and often overlooked issue for developing countries.

This article has demonstrated that a professional foreign service contributes significantly to multiple dimensions of national development-from securing economic partnerships and managing crises to advocating effectively in multilateral fora.

The study further highlights that foreign services in developing countries must evolve to confront emerging global challenges such as climate change, artificial intelligence, global health and cyber governance. These issues transcend traditional diplomacy and demand a new generation of diplomats equipped with interdisciplinary skills, cultural intelligence, technological fluency and emotional intelligence. To this end, governments must integrate foreign service development into broader national capacity-building and international

engagement strategies. This integration will ensure the deployment of skilled, adaptable officers capable of protecting and promoting national interests in a world marked by increasing political, economic and security interconnectedness.

Moving forward requires more than technical adjustments; it calls for a reconceptualization of diplomacy as central to national development. Institutional reforms must address incentive structures, embed professional standards and nurture a new generation of diplomats endowed with the skills, values and creativity needed to operate effectively in a volatile global environment.

Finally, this study stresses the importance of viewing foreign services not merely as extensions of state power but as instruments of peace, development and global cooperation. The credibility, creativity and capability of diplomats will determine how effectively developing nations assert their interests and contribute to shaping a more equitable international order. Thus, investment in a professional foreign service should be regarded as a strategic asset rather than an expenditure.

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Will Democracy Endure in South Asia? An Analysis of India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka 2014-2024

Nayani Melegoda

"No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all – wise. Indeed, it has been said democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."

Winston Churchill

Introduction

Political observers have noted an ongoing global decline in democracy in recent times. However, in 2015, it was reported that the South Asian region is witnessing an upsurge of democracy meaning that for the first time, all countries of South Asia have embraced democracy (ORF,2015). The inclusion of India in this review of democracy in praxis is essential, as it reflects valuable insight into big state–small state dynamics, directions for elected governments, and the broader regional implications for liberal democratic governance. As a regional superpower, India holds a commanding position relative to Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, making its democratic evolution particularly influential. Among the three countries examined in this study, both India and Bangladesh held general elections in 2014. In India, the 2014 election marked a significant landmark victory, with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), led by Narendra Modi, securing a parliamentary majority for the first time in decades.

In Bangladesh, the main opposition parties, the Bangladeshi National Party (BNP), led by Khaleda Zia, and Jamaat e Islami (JeI) boycotted the election in January 2014, leaving the field clear to the Awami League (AL), led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. This election was dubbed as the "battle of the begums'' by the foreign media. At the time western donors refused to endorse the election outcome on the ground that it did not reflect the will of the

people of Bangladesh. Yet, Western donors held back bringing in any sanctions (House of Commons, research briefings, 2015). In Bangladesh, the events that took place since 2014 marked a down turn in the country's democracy.

In Sri Lanka, both Presidential and Parliamentary elections were held in 2015, at a time nearly a decade of the Rajapakse regime in government. People of Sri Lanka went out to vote with many expectations for transparent and corruption-free government. There were many criticisms that democracy was at stake during the Rajapakse regime. Hence, 2015 election marked an upsurge of democracy in the country.

This paper aims at looking at instruments of democracy in the selected three South Asian countries. The question of how these South Asian countries can be categorized as working democracies between 2014-2024 will be investigated under the categories of Electoral Process, Political Participation/ Pluralism, Civil Liberties, Print and Electronic Media, and Rule of Law. This paper will further study the structural causes of discontent within democracies in the selected three countries of South Asia. Those are economic inequality, cultural polarization, and social media. There is comprehensive research data available online with many democracy projects in the world. The Varieties of Democracies project (V-DEM) data for the period under discussion was analysed as the main source of information. The others are research reports and data gathered from the International Institute of Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) and the US-based Freedom House. In addition, content analysis of various parliamentary, media and other research reports were consulted.

Country Briefs

India

India has been hailed as the world's largest democracy, a title it earned by maintaining universal suffrage, multi-party-political system and institutional pluralism. This democratic character has been reinforced by the country's growing electorate, particularly its massive youth population; the largest in the world. During the coalition era (1989–2014), India's democracy became more inclusive, with regional parties gaining a stronger voice in national politics and referee institutions, such as the Election Commission and judiciary exercising notable independence (Chatterjee, 2022).

However, since 2014, a strong democracy emerged under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP majority in the parliament. This is not to say that India has not witnessed certain challenges in democratic norms and institutional integrity. Scholars characterize several authoritarian practices as emerging through legal and procedural means rather than military coups or overt repression (Mehta, 2022; Anand, 2023). The V-Dem categorizes it as an "electoral autocracy" (Freedom House, 2023).

Additionally, the ruling party's attempts to centralize power, marginalize minorities-particularly Muslims - and erode the independence of oversight institutions must also be

highlighted (Chatham House, 2022). Yet, defenders argue that India's democratic foundations remain resilient, with an active electorate, regular elections, vocal civil society, and competitive party politics, by ensuring transparency and accountability (Vaishnav, 2025). This tension between erosion and endurance defines India's democratic narrative over the past decade.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh, constitutionally a parliamentary republic, has functioned under an increasingly centralized and contested political framework over the past decade. The political landscape has long been dominated by two parties; the Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Since returning to power in 2009, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the AL government have significantly consolidated executive power. Particularly after the 2011 abolition of the neutral caretaker government system, which previously helped ensure fair elections. While Bangladesh maintains regular elections and enjoys one of the highest voter turnout rates globally, the quality of its democracy has deteriorated. This was seen at the Battle of the Begums in 2014, raising serious concerns about representation, civil rights, and institutional independence (International IDEA, 2024; Freedom House, 2024).

Despite steady economic growth, the political environment has been marked by authoritarian tendencies, suppression of dissent, and politicized use of law enforcement. The judiciary has come under increasing executive influence, while civil society and the media have operated under legal and extralegal threats. Nonetheless, recent political upheavals, especially in 2023–2024, have created the potential for democratic revitalization. Sheikh Hasina similar to the case of Sri Lanka's Gotabaya Rajapakse had to flee the country amid mass protests. The formation of an interim reformist government under Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus in 2024 marked what some commentators have called a "second liberation" for Bangladesh (East Asia Forum, 2024). It has come to light that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina authorized her security forces to use lethal weapons/brutal crackdown against the protesters mostly young people (BBC 2025) in a completely undemocratic manner.

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is a unitary state with a hybrid presidential - parliamentary system, featuring universal suffrage and regular elections for both the presidency and parliament. Sri Lanka can boast of universal adult suffrage since 1931. In the post independent era, the adoption of the 1978 constitution, the presidency has historically been a powerful institution. The democratic practices in the country ensured to recalibrate this balance of power. Notably, the 20th Amendment in 2020 under the Rajapaksa regime significantly restored strong presidential powers, centralizing executive authority. However, the 21st Amendment in 2022 rolled back many of these powers, reinstating independent commissions and strengthening parliamentary oversight (International IDEA, 2024; Freiheit, 2024). The Sri Lankan parliament comprises of 225 members, whose role has been enhanced following reforms after the 2022 mass protests. One flaw is that the women representation in the Parliament has been non – significant until 2024.

While Sri Lanka has constitutional provisions protecting civil liberties and an independent judiciary, these institutions have frequently faced political interference. Sri Lanka's democratic performance, as measured by international observers, presents a mixed picture. The International IDEA places the country in the mid-range for representation, rights, rule of law, and participation, with particular strengths in civic engagement and electoral participation (International IDEA, 2024). Freedom House rated Sri Lanka as "Partly Free" in 2022, noting challenges in political rights and civil liberties. Meanwhile, CIVICUS- a global civic space tracker- labels the civic space in Sri Lanka as "repressed," highlighting restrictions on protests, media, and activism targeting. Despite these challenges, the 2022 *Aragalaya* protests was a turning point in reinstating transparency and accountability. The predominantly youth protests led to the resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa amid an economic crisis, marked a significant moment of civic awakening and popular demand for democratic reforms (Groundviews, 2024). Unlike in Bangladesh there were no brutal crackdown of the protestors by the security forces.

Electoral Process

India

India's electoral process is widely recognized for its sheer scale and the active participation of its citizens. Under the oversight of the Election Commission of India (ECI), general elections are typically conducted in a staggered, multiphase manner, ensuring broad access to the ballot box across the country's vast and diverse electorate. Executive power in India is vested in a prime minister- usually the leader of the majority party in the Lok Sabha (House of the People)- and a cabinet of ministers. While the president serves a largely ceremonial role, the office holds key constitutional functions such as appointing the prime minister and approving legislative acts. Members of the 545-seat Lok Sabha are directly elected for five-year terms. Most members of the 250-seat Rajya Sabha (Council of States) are elected by state legislatures, with a portion appointed by the president (Freedom House, 2024).

The 2014 general election marked a watershed moment, as the BJP, led by Narendra Modi, won a historic single-party majority, breaking nearly three decades of coalition politics. The campaign capitalized on widespread anti-incumbency sentiment, promises of economic revival, and strong leadership. In 2019, the BJP expanded its majority, reinforcing Modi's personal popularity and the party's ideological direction. However, both elections drew criticism for an uneven playing field. Observers highlighted concerns about the use of government resources for campaigning, pro-BJP media bias, and the marginalization of opposition voices (Anand, 2023; Jaffrelot, 2019).

The 2024 general election represented a partial course correction. Although the BJP emerged as the largest party, it fell short of an outright majority and had to rely on coalition partners within the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) to form a government. This result was widely seen as a democratic pushback.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh's electoral landscape during the past decade is characterized by tension, with controversy and credibility issues. The 2014 general election was largely boycotted by the BNP, allowing the AL to win in many constituencies unopposed. The 2018 elections further undermined democratic norms, with widespread allegations of voter intimidation, ballot-stuffing, and partisan policing (Freedom House, 2024).

Reflecting these realities, Bangladesh's Clean Election Index fell from 0.13 in 2014 to a striking 0.06 in 2024, and its Election Free and Fair score improved slightly from 0.25 to 0.95, though still far below regional or global standards (V-Dem, 2024). These figures emphasize how electoral legitimacy remained extremely low throughout the period. The 2024 interim administration promises to rectify this situation. In response to national protests, it has committed to holding genuinely free and fair elections under a newly restructured electoral framework in 2025 (East Asia Forum, 2024).

Sri Lanka

By 2014, people in Sri Lankans were questioning the democracy in praxis. Mahinda Rajapakse who was very popular in the post - civil war Sri Lanka lost his appeal to the public because of the allegations of massive corruption in government. Therefore, in the Presidential and Parliamentary election in 2015 it was a protest vote against the Rajapakse. There was clear majority to the rival candidate Maithripala Sirisena who promised to improve the political rights and civil liberties that Sri Lanka experienced. The internal rivalry between President Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe resulted in brother of Mahinda Rajapakse, Gotabaya Rajapaksa becoming president in 2019. His family's ethnic Sinhala Buddhist nationalist party Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) won parliamentary polls in 2020. A pattern of governmental mismanagement, corruption, and acute economic crisis under SLPP rule prompted the 2022 *Aragalaya* (Struggle) protest movement, which resulted in the ouster of President Rajapaksa and his brother, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa. A new government overseen by veteran politician Ranil Wickremesinghe, who was chosen by Parliament to serve out the remainder of Rajapaksa's presidential term, brought relative stability. The post covid economic challenges resulted in austerity measures under pressure from international creditors further damaged public confidence in the political establishment. This in return challenged the traditional political parties and their leaders. Therefore 2024, Presidential and Parliamentary elections resulted in a sweeping victory by the leftist National People's Alliance (NPP).

Political Participation/ Pluralism

India

India's participatory democracy remains robust, particularly at the grassroots level. Voter turnout in both national and state elections consistently exceeds 65%, with minimal disparity across income groups. Remarkably, according to the World Bank, the participation gap

between the rich and poor is among the narrowest globally. Youth engagement has also grown, notably through digital activism on platforms such as Twitter and WhatsApp, which played a visible role in shaping public discourse during the 2019 elections (Rao, 2023). As outlined in earlier sections, India maintains a dynamic multiparty system. The Indian National Congress dominated the federal government for most of the first five decades post-independence. However, the BJP emerged as a significant parliamentary force in the 1990s and led a coalition government from 1998 to 2004. This shift from single-party governments to coalition rule was spurred by the rise of regional and state-level parties with localized bases of power.

Political participation is not without challenges. Insurgent violence in some regions, the influence of powerful economic interests, and structural disadvantages faced by marginalized communities continue to shape the political landscape. Nevertheless, participation by women and religious and ethnic minorities remains high, and these groups are increasingly represented in government. By 2013, India had a Muslim vice president, a Sikh prime minister, and a Dalit woman serving as speaker of the Lok Sabha. In 2014, several states were governed by female chief ministers. In July 2022, Droupadi Murmu- former governor of Jharkhand and a BJP-backed candidate- was elected president. She became the first member of a tribal community to hold the office, marking a historic milestone in India's democratic evolution.

India’s president, a largely ceremonial figure, is elected to a five-year term by national and state legislators. In the most recent 2024 general elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi secured a third term after the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) won a majority of seats in the Lok Sabha.

Bangladesh

Bangladeshi citizens have consistently engaged in high rates of electoral participation. However, engagement beyond the ballot box has been minimal. Non-electoral political involvement, such as protest participation, civic group activism, or policy advocacy, remains low, at about 20–25% (Morium, 2024).

Importantly, the Women's Political Participation Index saw a decline, falling from 0.89 in 2014 to 0.58 in 2024 (V-Dem, 2024). This suggests not just stagnation but also a regression in gender-inclusive governance. Despite formal quotas in local bodies, patriarchal norms, political patronage, and lack of safe political spaces have continued to hinder women's participation at all levels (Amin, 2021). Youth, long excluded from decision-making roles, emerged as critical actors during the 2023–2024 protests. Their organizing ability and digital activism sparked the country’s most significant democratic mobilization in over a decade, setting the stage for potential long-term reforms (East Asia Forum, 2024).

Sri Lanka

Political participation in Sri Lanka is complicated, especially regarding gender representation and youth involvement. Women's representation in the national parliament remains among the lowest in South Asia, with only 5.3% of members of parliament being female in 2020 (IFES, 2024). However, a notable shift occurred at the local level after the introduction of a 25% electoral quota for women in 2016, which led to a significant rise in female representation, from 2% to 29%, following the 2018 local government elections (ibid.).

Despite these developments, women continue to face significant obstacles to national-level participation. These include high campaign costs, male-dominated party nomination boards and exposure to election-related violence (IFES, 2024). Structural challenges within centralized party systems further hinder progress toward gender parity. Accordingly, Sri Lanka's Women's Political Participation Index remained relatively static, declining marginally from 0.59 in 2014 to 0.58 in 2024 (V-Dem, 2024). This suggests that while local-level progress is evident, broader systemic issues continue to impede full gender inclusion in national politics.

Additionally, provisions under the Mixed Member Proportional Representation (MMPR) system introduced in 2018 intended to encourage broader political engagement, especially among youth. Though youth quotas were non-mandatory, parties were encouraged to include 25–30% youth candidates by 2025 (AERC, 2024). Youth participation in elections remained strong: presidential turnout was recorded at 81.5% in 2015, 83.7% in 2019, and 79.5% in 2024; for parliamentary elections, turnout was 77.7% in 2015, 75.9% in 2020, and 68.9% in 2024 (ibid.). The 2022 *Aragalaya* protests saw unprecedented youth-led grassroots activism, marking a turning point in civic engagement. This also resulted in traditional political parties being defeated in the elections in 2024.

Civil Liberties

India

India's civil liberties have suffered measurable declines in the last decade. Freedom House downgraded India from "Free" to "Partly Free," citing restrictions on assembly, speech, and minority rights. Additionally, the V-Dem Civil Liberties Index shows a decline from 0.72 in 2014, to 0.6 in 2024. The government's handling of dissent often conflates opposition with anti-nationalism, narrowing the space for democratic deliberation. Civil society organizations, particularly those receiving foreign funding, have faced bureaucratic harassment and de-registration under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) (Price, 2022). Additionally, marginalized communities- particularly Muslims and Dalits- have faced rising discrimination and violence, often with limited legal recourse. The Citizenship Amendment Act (2019) and National Register of Citizens (NRC) have also fuelled this tension. Freedom of religion is constitutionally guaranteed in India and is

generally respected. However, legislation in several states criminalizes religious conversions that take place as a result of "force" or "allurement." Hindus make up over 80 percent of the population, but the state is secular.

India continues to demonstrate democratic resilience through its vibrant civil society, independent judiciary, and active public discourse. Public interest litigation remains a crucial tool through which citizens challenge state actions and check accountability. Moreover, India's diverse and outspoken electronic and print media, continues to produce investigative journalism and facilitate debate on critical issues. Grassroots activism has sustained a culture of civic engagement, even in the face of institutional challenges. These dynamics reflect lasting democratic traditions and a population that remains deeply invested in the protection of civil rights.

Bangladesh

Civil liberties in Bangladesh have remained considerably constrained over the past decade. The V-Dem Civil Liberties Index shows a negligible rise from 0.46 in 2014 to 0.48 in 2024, reflecting stagnation rather than meaningful progress. The Digital Security Act (DSA), enacted in 2018, has become one of the primary instruments for suppressing civil liberties. The law contains vaguely defined offenses such as "hurting religious sentiment" or "publishing false information," allowing authorities broad discretion to arrest journalists, online activists, and opposition voices (Freedom House, 2024). According to human rights groups and the UN, the DSA has been systematically used to censor dissent, with dozens of journalists, students, and bloggers arrested or harassed under its provisions (Freedom House, 2024).

Moreover, security agencies such as the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) have been implicated in serious human rights violations, including enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and torture (ibid.). These actions have led to restricted public discourse and civic engagement. Civil society organizations, particularly those critical of the government, have faced audits, deregistration threats, and funding restrictions. During the 2023–2024 mass protests, authorities had imposed communication blackouts, banned gatherings, and arrested demonstrators, further infringing on rights to assembly and expression. However, the Yunus-led interim government has signalled a commitment to reviewing or repealing laws like the DSA.

Sri Lanka

Civil liberties in Sri Lanka are constitutionally guaranteed, particularly under Article 14 of the Constitution, which ensures freedoms of speech, assembly, association, and movement. However, their implementation has been uneven and increasingly constrained over the past decade. Accordingly, Sri Lanka's Civil Liberties Index rose from 0.6 in 2014 to 0.8 in 2024, indicating modest overall progress, especially in areas like civic engagement and the ability to protest peacefully (V-Dem, 2024).

Freedom House rated Sri Lanka's civil liberties score at just 0.33 in 2014, reflecting a pattern of heavy-handed governance and encroachments on personal freedoms, particularly under the Rajapaksa administrations. The use of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) continued to allow arbitrary arrests and prolonged detentions without trial, disproportionately impacting ethnic and religious minorities. The passage of the Online Safety Act in 2024 further raised concerns, granting a presidentially appointed commission powers to regulate and remove online content and prosecute individuals for vaguely defined offences such as "false information" or "disruptive speech" (Groundviews, 2024). Critics argue that this legislation curtails free expression and creates dissent among citizens.

Protest rights, too, have faced recurrent crackdowns. During the 2022 *Aragalaya* protests, the government responded with emergency curfews, social media blackouts, and force to disperse demonstrators. While the protests successfully triggered political change, including the resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the state's repressive response highlighted limitations on civil liberties. According to the CIVICUS Monitor, Sri Lanka's civic space remains classified as "repressed," with activists, journalists, and minority communities facing regular intimidation and surveillance.

Media

Following the Arab Spring uprisings of the early 2010's, there was a flood of optimism about social media's potential to unleash democracy around the world. However, the narrative of the social media changed quickly and at present social media is now blamed for fuelling disinformation, division and sometimes even violence. The 2024 World Economic Forum report named misinformation and disinformation the top global risks for the next couple of years. For the selected countries in South Asia this could be an existential threat.

India

India has a burgeoning media industry, with broadcast, print and digital media experiencing tremendous growth. There are around 197 million TV households, many of them using satellite or cable. FM radio stations are plentiful but only public All India Radio can produce news. The press scene is lively with thousands of titles. India has the second largest number of internet users in the world, after China.

There are around 197 million TV homes, many of them using direct-to-home satellite and cable services. Nearly 900 private satellite TV stations are on the air, around half of them devoted to news coverage. *Doordarshan*, the public TV, operates multiple services, including flagship DD1, which reaches hundreds of millions of viewers. Multichannel satellite TV is a huge hit. Leading platforms have millions of subscribers. State-owned *Doordarshan* runs a free-to-air platform, DD Free Dish. Over The Top (OTT) streaming platforms have a large following. Music-based FM radio stations abound. But only public All India Radio can produce news programming. AIR stations reach more than 99% of the population. India's press is lively and there are around 17,000 newspaper titles. Driven by a

growing middle class, the cumulative newspaper circulation figure is more than 400 million. International organisations give a mixed assessment of media freedom.

Privately-owned media are "vigorous and diverse" states the Freedom House. It further elaborates that the authorities use security, defamation and hate speech legislation to curb critical voices. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) highlights the problem of violence against journalists, especially those working for non-English-language-media in rural areas. However, it says that reporting in regions that the authorities deem to be sensitive, such as Indian-administered Kashmir, is difficult. Private media are vigorous and diverse. Investigations and scrutiny of politicians make the news media one of the most important components of India's democracy. Nevertheless, revelations of close relationships between politicians, business executives, lobbyists, and some leading media personalities have dented public confidence in the press in recent years. While radio remains dominated by the state and private radio stations are not allowed to air news content, the television and print sectors have expanded considerably over the past decade, with many of the new outlets targeting specific regional or linguistic audiences. Despite this vibrant media landscape, journalists continue to face a number of constraints. The government has used security laws, criminal defamation legislation, hate-speech laws, and contempt-of-court charges to curb critical voices on social media as well as traditional media platforms.

Internet access is largely unrestricted, though officials periodically implement overbroad blocks on supposedly offensive content to prevent unrest. Under Indian internet crime law, the burden is on website operators to remove content if requested to do so, and they face possible criminal penalties. Potentially inflammatory books and films are also occasionally banned or censored. A nationwide Central Monitoring System, launched in April 2013 and reportedly active in at least some states, will allow authorities to intercept any digital communication in real time. The surveillance does not require judicial oversight, and India does not have a privacy law to protect citizens in case of abuse. Academic freedom is generally robust. Very rare intimidation of academics and institutions over political and religious issues sometimes occurs. Scholars and activists accused of sympathizing with Maoist insurgents have faced pressure from authorities and alleged torture by police.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh’s media industry is diverse, spanning state-run and private outlets across print, broadcast, and digital platforms. Its media environment is heavily regulated and policed. According to the Government Censorship Effort score, the country improved from 1.44 in 2014 to 0.75 in 2024 (V-Dem, 2024). This reflects somewhat reduced, though still significant state interference.

State broadcasters function largely as government mouthpieces with limited editorial independence. The private sector is vibrant, comprising over 3,000 newspapers, about 30 TV channels, and community radio networks. Daily circulation figures exceed 400 million across roughly 17,000 titles. However, press freedom remains tightly constrained under legal and economic pressures. Complaints of violence and intimidation against journalists are

frequent. In 2024 alone, Bangladesh was reported as one of the most dangerous countries for journalists, with five killed while covering protests (RSF, 2025). Under former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's rule, laws like the Digital Security Act (2018) and later the Cyber Security Act placed restrictions on free expression. Although Hasina's ousting in August 2024 generated cautious optimism, boosted by interim reforms like revoked press accreditations, violations persisted. Journalists have been jailed, newspapers shut down, and online platforms monitored extensively. Investigative reporting has declined, and many media outlets now practice self-censorship. International watchdogs like Reporters Without Borders and Freedom House continue to rank Bangladesh poorly in press freedom indices (Freedom House, 2024).

The recent political transition offers some hope for loosening these restrictions. However, the structural threats to media independence, such as ownership concentration, politicized regulation, and fear of reprisal, remain deeply embedded, Overall, Bangladesh's media environment is technically pluralistic, yet heavily restricted by legislation, concentrated ownership, threats to safety, and periodic censorship. While reform attempts provide glimmers of hope, deep-rooted structural and political challenges constrain truly independent journalism.

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's media landscape features a mix of state-run broadcasters and private outlets. However, editorial freedom remains limited. The country ranked 139th out of 180 in the 2024 Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index, classified under the "very serious" category (RSF, 2024). State-owned media operate under the Ministry of Mass Media and are frequently accused of operating within government lines (ibid.).

Private media are more diverse, but their independence is undermined by high ownership concentration. Minority-language media, especially Tamil outlets, have faced sustained intimidation and legal threats. Journalists reporting on sensitive topics such as corruption, the military, or transitional justice often face surveillance, harassment, or arbitrary arrests. Additionally, compared to digital platforms, print newspapers are relatively expensive and increasingly out of reach for lower-income households. This cost barrier limits their circulation, contributing to an information gap within the country.

Legal frameworks have been increasingly restrictive. While Article 14 (1) (a) of the Constitution of Sri Lanka guarantees freedom of speech, legislation like the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Act have long enabled censorship and arrest for dissent. The 2024 Online Safety Act has deepened concerns by empowering a presidentially appointed commission to remove content deemed harmful or false, without judicial oversight.

Though Sri Lanka's online media sphere offers some room for critical discourse, self-censorship remains high. The state's heavy hand in media regulation, paired with political influence and historic impunity for attacks on journalists, continues to undermine media

freedom and democratic accountability (RSF, 2024; Groundviews, 2024). It is also notable to mention that during the 2022 *Aragalaya* protests, media played a crucial role in mobilizing public support and amplifying dissent. Independent online outlets, livestreams, and social media channels provided real-time coverage of protests, bypassing the often-muted narratives of mainstream broadcasters. This digital mobilization helped sustain momentum, challenged state narratives, and showcased the power of decentralized media in democratic resistance (Groundviews, 2024). Significantly, this wave of activism was reinforced by the active participation of middle-class citizens, including academics, IT professionals, geographers, and political scientists, whose expertise and networks lent both credibility and strategic depth to the movement.

Rule of Law

India

The judiciary is independent of the executive branch. Judges have displayed considerable activism in response to public-interest litigation matters. However, in recent years some judges have initiated contempt-of-court cases against activists and journalists who expose judicial corruption or question verdicts. The lower levels of the judiciary in particular have been rife with corruption, and most citizens arguing of having great difficulty securing justice through the courts. The system is severely backlogged and understaffed, leading to lengthy pretrial detention for a large number of suspects, many of whom remain in jail beyond the duration of any sentence they might receive if convicted.

The criminal justice system fails to provide equal protection to marginalized groups. Muslims, who make up some 13 percent of the population, are underrepresented in the security forces as well as in the foreign and intelligence services. Particularly in rural India, informal councils often issue edicts concerning social customs. While these bodies play a role in relieving the overburdened official courts, their decisions sometimes result in violence or persecution aimed at those perceived to have transgressed social norms, especially women and members of the lower castes.

Police torture, abuse, and corruption are entrenched in the law enforcement system. The police also suffer from understaffing in relation to the size of the population. Citizens frequently face substantial obstacles, including demands for bribes, in getting the police to file a First Information Report, which is necessary to trigger an investigation of an alleged crime. Custodial rape of female detainees continues to be a problem, as does routine abuse of ordinary prisoners, particularly minorities and members of the lower castes. According to the Working Group on Human Rights in India and the United Nations, 14,231 people died in police custody between 2001 and 2010, and approximately 1.8 million people are victims of police torture every year. This is likely an underestimate, since it only includes cases registered with the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).

The constitution bars discrimination based on caste, and laws set aside quotas in education and government jobs for historically underprivileged scheduled tribes, scheduled castes (Dalits), and groups categorized by the government as "other backward classes." However, members of the lower castes and minorities continue to face routine discrimination and violence. Dalits are often denied access to land and other public amenities, abused by landlords and police, and forced to work in miserable conditions. Indian Muslims are more likely than the general population to be poor and illiterate, with less access to government employment, medical care, and loans.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh's legal and judicial systems have seen minimal progress over the past decade. The WJP Rule of Law Index and Freedom House Rule of Law score show Bangladesh stagnating at 0.39 and 0.11 respectively in 2024, among the lowest globally and regionally (World Justice Project, 2024; Freedom House, 2024).

Critics argue that the judiciary lacks independence and is vulnerable to executive interference. Even constitutional safeguards, such as the Article 22 of the constitution of Bangladesh, which entails a promise of judicial separation, have been undermined in practice. Meanwhile, public trust in legal accountability mechanisms remains extremely low. The Accountability Index dropped from 0.41 in 2014 to 0.35 in 2024, underscoring institutional decay (V-Dem, 2024). Nevertheless, the current political transition provides a rare chance to reassert judicial independence and rebuild public confidence in legal systems. The interim administration has promised a reformation of the judiciary and security sector.

Sri Lanka

The rule of law in Sri Lanka has undergone significant shifts between 2014 and 2024, marked by alternating cycles of centralization and reform. A central feature of this decade-long evolution is the series of constitutional amendments that have shaped the balance of power and the functioning of independent institutions. The 18th Amendment (2010) significantly weakened democratic checks by abolishing term limits and curtailing the powers of independent commissions, concentrating authority in the executive branch. The 19th Amendment (2015), introduced under the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe administration, attempted to restore balance by reintroducing the Constitutional Council and empowering oversight bodies such as the Election Commission and the Human Rights Commission (International IDEA, 2024).

However, this progress was short-lived. In 2020, the 20th Amendment- passed under President Gotabaya Rajapaksa- reinstated extensive presidential powers, granting sole discretion over appointments to the judiciary, police, and public service. It also weakened the independence of oversight institutions. In response to public pressure following the 2022 economic crisis and the *Aragalaya* protest movement, the 21st Amendment was introduced. This partially reversed these powers, once again empowering the Constitutional Council to play a key role in high-level appointments (Groundviews, 2024; International IDEA, 2024).

Despite these structural reforms, the judiciary continues to grapple with deeper systemic issues. Allegations of corruption, politically influenced verdicts, and lack of transparency remain prevalent. The World Justice Project ranked Sri Lanka as the best performer in South Asia in 2014. However, its standing has since fluctuated, only recovering to a mid-tier regional level by 2024. Similarly, the World Bank's Rule of Law Index placed Sri Lanka slightly below the global average in recent years, with scores between -0.09 and -0.06 from 2022–23.

Encouragingly, V-Dem's Rule of Law Index shows notable improvement, from 0.43 in 2014 to 0.7 in 2024, reflecting gradual enhancements in institutional reliability and legal accountability. Yet, the passage of the 2023 Online Safety Act, along with ongoing restrictions on protests and speech, underscore continued frictions between state control and the full realization of rule of law principles (Freedom House, 2024; Groundviews, 2024).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the three case studies highlight that despite the challenges the democracy in South Asia will prevail for a considerable future. Similar features in all the three countries are, that people are highly literate and therefore value the right they have in making choices as to who would govern their countries. Both India and Sri Lanka had voter turnouts around 65% at last elections whereas Bangladesh it was only around 41% where it was considered that the elections were largely boycotted. Similarly, the authoritarian rule that emerged somewhat in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh looked very strong, until suddenly they were not. These democracies also show that the longest – standing democracies tend to be the most stable in the face of crises. Political observers may say that there is an ongoing global decline in democracy in the past decade or so (Vladimir Putin has ruled Russia since 1999). The above three case studies show us that the South Asia's roots in democracy is strengthened in the 21st century.

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Sri Lanka's Geopolitical Dynamics as a Small State: Past, Present and Future

Asantha Senevirathna

Introduction

There is a general understanding that Sri Lanka is a small state in the international system. The use of the term 'small state' on Sri Lanka can be related to its size and its political weakness. However, there is a serious debate in international relations that highlights there are some states in the international system which are small in land size and population but cannot be considered small state based on their power and influence. The case of Israel in the Middle East and Singapore in South East Asia are notable examples. Both Israel and Singapore are smaller in land size and population than Sri Lanka, yet their economic and military power had made them strong powerful states in their respective regions. Sri Lanka's long history provides ample examples that much of its history has been subjected to the influence of foreign powers. In the ancient era, there had been numerous South Indian invasions and later it was subjected to colonial rule for more than four centuries until it got independence in 1948. Even after independence, poor economic growth, political instability, ethnic conflicts, and external influences by major powers such as India have proved that it is a small state in the international system. As Keethaponkalan (2014) highlights Sri Lanka is historically identified as a small and weak state, "As a small and weak power, Sri Lanka had to struggle constantly to remain autonomous ever since independence. Hegemonic pressure emanated from two fronts: (1) dominant Western powers and (2) India" (p. 168). Further, As Devapriya (2023) highlights, Sri Lanka is a "small state flanked by a powerful regional hegemon and an even more powerful extra-regional player, the island nation has, throughout most of its recorded history, had little say in the geopolitical complexities dominating its foreign policy and domestic politics" (para. 1).

The Post-Independence Era till 1980

From independence in 1948 to 1955, Sri Lanka was governed by the United National Party (UNP) which continued its close relations with its previous colonial ruler United Kingdom (UK). The fear of Indian domination prompted UNP policymakers to maintain a close relationship with the UK. The historical experiences of South Indian invasions, overlapping Tamil population and a large number of people of Indian origin in that era contributed to this fear about Indian domination in Sri Lanka's politics. In this background, Sri Lanka then called Ceylon allowed the British to maintain its naval base in Trincomalee and an airbase in Katunayake.

However, there was a drastic change in Sri Lanka's foreign policy in 1956. Under the new Prime Minister S.W.R.D Bandaranaike, the new Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) government created a non-aligned foreign policy in the country. Also, the new government of Prime Minister Bandaranaike ended the lease agreements of British military bases in Sri Lanka. These policies had a highly positive impact on India's views of Sri Lanka as a friendly neighbour. Also, this new non-aligned foreign policy showed a decrease in the fear of Indian dominance among many Sri Lankan policymakers. Even the UNP governments after Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike maintained a non-aligned foreign policy. However, it was Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike who became famous for maintaining a non-aligned and highly active foreign policy. Her two tenures as the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka during the Cold War era from 1960to 1965 and 1970 to 1977, the country earned high regard from various countries in the world for its active and non-aligned foreign policy. Both Soviet Union and the United States recognized Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike's role in third world politics with high regard. Her neutral but active role roles in the Sino-Indian war of 1962 and the India-Pakistan war of 1971 earned her goodwill from these influential Asian countries. In recognition of Sri Lanka's positive foreign policy towards China, in the 1970s, it donated the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH) which later became one of the prime places for many international conferences. However, it was her relations with India that provided the country with many notable benefits. The signing of the 'Agreement on People of Indian Origin in Ceylon' in 1964 and the agreements signed to demarcate the maritime boundary between India and Sri Lanka in 1974 and 1976 was major foreign policy achievements in her era as the Prime Minister of the country. In both these agreements, it was evident that India did not maintain a big power attitude towards Sri Lanka. This was mainly due to India's recognition of Sri Lanka as a friendly country. A friendly country like Sri Lanka was important to India since it had major border conflicts with China and Pakistan on its northern and western fronts respectively. Another important factor that contributed to friendly relations between Sri Lanka and India was the special personal relationship between Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike. Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike's strategic visions helped Sri Lanka to maintain cordial relations with India. During her era, though Sri Lanka was a small state it played a major role in global politics. Her proposal for the nuclear-weapons-free zone in the Indian Ocean and her leadership in organizing the fifth

Non-Align Movement (NAM) summit in 1976 in Colombo made Sri Lanka an important player in global politics. Under her leadership, though Sri Lanka was a small state many powerful countries did not treat Sri Lanka form a hegemonic attitude due to its friendly and non-aligned foreign policy. While holding the post of Prime Minister, Sirimavo Bandaranaike was there for nearly 12 years and so she is the longest serving foreign minister of Ceylon/Sri Lanka. The period that she was foreign minister saw Sri Lanka punching above her weight in foreign affairs (De Silva 2019).

The new UNP government that came to power in Sri Lanka under President J.R. Jayewardene in 1977 brought drastic changes to the economic and foreign policy of the country. President Jayewardene started closer relations with the United States and economically advance Western countries focusing on rapid economic development. During the period from 1977 to 1980 many governments in South Asia including India maintained right-wing policies that in return facilitated the maintenance of new economic and foreign policy of Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka's Security Dilemma as a Small State in the 1980s: The Problematic Period

The decade of 1980s was the most problematic period in Sri Lanka's national security. Sri Lanka as a small state was subjected to the hegemonic influence of India and the ethnic issue aggravated into a major conflict. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi under Indian National Congress (INC) came back to power in 1980 which resulted in highly problematic relations between the two countries. The new 'Indira Doctrine' by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi maintained a hegemonic approach towards its small neighbours. Under the Indira doctrine, India considered any South Asian country maintaining close relations with an external power that is considered hostile to its interests as an anti-Indian act. In this background, the close relations of President Jayewardene with the United States and the West were recognised as anti-India by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The political environment that prevailed in South Asia at that time further contributed to an Indian suspicion about a possible external balancing by Sri Lanka. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s prompted the United States to increase its naval presence in the Indian ocean, which was considered by India as its traditional sphere of influence. President Jayewardene's close interactions with the United States was recognised by India as a possible effort by the latter to get access to Trincomalee port. In this background, India initiated a containment act against Sri Lanka. India used Tamil separatism in Sri Lanka as a geopolitical tool to contain the latter. India started training Tamil separatist groups including the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Tamil Nadu and elsewhere in India. In this background, the increasingly violent conflict between Sinhalese and Tamils resulted in the 'Black July' incident in July 1983. To address the violence created by Tamil armed groups, then the government of Sri Lanka increasingly seek military assistance from the West and other external powers such as China, Pakistan, and Israel. The external power involvement in Sri Lankan security issues further attracted Indian hegemonism toward Sri Lanka. It was during the time of Prime Minister

Rajiv Gandhi's era that India showed its peak of big power and hegemonic approach towards Sri Lanka. The signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord and the arrival of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka in 1987 marked the peak of the Indian hegemonic intervention in the island nation.

Sri Lanka's national security problem in the 1980s provides a classic example of a security dilemma of a small state that is subjected to the sphere of influence of large regional power. It can be highlighted that the political leadership of the country in that period did not understand the geopolitics of India-Sri Lanka relations that had an enormous impact on the country's national security. This era taught Sri Lanka how to act as a small state in the vicinity of a large regional power like India. It also showed that India as a regional power may react if Sri Lanka is developing close strategic relations with external powers that India considers hostile to its regional geopolitical interests. The Indian intervention in Sri Lanka during the 1980s as a regional power not only showcased its hegemonism over a small state like Sri Lanka but also showed its interest in playing a regional managerial role in its sphere of influence. However, by the early 1990s due to various internal and external issues, the IPKF withdrew from Sri Lanka. After 1991, the new regional and global political dynamics in the post-Cold War world order forwarded new challenges and opportunities to Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka and New World Order

As highlighted earlier, Sri Lanka has new geopolitical challenges and opportunities in the new world order. The regional power India now does not consider the United States to be hostile to its regional interests as it viewed in the 1980s. In fact, gradually United States-India relations have developed into a more strategic partnership in the 21st century. It is the rise of China that has prompted the United States and India to develop a close strategic partnership with each other. It is very much evident that the United States is concerned about the rise of China as it considers it a challenge to its global dominance. At the same time, India is worried about the rise of China as it believes is a challenge to its regional hegemony in the region of South Asia and the Indian Ocean. In recent times Sri Lanka has developed strong relations with all these powerful countries. However, the rapid growth of Sri Lanka's relations with China has caused a geopolitical threat perception in the United States and India. To counter the growing influence of China in Sri Lanka, both the United States and India unilaterally and cooperatively are implementing various strategies in Sri Lanka. The growing influence of these major powers provides both challenges and opportunities for Sri Lanka. While acknowledging the strategic position of the island in the Indian Ocean Region, small states such as Sri Lanka have to be aware of the geopolitical implications resulting in complications that require foreign policy adjustments (Fernando,2018). Sri Lanka as a small state is in a strategic dilemma in the twenty-first century to manure its relations with these powerful countries. As Senevirathna (2025) mentions, "The regional power India and the superpower United States' contradictions with China on BRI have created major geopolitical

challenges for Sri Lanka as a small state. In this background, Sri Lanka is now strangled between the geopolitical interests of the BRI and IPS" (p.333).

Sri Lanka and China in the 21st Century

At present China has become an economic superpower in the world. China's influence is growing all over the world bringing drastic changes to the existing world order. Sri Lanka has a long history of relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC). Since the start of diplomatic relations in 1957, China-Sri Lanka relations grew steadily in the Cold War era and beyond. As highlighted earlier, the non-aligned foreign policy and Sri Lanka's active participation in protecting the rights of third world politics earned respect from China over the years. However, it was during the tenure of President Mahinda Rajapaksa from 2004 to 2014 that China-Sri Lanka relations came to new heights. First, China supported Sri Lanka with military equipment and training to overcome three-decade-old terrorism in the country by 2009. As Samaranayke (2011) highlights during President Rajapaksa's era, "A first-time, systematic analysis of the trends in Sri Lanka's economic, military, and diplomatic relations with China reveals that ties have indeed been strengthening" (p.1). Secondly, Sri Lanka became an important partner to China's BRI. Under the BRI, China started many large-scale development projects in Sri Lanka. In the wide scope of the BRI, China did recognise the importance of Sri Lanka due to its strategic location within the Indian Ocean. Sri Lanka is connected to the maritime version of the BRI that is known as the Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI). Sri Lanka is an island nation strategically located in the Indian Ocean. Due to its location along the world's busiest sea lanes connecting the Far East with the West, it has become an important part of the MSRI (Senevirathna, 2018, p.116). Sri Lanka as a small state that was just coming out of a three-decade-long civil war in the country saw BRI as an opportunity to develop the country. Initially, Sri Lanka gained financial and technical assistance to develop the first expressways in the country. Thereafter, Sri Lanka initiated several notable projects under the BRI with Chinese assistance. The Hambantota port development project, Hambantota International Airport, Norochcholai Coal Power Plant Project, Nelum Pokuna Theatre Project, Nelum Kuluna (Lotus Tower) Communication Tower Project, the development projects in the port of Colombo along with Port City Project (PCP) are notable Chinese projects in the country. Among all these projects, the port development has become the most controversial where both United States and India have highlighted their geopolitical concerns.

The Hambantota port development project started in southern Sri Lanka in 2004. It is being developed as a service port for ships travelling in the East-West Sea route in the Indian Ocean. Along with the port development, President Rajapaksha government initiated various infrastructure development projects in the Hambantota area including the development of an international airport. However, over time the projects in Hambantota did not generate enough profit to repay the Chinese loans taken to initiate these projects. In this background, in 2017 the government under President Maithripala Srisena and Prime Minister Ranil

Wickremasinghe sold seventy per cent of shares of the port to a Chinese government-owned company. This transaction alarmed both United States and India. In 2018, the United States Vice President Mike Penance delivered a speech at the Hudson institute highlighting that China has a strategic plan to make Hambantota a military base for its navy. He mentioned that "Two years ago, that country (Sri Lanka) could no longer afford its payments, so Beijing pressured Sri Lanka to deliver the new port directly into Chinese hands. It may soon become a forward military base for China's growing blue-water navy"(as cited in Rutnam, 2018). The 'String of Pearls Strategy' forwarded by the United States Defence Department in 2004 highlights Hambantota to be one of the pearls by China in the Indian Ocean that is trying to contain Indian power in the region. This has generated serious strategic concerns among the strategic community in New Delhi.

China has also engaged in the massive scale port development in the port of Colombo. The port of Colombo is the busiest transhipment port in South Asia and Chinese companies have a strong presence in the port. A Chinese company holds most of the shares at Colombo South Container Terminal (CSCT) which is the busiest terminal in the port of Colombo. India is the most important transhipment partner of the port of Colombo. In this background, India has a strategic concern regarding the Chinese presence in the port of Colombo and is currently working in Sri Lanka to gain an operational presence in the port. Apart from the notable presence at the port of Colombo, the Chinese are also building the port city right next to it on reclaimed land from the sea. The PCP is going to be the largest ever foreign direct investment received by Sri Lanka. The CPC has received an investment of 1.9 billion USD and in the second phase, will receive investments worth 13 billion USD (Samaranayaka 2015). The PCP is expected to get a large-scale economic benefit to the country, but the problem lies with how the United States and India view the growing Chinese presence at Colombo. Sri Lanka as a small state must carefully initiate the development of PCP without generating geopolitical threat perceptions among strategic communities of the United States and India. One of the strategies that Sri Lanka can work on right now is to attract Indian and Western companies to invest in the CPC which will ease the geopolitical concerns of the concerned parties due to their presence and cooperation with the project. As a small state that is on the path of economic development, Sri Lanka needs to maintain economic interactions with China considering its importance in the global economy. However, Sri Lanka as a small state must be vigilant about how the United States and India look at its relations with China.

Sri Lanka and India in the 21st Century

As highlighted earlier, India is the most influential country in the internal politics of Sri Lanka. From a Sri Lankan perspective, India represents the most important country in its foreign policy. The incidents in the 1980s provides a classic example that Sri Lanka as a small state can be subjected to Indian hegemonism if it maintains a foreign policy that the

Indian strategic community considers a threat to its geopolitical interests. Indian strategist Ravi Kaul highlights the strategic importance of Sri Lanka to India as follows:

> "Sri Lanka is important strategically to India as Eire is to the United Kingdom or Taiwan to China. As long as Sri Lanka is friendly or neutral, India has nothing to worry about but if there be any danger of the island falling under the domination of a power hostile to India, India cannot tolerate such a situation endangering her territorial integrity (Kaul 1974, p.66)".

In the present-day context, it is the growing Chinese influence that worries the strategic community in India. The recent border clashes between China and India have contributed latter to identifying China as a threat to its geopolitical interests. In this background, it is no wonder that India is largely concerned about the growing Chinese influence in its traditional backyard in the Indian Ocean and particularly in Sri Lanka. Especially, India does not like the so-called 'String of Pearls Strategy' becoming a reality and Sri Lanka to be part of it. Here, Sri Lanka faces the challenge of convincing India that strong China-Sri Lanka relations are not in any way targeted at containing India.

In the new world order, the relations between India and Sri Lanka have been largely cordial. India is an import partner of Sri Lanka and there are many important economic initiatives between the two countries. In recent times India has shown its interest to engage in strategically important projects in the country especially focusing on challenging the growing Chinese influence in the island nation. As Balachandran (2021) highlights With Sri Lanka drifting toward China to get funds for infrastructural development, India is anxious to demonstrate that it also can contribute to Sri Lanka's economic development. In this regard, the External Affairs Minister of India Jaishankar at a meeting with the then Minister of Foreign affairs of Sri Lanka in January 2021 mentioned that:

> "As two close neighbours with such obvious synergies, the potential for further strengthening our cooperation is enormous. Some of that may help provide immediate relief; others would have very positive medium-term implications for Sri Lanka's development. There are many proposals under discussion, including in infrastructure, energy, connectivity, etc. Their early implementation is obviously in mutual interest and would definitely accelerate Sri Lanka's economic recovery (Balachandran 2021)".

To counter the Chinese influence in the port of Colombo, recently India entered into an agreement with Sri Lanka to develop the Western Terminal under its expansion project. This initiative will provide more security to Indian transhipment in the port of Colombo. While addressing Indian security concerns the new projects provided a win for the port of Colombo since it was able to attract large-scale investment from an Indian company. This investment will facilitate the future plans of the port of Colombo to become a major maritime hub in the world. This project can be an example of how Sri Lanka used the strategy of hedging between China and India to attract much-needed investments to develop the port of Colombo.

Since its independence, India was interested in the port of Trincomalee on the Eastern coast of Sri Lanka. Trincomalee is the most important natural harbour in the Indian Ocean and has a great strategic value. The area is home to a large oil tank farm that was built by the British.

As highlighted earlier during the Cold War era India had worried that this strategically important harbour may fall under an external power that is hostile to India. In the 1987 Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord, India made sure that Trincomalee will not fall under any external power which was highlighted under the accord. Even in the twenty-first century, India maintains strong interests in the Trincomalee. Recently the government of India signed an agreement with the government of Sri Lanka extending the Indian cooperation in developing the Trincomalee oil tank farm under a long-term agreement. Now with the oil tank deal, the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), one of India's largest government-owned business entities, will expand its Trincomalee port presence through the Lanka Indian IOC (LIOC), its Sri Lankan subsidiary, which has already been operating 14 oil tanks for nearly 20 years in the northeastern port (Macan-Makar 2022).

In recent times India has extended its development assistance to Sri Lanka especially focusing on the development in the North-East of the country. From an Indian perspective, Tamil Nadu is insisting on the central government of India to contribute more to achieve the development and political aspirations of the Tamils in the North and East of Sri Lanka. Further, India is also working on uplifting the living standards of Indian Tamils in the hill country of Sri Lanka. The ethnic linkages among Tamils in India and Sri Lanka can serve as an effective tool for India to maintain its geopolitical interests in Sri Lanka. In this background, it can be argued that in future India would develop its strategic initiatives based on two factors. The First would be the growing Chinese influence in Sri Lanka and the second, would be Tamil linkage politics between the two countries. Based on the experience, Sri Lanka as a small state has to maintain its foreign policy and policy on the ethnic issue that will not attract negative impact from India. However, the large market and rapid economic growth of India can be used by Sri Lanka to develop its economy.

Sri Lanka and the United States in the Twenty-First Century

Historically Sri Lanka has had friendly relations with the United States. However, due to Sri Lanka’s strong role in the non-aligned movement in much of the Cold War era two countries never embarked on a strategic level defence partnership. Sri Lanka's open economic system from 1977 onwards made the United States an important economic partner. At the present United States has become the largest export destination for Sri Lankan products. In the year 2021, approximately 25 percent of the total exports from Sri Lanka went to the United States (Trending Economics, n.d.). In this background, the United States' interest in Sri Lanka is characterised by its larger geopolitical interest under the Indo-Pacific strategy. The United States view the strategic location of Sri Lanka in the IOR had given the island an opportunity to play a constructive role in regional affairs. However, the United States wants Sri Lanka to act in a manner that will not harm the wider interests of the United States in the region. In recent times, the growing Chinese influence because of the large-scale infrastructure projects has generated concerns among the United States strategic community. As highlighted earlier, even the policymakers at the level such as the Vice President of the United States have

commented on the Chinese involvement in Sri Lanka in a negative manner, particularly regarding the developments related to the port of Hambantota. In the immediate aftermath of the civil war, the United States and other Western countries tried to pressure Sri Lanka using the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) targeting to contain growing China-Sri Lanka relations. In an effort to increase its influence on the island, the United States proposed an infrastructure development corridor connecting Colombo and Trincomalee under the Millennium Cooperation Challenge (MCC). The MCC proposed a complete grant of 480 million USD targeting various infrastructure development. However, many political organizations in the country opposed the project. As Samaranyaka (2020) highlights, The MCC included three sub-agreements that could give the US a certain degree of control, which can seriously impact Sri Lanka's sovereignty. This agreement generated a intense debate in the country opposing the signing of this agreement. In this background, the newly appointed government in Sri Lanka under President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in 2019 had to cancel the project. As a small state Sri Lanka has to deal with the United States in a manner that will not attract negative influence from the world's most powerful country. Sri Lanka has to carefully analyse the strategic interests of the United States under its IPS. Certainly, there are challenges, but if Sri Lanka can use the tool of hedging based on Chinese influence, there is an opportunity to attract investments from the United States and the West to develop the economy. In this background, inviting the United States and Western companies to invest in Hambantota and CPC to counter Chinese influence can provide economic benefits to the country.

Conclusion

History shows that Sri Lanka had been subjected to the influences of powerful countries. International Relations scholars largely recognise Sri Lanka as a small state in the international system since its weakness in avoiding external influences and visible political and economic weakness. After independence in 1948, initially, the UNP government maintained close security and economic relations with the UK. However, the new SLFP government adopted a new non-aligned foreign policy. Till 1980, Sri Lanka had cordial relations with major powers in the world and particularly with its larger neighbour India due to the non-aligned foreign policy of the country. During this era, Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike became a symbol of third world politics and showed the rest of the world how a small state like Sri Lanka can progress in a volatile international system. Her special relations with Indian political leadership particularly earned benefits to the country. The decade of 1980s became the most problematic era in Sri Lanka's foreign policy and national security. The Indira doctrine in that era identified President Jayewardene's relations with external powers as a threat to its regional power. This in turn led to India using Tamil political linkage as a geopolitical tool to contain Sri Lanka's policies. The Indian intervention in the 1980s shows how Sri Lanka faced a security dilemma as a small state that did not understand the geopolitical interests of India. In the post-Cold War era and particularly after 2000, Sri Lanka has been subjected to the emerging power politics by major

powers in the Indian Ocean. China has increased its influence in the island nation under BRI. To contain Chinese influence both the United States and India have increased their influence in Sri Lanka via their own strategies. The IPS strategy where the United States and India collaborate to counter BRI has forwarded further challenges and opportunities to Sri Lanka at present. In this background, "Since Sri Lanka is still a developing country, it should have an effective strategy to gain opportunities while successfully facing challenges provided by both BRI and IPS" (Senevirathna 20, p.190).

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Strategic Significance of Maritime Diplomacy in Strengthening Sri Lanka's Sea Power

Roshan Kulatunga

Introduction

Sri Lanka is a small state located in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Its strategic position, island geography, and proximity to major Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) and the Indian sub-continent have placed Sri Lanka in a challenging location in the IOR, given its strategic location and maritime geography, Sri Lanka faces both traditional and non-traditional maritime security issues. Therefore, it is important to understand the significance of sea power/maritime power and nexus to maritime diplomacy. In the 21st century, sea power depends on both the military and non-military maritime components of a state. These stakeholders interact with state and non-state actors using a combination of soft and hard power assets in the maritime domain. As a soft power tool, maritime diplomacy is increasingly significant, encompassing activities such as port visits, combined maritime exercises, civil maritime operations, and naval presence. Maritime stakeholders are the outermost layers of the state and play a crucial role in addressing challenges in the maritime domain. Sri Lanka may not be strong in military power, but the diplomatic aspects, such as port visits, combined operations, sharing of intelligence and surveillance, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) activities, and goodwill visits, could be used to enhance its sea power. Under the purview of maritime diplomacy, the Navy and other Constabulary Agencies play a vital role in maritime diplomatic activities such as combined operations, joint patrols, and SAR operations.

This article argues that the most effective way for Sri Lanka to strengthen its position in the maritime domain is through the use of maritime diplomacy. It will also discuss the Shelter Theory, introduced by Buldur Thorhallsson, which focuses on the behaviour of small states.

In the current context, Sri Lanka must navigate relationships with powerful maritime nations such as the USA, China, India, Australia, and the UK, as well as with international organisations such as the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). Therefore, Sri Lanka must understand its small state capacities, level of sea power, and utilise maritime diplomacy and incorporate it into the overall maritime strategy of the state.

Maritime Opportunities and Challenges

Sri Lanka, as a small island nation, possesses numerous maritime opportunities but also faces a wide range of traditional and non-traditional maritime security challenges. The competition for maritime dominance in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, along with the use of 'gray zone' tactics by various states, such as covert operations, cognitive warfare, propaganda, intelligence deployments, and espionage, complicates the security landscape. Additionally, the rise of non-state actors in the maritime domain and advancements in maritime technologies underscore the necessity for small states like Sri Lanka to develop a comprehensive maritime strategy. This strategy should also explore opportunities in the blue economy and ensure good order at sea, which is essential for a maritime nation.

Sri Lanka is facing significant challenges in terms of maritime security due to the maritime influence of larger nations. China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative, for instance, represents a new geopolitical strategy in the 21st century as a part of China's merchant maritime civilization. The "QUAD," which consists of the US, Japan, Australia, and India, is increasing its confrontation with China across the Indo-Pacific. Meanwhile, Chinese investments in Sri Lanka have grown considerably in recent years, mainly focusing on infrastructure development as part of the OBOR Initiative. This initiative has drawn considerable attention from other major power, and Sri Lanka is in a maritime security dilemma for cooperating with other interested parties when dealing with bilateral and multilateral agreements. The trilateral technology sharing arrangement security pact AUKUS, involving Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, is another collective security strategy in the Indo-Pacific region (Kulatunga 2022).

Sri Lanka has not yet published any national security, defence, or maritime strategy as an official government document. Therefore, Sri Lanka has a huge lacuna in maritime diplomatic strategies without a published maritime strategy. Hence, Sri Lanka's maritime diplomatic strategies must carefully analyze the traditional challenges and opportunities within the maritime domain. There is a diversity of maritime security challenges in the IOR. Maritime disasters impacted the maritime environment and function of the SLOCs in the IOR. The accidental disaster happened due to a chemical leak (nitric acid) in a container ship X Press Pearl in May 2021 off the coast of Colombo, Sri Lanka, causing severe environmental damage. (UNEP 2021). The disruption of SLOCs around Sri Lanka could impact the daily flow of shipping trade. Thus, the smooth function of the Colombo, Hambanthota, Trincomalee, Galle and Kankasanthurai harbours is vital. Beijing has

significantly invested in developing infrastructure facilities in Colombo and Hambantota harbours (Singh 2021). India has shown great interest in Trincomalee and Kankasanthurai harbors. Additionally, the visit of a Chinese submarine to Colombo harbor in October 2014 (Aneez & Sirilal 2014) and the docking of the Chinese research ship Yuan Wang 5 in Hambanthota port in August 2022 (Srinivasan 2022) have had a significant impact on diplomatic relations with India and China.

Outside of the challenges presented by major states, the maritime security issues in Sri Lanka are diverse and far-reaching threats. These include maritime terrorism, weapons proliferation, epidemics (COVID-19, Dengue), transnational crimes, narcotics smuggling, illegal migration, human smuggling, maritime disasters, marine pollution, piracy, armed robbery, Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, transportation of radioactive materials, and maritime extremism. Among these, drug trafficking poses perhaps the greatest threat to Sri Lanka. According to the descriptive analysis of Perera, the sociological impact of drugs on the country has been highlighted, with one source stating that "Drugs can simply destroy a country without waging war. The damage caused by drugs to the younger generation is enormous and irreversible" (Perera 2015, p.11). Additionally, Indo-Sri Lanka fishery disputes with IUU fishing have persisted for many decades without a clear resolution, leading to incidents that affect human security in both countries (Moorthy 2013). These are just some of the challenges the country faces, and it is clear that transnational and regional collaboration is required.

The Maritime Doctrine of Sri Lanka (MDSL), published by the Sri Lankan Navy, only covers the naval component and mainly focuses on non-traditional maritime challenges to the state. The document gives limited concern to traditional security threats, and it has not incorporated civil maritime components or other maritime institutions into this document. The authors of the MDSL have focused primarily on the naval component of maritime security, paying less attention to sea power as a comprehensive strategy that includes both civil and military aspects. The document does not effectively reflect the broader conceptual understanding of sea power. Additionally, maritime diplomacy as a strategy has not been discussed in the Sri Lankan maritime strategy development process, nor has any white paper been published by government officials outlining the role of diplomacy. Thus, there is a significant gap in understanding the concept of sea power and its relationship to maritime diplomacy, leading to challenges when facing threats and exploiting opportunities for a small, maritime state.

Theoretical consideration

When considering maritime power, nations must take into account their civil and military maritime capabilities. According to Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan of the US Navy, the purpose of a Navy is to protect trade routes and seaborne communications between points. Mahan, considered the father of modern sea power, emphasized that it is not just a nation's power at sea, but the power derived from the sea itself (Miere 2014). Mahan enumerated the 'Elements of Sea Power' as Geographical Position, Physical Conformation, Extent of

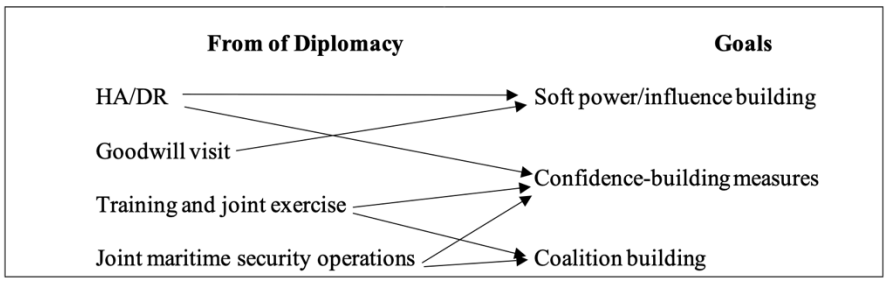
Territory, Number of Population, National Character, and the Character of the Government (Mahan, 1890). Russian Rear Admiral Gorshkov, emphasized the significance of fishing, mercantile, and oceanographic fleets, as well as a state's maritime culture, in determining its overall sea power (Gorshkov 1976). Geoffrey Till argues that sea power should be in line with a nation's security strategies. Maritime forces can be a strong diplomatic tool because they can operate in diverse environments (Till 2013, p.72). China's Maritime Militia and Fishing Fleets indicate the strategic importance of the People's Republic of China as a traditional security instrument (Luo & Panter 2021). This is a prime example of the modern interpretation of Gorshkov's concept of sea power. However, there is limited literature on the utilization of sea power in Sri Lanka. Only a few existing pieces of literature discuss the importance of sea power in the context of Sri Lanka. According to Jeewaka Kumara, the sea power dimension of Sri Lanka's national security has been neglected by contemporary academia in the studies of small powers (Kumara 2021).

Pradeep Rathnayaka (2016) has offered insights into the applicability of Mahanian principles to contemporary warfare within the Sri Lankan context. Sri Lanka's protracted conflict underscores the unique dynamic of a maritime nation's pivotal relationship with its surrounding seas. Rathnayaka expounds upon the significance of the Indian Ocean's security in ensuring maritime safety for Sri Lanka. The country's copious waters not only yield economic prosperity but also engender strategic vulnerabilities. The sustained war efforts of the LTTE, a terrorist organization, against the democratic state for a span of three decades, were sustained through the influx of arms via sea routes. The Sri Lankan Navy successfully executed extensive maritime operations to uncover illicit storage facilities. These instances exemplify the utilization of sea power in a wartime milieu. Rathnayaka's discourse culminates with an examination of the dearth of robust peacetime theory in contemporary warfare (Rathnayake 2016). Roshan Kulatunga's comprehensive analysis has underscored the prominence of non-traditional maritime security challenges in Sri Lanka. The imperative of comprehending the maritime security dilemma has also been underscored in the same article. The absence of a robust maritime strategy for Sri Lanka has raised concerns for the author, and Kulatunga has expounded on the necessity of integrating maritime concepts and theories in the development of maritime strategies and policies for Sri Lanka. Additionally, he contends that the strategic application of these concepts to the Sri Lankan maritime domain is of paramount importance (Kulatunga 2020). Geoffrey Till (2021) discusses two components of the diplomatic value of naval power. The first is military service, which is an instrumental part of a diplomat's toolkit. Second, navies possess specific characteristics that differentiate them from other armed forces; the Navy has international navigation capabilities. Navies do have a political impact on their environment.

Naval and maritime diplomacy both hold diplomatic value in international relations. Naval Diplomacy addresses only the naval component of a state. Being the outermost defence circle in a state, the Navy has to engage in different maritime activities. Naval visits, combined operations, sharing of intelligence and surveillance to maintain good order at sea,

and joint search and research operations are a few of them. This is basically the Navy utilising its platforms and people to interact with other Navy of state or constabulary agencies. Meanwhile, maritime diplomacy addresses all the maritime affiliates engaged in activities in the maritime domain. In, "Maritime Diplomacy in the 21st Century, Drivers and Challenges" (2014) by Christian Le Miere thoroughly discusses maritime diplomacy and gunboat diplomacy. This book focuses on the naval component, the constabulary role, and other players involved in maritime activities, such as privateers, the civil sector, non-military components, the fishing trade, and the community. Maritime diplomacy involves the management of international relations through the maritime domain. This definition encompasses various activities, such as port visits, combined maritime exercises, civil maritime activities, maritime conferences, combined operations and more. In the same book, the author discusses maritime diplomacy under three categories: cooperative maritime diplomacy, persuasive maritime diplomacy, and coercive maritime diplomacy. Maritime components can undertake cooperative maritime diplomacy under the following forms:

Figure 1: Forms of Cooperative Maritime Diplomacy and its Goals



Source: Miere, 2014.

According to Miere, cooperative maritime diplomatic events are fundamentally oriented towards achieving political objectives. These objectives are pursued through means of influence, coalition building, and fostering confidence. Notably, cooperative maritime diplomacy abstains from employing strategies of coercion or forceful persuasion, instead relying on attraction and co-option to inspire other governments and organizations. It also serves as a confidence-building measure. Furthermore, Miere asserts that maritime training, education programs, personal visits, and maritime conferences are integral components of a nation's seapower, extending beyond the physical maritime resources. This comprehensive approach is viewed as an influential and confidence-building form of cooperative maritime diplomacy, which assumes a critical role in the 21st-century interactions among larger states and major powers, especially in their pursuit of alliance-building for maintaining a balance of power. Therefore, this paper will discuss Miere's definition of maritime diplomacy, which combines naval and other constabulary agencies engaged in cooperative maritime diplomatic activities.

Unpacking the link between Sea Power, Maritime Diplomacy and Shelter Theory

The challenges to maritime security in Sri Lanka are varied and complex. The Navy, along with other constabulary agencies, is tasked with addressing these issues in the maritime domain. Engaging these stakeholders could enhance the sea power capabilities of small states. However, Sri Lanka currently lacks a comprehensive maritime strategy. The only existing attempt at a maritime doctrine (MDSL) is a single document focusing solely on the naval component, which is misleadingly labelled as a maritime doctrine. This approach is conceptually flawed.

Maritime constabulary agencies must work together to develop a comprehensive maritime strategy. The Sri Lanka Navy, as the country's primary maritime force, must consider collaboration with other affiliated agencies and integrate their contributions into the maritime doctrine. First, it is crucial for the country to establish a national security strategy, followed by a national defence strategy. After these foundational strategies are in place, a maritime strategy should be developed, culminating in a maritime doctrine. However, as of now, Sri Lanka has not published any white papers on either security strategy or maritime strategy. The lack of a national security strategy and maritime strategy in small states like Sri Lanka presents a significant challenge when it comes to interacting with both state and non-state actors.

According to Shelter Theory, smaller states are often reliant on the political, economic, and societal support provided by larger nations and international organizations. Recently, Sri Lanka has sought military assistance from India in response to maritime crises. The incidents involving the MV Xpress Pearl on May 3, 2023, and the MV New Diamond on September 3, 2023, serve as significant examples of the Indian Navy's cooperative maritime diplomacy in assisting Sri Lankan authorities when the vessel was engulfed in fires while in Sri Lankan waters. These occurrences highlight Sri Lanka's need for military support from India, particularly given its limited maritime capabilities to effectively manage such disasters. According to *the Morning* online news, Sri Lanka incurred a cost of INR 890 million to the Government of India for the extended assistance rendered during the Xpress Pearl incident (Morning 2024). While Sri Lanka seek protection and support from stronger states, they also wield a distinct form of maritime power, as articulated by Geoffrey Till (2013). This demonstrates how small states practice maritime diplomacy and leverage their sea power to not only seek shelter, but project influence in the maritime domain.

Domestic maritime strategies have not been developed to prioritize the requirements of Search and Rescue Operations (SAR) and utilize more resources to protect the SLOCS. Furthermore, maritime technology has not been developed to exploit the EEZ to grow sea power capabilities by identifying maritime living and non-living resources. Potential non-living ocean resources in Sri Lanka that could substantially impact national development include mineral resources, crude oil, natural gas and gas hydrates. Therefore, the concept of sea power is a critical area of study under island states studies. The conceptual understanding of this concept is followed/read by only a limited naval crowd in the Sri

Lankan context, and non-naval maritime components have poorly understood this concept, and the maritime doctrine of Sri Lanka was given the least attention to the concept.

The absence of a maritime strategy also reflects the limited attention and consideration given by the strategic level decision makers in the country. Therefore, a small state like Sri Lanka cannot develop maritime power without understanding the theory of sea power and other maritime concepts. Also, this puts the small states at the mercy of larger states and international organizations to seek shelter to exploit maritime resources and counter maritime disasters and other maritime challenges that small states cannot face on their own.

The failure to fully recognize and utilize the diplomatic potential of Sri Lanka's maritime power represents a significant shortcoming in the country's maritime policies. According to Shihar (2023), a lack of cooperation among government institutions was evident during the incidents involving the docking of the Chinese research ships Yuan Wang 5 at the Port of Hambantota in August 2022 and Shin Yan 6 at the Port of Colombo in October 2023. In such scenarios, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for providing diplomatic clearances, while the Ministry of Defence handles security clearances; both are the primary stakeholders required to coordinate these events. Unfortunately, there were significant delays in the decision-making process, and the government struggled to negotiate effectively with both China and India, resulting in heightened tensions. The Sri Lankan government has considered establishing Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) to grant diplomatic permission for foreign warships, military aircraft, and research vessels entering Sri Lankan waters. This decision followed the imposition of an embargo on foreign marine scientific research requests for an unspecified period due to diplomatic tensions and concerns, mainly between India and China.

This is not the first time a research vessel has visited Sri Lanka. Fernando (2023) reported in the Daily Morning that the National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency (NARA) has a sea-going vessel, the RV Samudrika, in its inventory for marine science research. While the Samudrika may not be equipped with advanced sensors like many of the marine scientific research vessels that have docked at Sri Lankan ports over the past ten years, it can conduct basic hydrographic and oceanographic research. That was one of the reasons NARA intended to welcome the Chinese Research Vessel. Nonetheless, this issue has sparked controversy both locally and internationally, as researchers have pointed out the absence of maritime diplomatic strategies in Sri Lanka.

According to the IOM, the Border Risk Assessment Centre (BRAC) was established in Sri Lanka on December 20, 2021. This initiative is part of the Border Management Strategy introduced by the National Border Management Strategy in 2018, with technical assistance from the IOM and financial support from the Australian government. The BRAC serves as the central hub for sharing intelligence among Border Management Agencies to combat illegal travel and unlawful activities across borders. This collaborative effort is a key aspect of the cooperative maritime diplomacy between Sri Lanka, Australia, and the IOM.

Sri Lanka actively participates in various maritime exercises, agreements, conferences, meetings, and partnerships with both state and non-state actors. Integrating these maritime relations into the country's overall maritime strategy is important. Additionally, conducting thorough analyses and regular evaluations is crucial for developing effective maritime diplomatic strategies.

The researcher observed that the weaknesses in the security policy-making system, a lack of interagency coordination, limited resources, and a poor economy have heightened maritime security vulnerabilities in Sri Lanka. Although Sri Lanka is a maritime nation, its maritime exploration activities are limited, and it relies on larger states for support. Recent maritime disasters at sea have significantly involved assistance from India. Sri Lanka currently lacks the essential maritime platforms and capabilities necessary to address its maritime challenges independently. The incident involving the Yuan Wang 5 has, for instance, contributed to uncertainty in diplomatic relations with key stakeholders, including India, China, and the United States.

Further, port diplomacy falls under the broader category of maritime diplomacy and is a vital aspect of Sri Lanka's foreign policy today. The development of port policy must take into account the complex geopolitical landscape. Sri Lanka made a strategic choice to construct the port city in Colombo and the port in Hambantota. These decisions were taken under the executive leadership of Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa during his presidency and received cabinet approval before being implemented. However, when Mr. Maithripala Sirisena became the executive president in 2015, the development of Colombo Port City was temporarily halted. This situation is a notable example of how individual leadership can affect other areas of interest. Therefore, the Executive Presidency of Sri Lanka represents a critical turning point where decisions are crucial when engaging with larger powers. These incidents highlight the importance of effectively utilizing shelter theory, maritime diplomacy, and maritime power to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes for all parties involved. Additionally, there is a need to integrate these theories and explore their relevance in contemporary academic studies.

Conclusion

Sri Lanka must expand its maritime activities to effectively govern its maritime zones and incorporate these actions into its overall maritime strategies. Despite the country's significant maritime opportunities, there are limitations in how these are leveraged to achieve national development goals. Therefore, it is crucial to adopt a robust maritime diplomatic approach to formulate policies proactively, rather than reactively responding to incidents like the visit of the Chinese research and survey ship Yuan Wang 5. This study highlights the importance of understanding maritime concepts, such as sea power and small-state theories like the Shelter Theory, to develop effective maritime objectives and diplomacy for small island nations. The lack of clarity in domestic policies regarding maritime diplomacy has created challenges for larger states and international organizations

when dealing with Sri Lanka. To address this issue, it is recommended that the country develop a white paper to reduce security concerns and enhance transparency regarding its maritime posture. Currently, Sri Lanka does not have a platform that unites maritime experts from both civil and military maritime agencies to discuss critical maritime issues. Therefore, it is imperative to make immediate policy-level decisions to establish a strategic forum that can advise the government on maritime security and areas of interest within the maritime domain. Additionally, the government should enhance coordination among the Navy and other maritime law enforcement agencies by centralizing them under one authority instead of dispersing them across multiple ministries and institutions. Finally, the study emphasizes the necessity of leveraging Sri Lanka's Sea power capabilities and integrating them into the country's decision-making process.

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Understanding the Dynamics of Strategic Security Syndrome in Contemporary South Asia

Krishanthi D. Wimalasiri

Introduction

South Asia is a geographically pivotal area with rich resources, diverse, multi-ethnic, and multicultural societies, home to one-fifth of the world's population, and characterized by prevailing nuclearized deterrence structures. All of which contribute to a persistent condition of strategic insecurity known as the Strategic Security Syndrome, focusing on the geopolitical rivalries in the region, fragile regional institutions, enduring strategic imbalance in the security of small states, the India-Pakistan rivalry, the influence of great powers, and the structural weaknesses of Regional Cooperation. This study examines the contemporary Strategic Security dynamics in the geopolitical context of South Asia by critically analysing the historical, regional, and international drivers of security paradigms in the subcontinent, and how numerous states perceive and behave in the face of threats, of critical geopolitical imbalance, rather than often creating cyclical patterns of strategic balance.

There are a few characteristics that can be seen to understand why South Asian nations still rely on more traditional state-centred military security rather than cooperative or human-centred security models. First, the South Asian geography itself plays an important role in the persistence of the Strategic Security Syndrome. The region is bordered by natural boundaries, such as the Indian Ocean to the south and the Himalayas to the north, which create friction and isolation. The constricted strategic corridors, resource-rich but disputed states, and highly populated frontiers all contribute to the increased security issues. Geography influences strategic decisions on both the physical and psychological factors, shaping circumstances through perceptions of vulnerability, encirclement, and rivalry for regional supremacy.

Secondly, the Indo-centric nature theorizes a centre revolving around India's geographical, cultural, historical, and economic centrality, which has critical implications for the study of

regional and global processes. This approach highlights India's central location, making it a hub of socio-cultural continuities, imperial legacy, colonial past, and economic development. Moreover, the third characteristic is its asymmetric and hierarchical power structure. India holds a dominant position in South Asia, based on its population, natural resources, economy, military, and industrial and technological strengths. These two traits establish India as the well-known ' Big Brother' in South Asia, with all the negative overtones.

Fourth, Colonialism established a patriarchal society, militaristic domination, centralized bureaucracy, and Artificial borders. Above all, it is characterized by the separation of populations on linguistic, religious, and ethnic grounds. Traditional security narratives in South Asia predominantly revolve around inter-state conflicts, border disputes, and the threat of war. Central to these narratives are territorial disputes, particularly the enduring conflict between India and Pakistan over Jammu & Kashmir (J&K), and boundary disputes between India and China. It claims an enormous diversity of communities with their own unique identities, traditions, dialects, and religious structures, making it the most ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse region of the Indo-Pacific Region. Apart from having various ethnic groups coexist, such as Indo-Aryans, Dravidians, Mongoloids, and other tribal societies, the region is also marked by enormous diversity in religion, including Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and native practices. Furthermore, the colonial legacies of two centuries of British rule in South Asia significantly altered the political, social, and security structures of the subcontinent.

Finally, the contemporary geopolitics of great power competition, especially in South Asia, has been profoundly altered by China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Its development and growth have promoted a new form of strategic competition, which is due to a set of interlinked reasons influenced by geography and regional security perceptions. By concentrating China's infrastructural and economic Strategies throughout South Asia and the world, the BRI has replaced classical and conventional geopolitical dynamics. As countries view BRI infrastructure projects as a means to enhance China's strategic influence, regional actors (including India, Australia, and Japan) are rushing to protect their interests using counterbalance strategies like a ‘Necklace of diamonds’.

Due to these characteristics, South Asia's security architecture is defined by complex security dynamics. The subcontinent faces a classical and critical geopolitical mix of security challenges, each with its distinct security narrative. The security narratives of South Asia are crucial to understanding the issues and potential for regional stability, as well as international security, with special reference to Sri Lanka.

Hydro Hegemony and Water Nationalism

The India-Pakistan rivalry, which has led to conflict in Pahalgam in 2025, has been a central theme in South Asian security discourses, reflecting traditional security concerns of the

region today. The Kashmir issue is not merely a territorial disagreement. It is filled with issues of identity, self-determination, and regional aspirations. J&K involves claims of ongoing sub-conventional or hybrid war, as well as issues relating to the control of strategic resources, including water. In addition to being a life-giving resource, water is also a geopolitical resource. The author predicts that water will become the primary source of conflict in South Asia in the coming decades. This is particularly in South Asia, where India and Pakistan's lifeline is the Indus River System that flows from the contentious Kashmir region. Historical grievances, geopolitical competition, and shifting notions of sovereignty, security, and right to resources are all intertwined in the complicated politics of water sharing between the two countries (Wolf, 1998; Mustafa, 2010).

The Indus River System, under the terms of the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty between India and Pakistan, has long been regarded as an exemplary model for resolving disputes. However, Indian upstream dam building and climate change, as well as the recent surges in nationalist stance in both nations, have challenged this model (Salman & Uprety, 2002). As the lower riparian, Pakistan is concerned with India's increasing control over water flows in Kashmir, particularly in projects like the Baglihar and Kishanganga dams, which it perceives as attempts to degrade its agricultural foundation (Mustafa, 2010). There are similarly complicated water-sharing arrangements among Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and India in the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna Basin. Downstream, Bangladesh regularly faces floods during the monsoon season and water shortages during the dry season; the unevenness is habitually attributed to India's Farakka Barrage and water diversion plans (Crow & Singh, 2000). The absence of a binding convention relevant to the entire basin breeds suspicion and creates space for unilateral action that can all too readily assume diplomatic or even military dimensions.

In 2025, China's proposal for a large hydroelectric project in Tibet raised concerns among environmentalists about the fate of the world's longest and deepest canyon. Neighbouring India is also concerned, as it fears that China will use the river water it depends upon as a weapon. In a remote river canyon in eastern Tibet, a nature reserve near a disputed border with India, China has announced plans to construct the world's largest hydroelectric power station. Indian politicians have responded furiously, claiming it gives China permission to cross the border and use deadly "water bombs. "Most probably, this dam could spark a war between China and India.

Figure 1: China's Largest Hydropower Project - The Brahmaputra River

Source: ClearIAS, 2025.

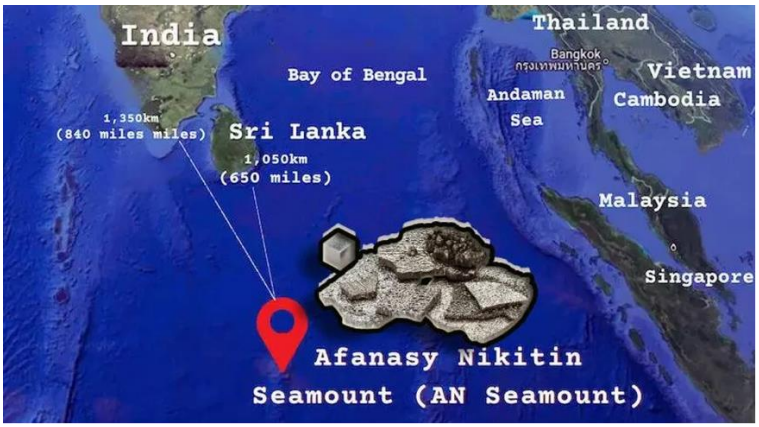
A more geopolitical struggle between upper and lower riparian states is demonstrated in the new South Asian water conflicts, such as China's upper riparian hegemony over rivers draining into India and the India-Pakistan competition over the Indus. Transboundary River control is no longer a common lifeline, but a strategic tool in the intricate conflict between these states. Through rearranging river flows through solitary single-sided dam schemes and water diversion, upstream riparian states like China and India are increasingly projecting hydro-hegemony. In certain intra-state contexts, such activities jeopardize the political stability and ecosystem balance of downstream nations like Bangladesh, Pakistan, and even India.

Redefining Resource Geopolitics: Cobalt Conundrum

Cobalt geopolitics has begun following the discovery of a cobalt-rich underwater mountain in the middle of the Indian Ocean, close to Afanacy Nikitan, Sri Lanka. However, India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives are interested in the same area. Sri Lanka is also looking to mine precious minerals there, adding to the competition**.** Cobalt geopolitics at its most basic level is the interaction among political strategy, economic demand, and geography within the global cobalt supply chain. Despite this, Cobalt is indirectly linked to its application in the production of batteries for smartphones, laptops, especially lithium-ion batteries that power electric vehicles and hundreds of millions of portable consumer gadgets. It also plays a key role in making alloys for jet engines, gas turbines, and cutting tools. Additionally, cobalt is used in medical implants and as a catalyst in the chemical industry (Linganna,2004). The global demand for these devices keeps increasing, thus placing Cobalt right in the middle of the globe's energy transition and sustainability cultures. It encompasses the strategic value of cobalt reserves, the countries holding them, the industries that rely on them, and the great-power competitions that result from this reliance. The assertion is categorical: in the twenty-

first century, access to cobalt is an issue of national security, economic competitiveness, and global influence. It is no longer merely an industrial issue**.**

Figure 2: Afanasy Nikitin Seamount



Source: Kumar, 2025.

Furthermore, the Author would like to question whether one can ever be free from cobalt geopolitics complexities altogether with the smartphones in our hands? The demands of modern life can prevent us from being able to afford not disturbing these precious minerals, lying serenely in the earth where they have slept for thousands of years. Cobalt will find its way back to our devices, our cities, and our economies due to the pull of technological advancement and the pressures of international competition. We may be trapped with the problems and detriments of cobalt for decades to come. Whether we shall learn how to use it wisely, in advance, and with respect for the spaces and lives it will touch is as important as how we will use it. Moreover, I doubt whether we are prepared as Sri Lankans or South Asians to avoid geopolitical conflict or most probably proxy wars in South Asia or interstate war between South Asian countries themselves on the same scale as Ukraine today.

Nuclear Proliferation: From Deterrence to Danger

The Indian Navy launched an elite project to create a modern nuclear submarine base called INS Varsha. India increases its sea-based nuclear deterrence with Project Varsha and future INS Aridhaman SSBN development. INS Varsha will be a strategic submarine base at sea near Visakhapatnam in 2026. These are efforts to counterbalance China's Indo-Pacific presence and to enhance India's nuclear triad. With the Quad partnership, INS Varsha will be valuable in upgrading cooperative security agreements with the US, Japan, and Australia. It also provides for future joint ventures and foreign technology partnerships. The facility adds stability and deterrence to the region by reinforcing naval capabilities.

A key element of credible minimum deterrence, India's emphasis on the development of its underwater capability, particularly its SSBNs, nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines,

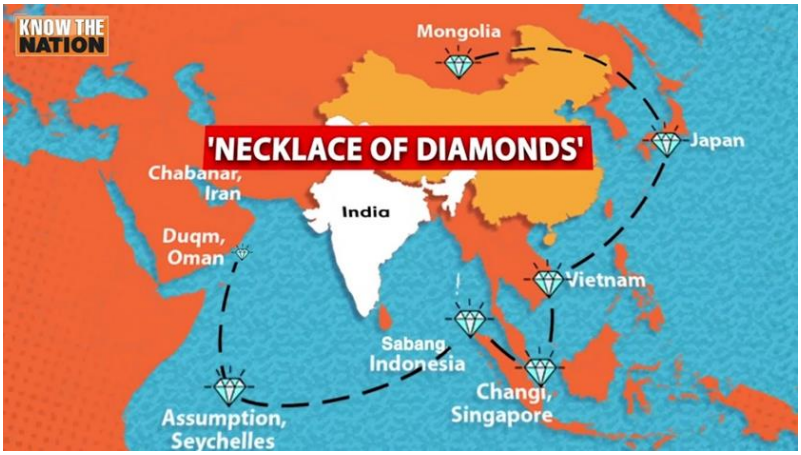
will strengthen the nation's second-strike nuclear deterrent. INS Varsha enables this by offering a safe location for the deployment and maintenance of nuclear submarines. By making India less susceptible to a nuclear first strike, this development promotes regional strategic stability. Although the Indo-Pacific will never be a unipolar Chinese zone, the Chinese-Indian naval competition is likely to escalate in the future. Instead, a new multipolar maritime order is unfolding, wherein extra-regional powers like the US and regional actors such as Australia, Japan, and India are all attempting to ensure freedom of navigation and a rules-based order.

In this regard, China and India are becoming important powers, according to Mahbubani (2025). As part of the Asian security architecture, South Asia will be increasingly significantly impacted by Chinese regional initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and India's attempts to offset them through alliances like the Quad. India's strengthened capabilities, facilitated by INS Varsha, will further its position as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), and institutions such as the Quad will play a pivotal role in this regard. China will increase its presence near Sri Lanka, Myanmar, or the Maldives, which will increase regional tensions. New conflicts and alliances may arise as a result of the overlapping spheres of influence. New strategic conflicts and a new kind of Balance of Power will be created very soon.

String of Pearls Vs Necklace of Diamonds

The Necklace of Diamonds policy is not aggressive, but a policy of balance. India aspires to be the region's greatest security provider in the Indian Ocean, protect its maritime interests, and prevent Chinese maritime encirclement, such as the Changi Naval Base in Singapore, Sabang Port in Indonesia, Chabahar Port in Iran, and Duqm Port in Oman. It plans to get secure military access to Assumption Island in Seychelles. To counter China's growing naval presence in the Indian Ocean, especially its String of Pearls strategy, India developed the ‘Necklace of Diamonds’ as a strategic sea doctrine.

Figure 3: Necklace of Diamonds



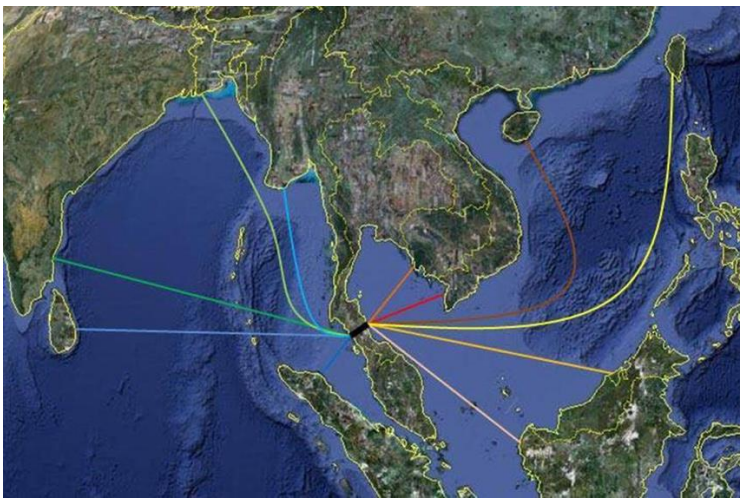
Source: Javid, 2020

The creation of strategic partnerships, alliances, and access agreements with friendly maritime nations to encircle China's influence with cooperative 'diamonds.' In contrast, the String of Pearls is the development of ports and infrastructure under Chinese control or influence in and around India (e.g., in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Djibouti). The Necklace of Diamonds strategy seeks strategic equilibrium, rather than confrontation. It reflects India's determination to protect its oceanic interests, deter Chinese oceanic encirclement, and be the dominant security provider of the Indian Ocean.

Upcoming Thai Canal (Kra Canal): A Paradigm Shift?

Since the potential for another waterway linking the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea can redesign trade and shape regional geopolitics, the idea of the Kra Canal has been under consideration for centuries. Though it has never been constructed, its prospective significance keeps the idea on the strategic agenda, especially due to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and rising Chinese influence in Southeast Asia. Thailand has gone down a different route to date, but discussions of the feasibility of the canal and potential geopolitical repercussions continue.

Figure 4: The Proposed Route of the Thai Canal



Source: House of Parliament, Thailand.

By reducing shipping distances by about 1,200 nautical miles, the Kra Canal, when built, would offer a strategic bypass to the Strait of Malacca. The Strait of Malacca presently sees about 94,000 ship transits a year; the bypass would cut travel time, reduce fuel costs, and improve congestion. The need for secure and effective sea lanes is more pressing than ever, with the growth of global commerce, especially in the container shipping and energy markets. Another route would ease bottlenecks and address fears over too great a dependence on one commercial route.

Now carrying more than 60% of global seaborne trade, the Strait of Malacca is among the world's most congested and risky shipping chokepoints (UNCTAD, 2023). Due to its strategic location and narrowness, it is vulnerable to geopolitical tensions, congestion, and piracy. Some of this high-seas traffic would be rerouted through the proposed Kra Canal, which would cut across Thailand's Isthmus of Kra and provide a safer alternative route (Yoshikazu, 2021). For South Asian countries like India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, all of which heavily depend on sea exports and imports to and from East Asian markets, such development would potentially improve maritime efficiency and navigation safety (UNCTAD, 2023)By bypassing the Malacca chokepoint and linking the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea directly, the Kra Canal, if ever constructed, would provide a much shorter east-west sea trade route (ADB, 2021). Particularly for Bay of Bengal littoral countries like Bangladesh and India, which would be the gainers from improved maritime connectivity with East and Southeast Asia, this change may trigger local investment and trade. For example, as shipping distances are shortened and turnaround is improved, India's Kolkata and Chennai ports and Bangladesh's Chittagong can experience rising volumes of containers and transhipment opportunities. Furthermore, the construction of the canal would facilitate multimodal trade corridors and enhance regional connectivity initiatives and India's Act East policy (ADB, 2021).

Still, Sri Lanka may be able to seize the opportunity within the region. Sri Lanka can strengthen its position as South Asia's transhipment hub through the Kra Canal opening and trade development with India (Yoshikazu, 2021). If ports like Hambantota are diversified away from Chinese reliance, they might also be used as logistics and fueling hubs. Sri Lanka's capacity to become a holistic marine hub is hampered by its weak maritime legal and financial services, policy uncertainty, and geopolitical turmoil (Haacke, 2020). Overall, by assigning extremely high priority to port modernization, open governance, and strategic partnerships, Sri Lanka can establish a key regional standing in the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean blue economy by replacing Singapore entirely here in South Asia.

By providing a quicker alternative route for ships between the Middle East, South Asia, and East Asia, the canal would shift global maritime logistics and possibly divert large amounts of cargo traffic from the overcrowded and dangerous Malacca Strait (Yoshikazu, 2021; UNCTAD, 2023). The competition between the great powers and that between smaller governments to transit between them is heightened by the canal, a strategic realignment in the Indian Ocean region. Its potential Chinese role makes it one of the features of the larger 'String of Pearls' strategy, compelling nations like Sri Lanka to review their investments in infrastructure, maritime security, and foreign policy in terms of an increasingly complex geopolitical context (IISS, 2022; Ministry of External Affairs, India, 2023).

Policy Recommendations

Several factors drive the contemporary security syndrome in South Asia today. The application of the study to current geopolitical changes is evidenced by the recommendations, which provide an avenue for evidence-based decision-making in complex security contexts. Rivers, long regarded as cooperative natural systems, are being increasingly territorialized as a result of this trend toward the exercise of sovereign jurisdiction over shared waterways. However, another aspect of the deterritorialization of the vision of water imagines rivers as humanitarian and environmental resources that transcend political boundaries. South Asia is likely to witness increased water nationalism, environmental degradation, and interstate conflict, particularly in the form of in-basin conflicts, if institutional mechanisms for facilitating basin-level cooperation and fair sharing are not in place. The region must transition away from zero-sum thinking and territorialised, competitive management of its shared water resources to prevent future conflicts.

Trincomalee and Hambantota were the two harbours that may be developed into international ports. A commercial harbour could only be constructed in Hambantota because Trincomalee was not on the main sea lane. Through expanded maritime connection, extra transshipment possibilities, and increased potential for inclusion in new regional trade patterns, Sri Lanka stands to gain heavily from the opening of the proposed Thai (Kra) Canal. However, Sri Lanka must adopt a pragmatic, strong foreign policy to maximize its advantages while minimizing the security risks that accompany them. Maritime Domain

Awareness (MDA) refers to the requirement for situational awareness at sea, which calls for knowledge of all maritime actors' positions and intentions in all dimensions on, over, and beneath the waters. MDA is becoming extremely necessary for the efficient and safe operation of maritime activities, a crucial driver of the country's economic expansion. To become sought-after regional centres of the rising maritime order, Colombo and Hambantota ports need to be transformed using digital technologies, green supply chains, and speedy customs procedures.

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is signed or acceded to by a large number of Asian nations. Nevertheless, there is a lack of complete ratification and submission to its dispute settlement bodies. Such hesitation weakens the ability of UNCLOS to prevent and settle maritime conflicts, especially in areas like the Eastern Indian Ocean, the Bay of Bengal, and the South China Sea. South and Southeast Asian states, particularly Sri Lanka, are advised to take the initiative to bring about more compliance with UNCLOS through cases of mitigation. Ratifying and Internalizing UNCLOS Provisions: States that have not yet ratified UNCLOS should follow them, and those that have already ratified should incorporate their dispute settlement procedures into their domestic law to the best possible extent as a precaution.

Small states need to make strategic and rational decisions in this new and complicated global order to escape resource traps laid by superpowers. To possess valuable natural resources, such as rare earth or cobalt, is to be of use and at risk. Small governments need to diversify their diplomatic relations, make resource transactions transparent, and build institutional capacity to move about this geopolitical minefield safely. It is only by exercising prudent balancing, parliamentary checks, and inter-subregional collaboration that strategic autonomy can be safeguarded. Small states should place the utmost priority on environmental control, sustainable development, and equitable benefit-sharing of natural resources, rather than being fixated on great power competition. The governments of South Asia must make a realistic choice that will work in their favour by developing their economies and resolving security challenges.

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Law, Economics, and Geopolitics in Motion: Sri Lanka's Strategic Trade Relations with India and China

Nadeesh de Silva

Introduction

Sri Lanka's strategic position at the crossroads of key maritime routes in the Indian Ocean places it at the centre of a complex geopolitical landscape shaped by the competing ambitions of regional powers India and China. As a small developing nation, Sri Lanka must navigate not only the economic demands of increasing trade and investment links but also the diplomatic challenges of balancing relations with two larger neighbours whose interests often diverge or conflict. Trade agreements with India and China, while mainly economic tools, are deeply connected to wider political and security concerns. India sees Sri Lanka as part of its traditional sphere of influence and aims to maintain regional dominance. Conversely, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and related infrastructure investments in Sri Lanka illustrate its growing strategic reach. These factors place Sri Lanka in a sensitive position, where economic engagement cannot be separated from issues of sovereignty, security, and alignment in the context of great power rivalry.

Within this context, Sri Lanka's involvement in bilateral trade agreements must also align with the rules-based multilateral trading system under the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The WTO's principles of non-discrimination, transparency, and comprehensive liberalisation serve as significant legal constraints and normative frameworks, yet they coexist with the political realities of asymmetrical power relations and strategic bargaining. This paper examines how Sri Lanka navigates these intersecting challenges: balancing the economic advantages and risks of trade agreements with India and China, while ensuring compliance with WTO obligations and maintaining its diplomatic autonomy. Employing a multidisciplinary approach that integrates trade law, international relations theory, and

political economy, the study analyses the legal structures, economic impacts, and geopolitical factors shaping Sri Lanka's trade strategy.

Trade diplomacy of small states

The connection between trade agreements, geopolitics, and international law is critical to understanding Sri Lanka's bilateral relations with India and China. This section examines existing scholarship from various fields to provide context for the challenges small states face when negotiating asymmetrical trade relationships during great power rivalry.

In the field of International Relations, trade agreements are increasingly understood not merely as economic tools but as instruments of foreign policy and geopolitical influence (Baldwin, 2016; Aggarwal, 2016). For small states, such as Sri Lanka, conducting trade with others are often a challenging task as they have to operate within complex geopolitical environments controlled by larger powers. Amitav Acharya (2014) and Robert Kaplan (2010) highlight how geographic location and strategic importance can compel small states to adopt subtle diplomatic strategies, balancing competing interests to maintain sovereignty and maximise economic gains. In South Asia, Sri Lanka's position in the Indian Ocean has made it a key point for India's regional dominance pursuits and China's expanding Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) ambitions. Scholars stress the significance of "hedging" strategies, whereby smaller states engage with multiple powers at once to avoid over-dependence (Kuik, 2016).

India's trade agreements in South Asia are shaped by security concerns and efforts to consolidate regional leadership (Pant, 2019). In contrast, China uses trade and investment agreements to expand its strategic footprint (Rolland, 2020). South Asia's trade agreements are heavily influenced by various security concerns and the power struggles, both internal in the region and external. Consequently, there is a lot of issues in making them aligned with the World Trade Organisations's (WTO) principles such as transparency, non-discrimination, and comprehensive coverage (de Silva, 2024). As argued elsewhere, the fragmented and partially overlapping FTAs in South Asia have hindered its integration into the global trading system, reflecting both legal and political complexities. It has also complicated the negotiation process for smaller states, which must balance economic liberalisation with political sovereignty.

Trade law literature highlights the challenges that developing countries encounter in aligning bilateral agreements with multilateral WTO obligations. Jackson (2006) and Van den Bossche & Zdouc (2017) explain how WTO provisions regulate the formation of FTAs to prevent discrimination against third parties. However, the "spaghetti bowl" phenomenon, as described by Bhagwati (2008), illustrates how overlapping and inconsistent agreements can weaken multilateralism. For small states, limited institutional capacity and negotiation power intensify these legal complexities (Hoekman & Kostecki, 2009).

Economic analyses of Sri Lanka's trade with India and China highlight persistent trade imbalances and limited export diversification (Kelegama, 2009; Athukorala, 2013). Meanwhile, political science and international relations scholars (Samaranayake, 2019; Abeyratne, 2020) examine the relationship between China's infrastructure investments and Sri Lanka's debt vulnerabilities in relation to its geopolitical strategy. The literature shows that Sri Lanka's trade agreements operate at the intersection of legal obligation, economic development, and geopolitical strategies. However, a gap remains in integrative research that combines legal, economic, and geopolitical perspectives on Sri Lanka's bilateral trade agreements and WTO compliance. There is a notable lack of detailed analyses that combine these aspects to evaluate how Sri Lanka manages asymmetrical trade relations with India and China within WTO frameworks are missing. This study aims to address this gap by using a multidisciplinary approach.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative, multidisciplinary approach combining doctrinal legal analysis with International Relations and political economy perspectives to examine Sri Lanka's bilateral trade engagements with India and China within the context of WTO commitments. A crucial part of the study is a doctrinal analysis of relevant trade agreements, WTO rules, and dispute settlement records. The research critically assesses the India–Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (ISFTA), ongoing trade relations between Sri Lanka and China, and their compatibility with WTO principles, including non-discrimination, transparency, and the coverage of 'substantially all trade.' Legal texts, notifications, and official trade data from WTO and national government sources underpin this analysis.

The study conducts a comparative analysis of Sri Lanka's trade agreements with India and China to identify structural asymmetries, economic impacts, and differing legal frameworks. This comparison helps illuminate how Sri Lanka manages distinct political and economic challenges posed by each partner. Primary data sources include WTO databases, official trade statistics from Sri Lanka's Department of Commerce, and publicly available negotiation documents. Secondary sources consist of scholarly articles, policy analyses, and media reports. Due to the sensitive nature of some ongoing negotiations, access to confidential documents was limited, which restricts the depth of analysis for certain aspects.

Table 1: Analytical Framework

Dimension	Focus Area	Key Indicators / Criteria
1. Legal Consistency Test	WTO compliance of FTAs	- Notification and transparency obligations - MFN and non-discrimination principles - Article XXIV / Enabling Clause alignment

2. Asymmetry Assessment	Power imbalance in trade negotiations and outcomes	- Trade deficits - Sectoral concentration - Legal safeguards (e.g., special clauses, flexibilities)
3. Policy & Institutional Implications	Capacity for effective implementation, enforcement, and dispute resolution	- Institutional capacity - Monitoring mechanisms - Dispute settlement readiness
4. Geopolitical Positioning	Impact of regional and global power dynamics on trade diplomacy	- Strategic location in Indian Ocean - Balancing India-China competition - Alignment with regional/multilateral blocs - Security-economic trade-offs

Source: Author, 2025.

This study employs a four-dimensional analytical framework that integrates legal, economic, institutional, and geopolitical perspectives to assess Sri Lanka's trade relations with India and China. First, the *Legal Consistency Test* evaluates the alignment of Sri Lanka's bilateral trade agreements align with WTO obligations, focusing on notification and transparency requirements, adherence to the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) and non-discrimination principles, and compliance with Article XXIV of GATT or the Enabling Clause. Second, the *Asymmetry Assessment* looks at the power imbalances and outcomes by analysing indicators such as ongoing trade deficits, sectoral export concentration, and the existence or lack of legal safeguards to protect Sri Lanka's interests. Third, the *Policy and Institutional Implications* area assesses Sri Lanka's capacity to implement, monitor, and enforce trade agreements, considering administrative capacity, inter-agency coordination, and preparedness for dispute resolution. Lastly, the *Geopolitical Positioning* view places these trade relations within the larger strategic context of regional power struggles, especially Sri Lanka's effort to balance relationships between India and China. This dimension examines the strategic importance of Sri Lanka's position in the Indian Ocean, its responses to competing regional influences, and how economic choices intersect with national security and foreign policy. Collectively, these four areas offer a thorough framework for understanding how trade law, economic interests, and international politics come together in shaping Sri Lanka's external trade strategy.

India–Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (ISFTA): Compliance and Political Dynamics

The India–Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (ISFTA), signed in 1998 and enforced in 2000, was Sri Lanka's first bilateral trade pact and marked a key step in institutionalising economic ties with its largest neighbour. Legally, the ISFTA was designed to conform with WTO rules under Article XXIV of GATT, including tariff reduction schedules, rules of origin, safeguard measures, and dispute resolution procedures. It was properly notified to the WTO, showcasing initial compliance with multilateral transparency and notification obligations. However, the agreement's substantive implementation has been inconsistent. While India has liberalised a wide range of tariff lines, Sri Lanka's export growth has been limited by restrictive rules of origin, administrative delays, and non-tariff barriers that continue to restrict market access for Sri Lankan goods.

Economically, the ISFTA has led to a significant increase in bilateral trade volume, but it has also deepened a growing trade imbalance. Sri Lanka consistently records a trade deficit with India, reflecting both structural production asymmetries and limited export diversification. The agreement's benefits have mostly favoured Indian exporters, particularly in pharmaceuticals, vehicles, and manufactured goods. Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's exports remain focused on a few key sectors, including tea, apparel, and rubber-based products. The asymmetry in bargaining power-both during negotiations and in institutional capacity for implementation-has created an uneven playing field, raising questions about equity and long-term sustainability.

Geopolitically, the ISFTA must be understood within the broader strategic context of South Asia. India views economic integration with Sri Lanka as a way to maintain regional influence and countering China's expanding presence in the Indian Ocean. For Sri Lanka, however, this relationship is shaped by a delicate balance between benefiting from India's market access and preserving autonomy amidst a history of political sensitivities, particularly concerning Tamil Nadu and the legacy of India's involvement in Sri Lanka's internal affairs. India's push for an expanded economic and trade agreement (CEPA/ECTA) has faced resistance in Sri Lanka, partly due to concerns about increased Indian dominance and insufficient safeguards for local industries.

From a legal perspective, although the ISFTA meets formal WTO compliance criteria, its design and implementation fall short of ensuring equitable outcomes. As highlighted by de Silva (2024), South Asian FTAs, including the ISFTA, frequently suffer from incomplete trade coverage, vague dispute resolution mechanisms, and overlapping legal commitments that weaken the clarity and enforceability of their obligations. Additionally, the limited institutional infrastructure in Sri Lanka constrains effective monitoring, the negotiation of safeguards, and dispute resolution, thereby weakening its position within the agreement.

In summary, the ISFTA demonstrates the difficulties small states encounter when negotiating with larger powers through bilateral trade agreements. Although it has brought some economic advantages, the deal has emphasised structural inequalities and caused political tensions that diminish its developmental potential. For Sri Lanka, this experience highlights the importance of adjusting future trade negotiations-both with India and other partners-to adopt a more balanced, transparent, and strategically informed approach.

Sri Lanka–China Trade Engagements: Strategic Expansion and Legal Challenges

Sri Lanka's trade and economic ties with China have grown significantly over the past twenty years, mirroring China's rise as a global economic power and its increasing strategic interest in the Indian Ocean region. Unlike the ISFTA with India, Sri Lanka has not yet finalised a formal Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with China, despite numerous rounds of negotiations since 2014. The relationship remains informal and is mainly governed by WTO Most Favoured Nation (MFN) principles, complemented by a series of bilateral investment and infrastructure cooperation agreements. This legal ambiguity raises questions about compliance with WTO expectations for transparency and "substantially all trade" coverage under Article XXIV, as well as Sri Lanka's long-term legal commitments.

Trade between the two countries exhibits a considerable and ongoing imbalance heavily in favour of China. China ranks among Sri Lanka's top sources of imports, supplying machinery, electronics, construction materials, and consumer goods. Conversely, Sri Lanka's exports to China are relatively limited and mainly comprise raw materials such as tea, rubber, and coconut products. The absence of a finalised FTA has deprived Sri Lankan exporters of preferential access to the Chinese market, thereby restricting their competitiveness. Additionally, the proposed Sri Lanka–China FTA has stalled due to disagreements over tariff liberalisation and China's reluctance to grant Sri Lanka's request for asymmetrical treatment, further highlighting the challenges of negotiating with an economic superpower.

Beyond economics, Sri Lanka–China trade relations are deeply intertwined with geopolitical considerations. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) makes Sri Lanka a key part of its global infrastructure and maritime connectivity strategy. Major Chinese-supported projects, such as the Hambantota Port, Colombo Port City, and highway development, are presented as development efforts but have also faced criticism for creating debt reliance and undermining national sovereignty. These projects carry important legal and policy consequences for trade, especially regarding regulatory standards, investment protection, and state aid rules, which could impact future trade commitments.

From an International Relations perspective, China's involvement in Sri Lanka is part of its broader effort to reshape the Indo-Pacific order and counterbalance India's regional influence. This places Sri Lanka in a delicate position: while China provides investment and

political backing, becoming overly reliant could alienate traditional allies, including India and Western actors. The geopolitical tightrope Sri Lanka must navigate complicates the negotiation of a trade agreement that is not only economically viable but also politically sustainable.

Legally, the absence of a finalised and WTO-notified FTA creates uncertainty and fragmentation. Unlike India, China's trade-related instruments in Sri Lanka are often embedded in investment contracts, concessional financing, and project-specific memoranda of understanding, many of which lack transparency or dispute resolution mechanisms. This contrasts with WTO standards for standardised, multilateral-compatible trade governance. Consequently, Sri Lanka faces the dual challenge of transforming political cooperation into enforceable trade rules while maintaining multilateral integrity.

In conclusion, Sri Lanka's trade relations with China highlight the complexities of negotiating with a global power whose strategic ambitions extend beyond economic factors. While the partnership has brought vital infrastructure and capital inflows, the absence of a formal FTA, limited export growth, and the geopolitical sensitivity of Chinese involvement create notable legal and political difficulties. For Sri Lanka, the future journey must balance immediate development requirements with long-term trade management and foreign policy consistency.

Comparative Analysis – India vs. China: Applying the Analytical Framework

Sri Lanka's trade relations with India and China provide a unique perspective to explore the interaction of law, power asymmetries, institutional preparedness, and geopolitical strategies. This section assesses these bilateral engagements using the four-part analytical framework outlined in Section 3.3.

Legal Consistency with WTO Principles

The India–Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (ISFTA) has been formally notified to the WTO and generally complies with the requirements of Article XXIV of GATT. It includes legally binding commitments such as tariff schedules, rules of origin, and dispute settlement clauses, reflecting an effort to achieve multilateral consistency. However, challenges remain regarding non-tariff barriers and the partial liberalisation of sensitive sectors, which arguably weaken its effectiveness and question the principle of "substantially all trade" under WTO standards.

In contrast, Sri Lanka's trade with China does not have a formalised FTA and is mainly conducted under WTO MFN provisions. Although FTA negotiations started in 2014, they

remain unresolved due to disagreements over the extent of tariff reductions and the need for asymmetrical liberalisation. This legal uncertainty reduces transparency and predictability, leaving the relationship outside the formal WTO-compatible trade framework. Therefore, from a legal perspective, Sri Lanka's trade arrangement with India is more structured, while Chinese engagement remains informal and diplomatically motivated.

Asymmetry in Economic Outcomes and Bargaining Power

Pronounced asymmetries characterise both trade relationships. India and China, as key regional and global economic powers, possess greater negotiating leverage and economic influence. In both instances, Sri Lanka persistently runs trade deficits. Indian exports dominate Sri Lankan markets under the ISFTA, whereas Chinese imports-primarily capital goods and manufactured products-flood Sri Lanka's economy without reciprocal export gains. The lack of diversification in Sri Lanka's export base further exacerbates this imbalance. Indian non-tariff barriers and administrative hurdles restrict Sri Lankan goods, while the absence of preferential access to China's market weakens export competitiveness. Furthermore, Sri Lanka's limited capacity to include legal safeguards-such as escape clauses or special and differential treatment-has made it susceptible to unfavourable terms, emphasising the asymmetry in bargaining power.

Institutional Capacity and Implementation Gaps

Sri Lanka's capacity to implement, monitor, and enforce bilateral trade agreements is constrained by administrative and institutional limitations. Although a legal framework exists with the ISFTA, Sri Lankan agencies have struggled with monitoring compliance, conducting impact assessments, and resolving disputes through formal channels. Inter-agency coordination is frequently weak, and trade-related institutions lack specialised expertise in WTO law and the enforcement of bilateral treaties. Regarding China, the issue is more fundamental: the lack of a binding FTA means that institutional engagement is concentrated more on project-level coordination (such as infrastructure investments) rather than trade governance. This restricts Sri Lanka's ability to negotiate reciprocal obligations or secure fair market access. In both cases, the absence of strong institutional frameworks hampers Sri Lanka's capacity to assert and protect its interests effectively.

Geopolitical Positioning and Strategic Tradecraft

Sri Lanka's engagements with India and China are closely tied to wider regional power dynamics. India aims to keep its traditional influence in South Asia and considers its trade agreements as a strategic anchor. China, on the other hand, positions its economic presence within the Belt and Road Initiative, utilising infrastructure finance and investment to extend its strategic influence across the Indian Ocean.

Caught between these two giants, Sri Lanka adopts a form of 'strategic hedging' -engaging both powers economically while endeavouring to maintain strategic autonomy. However, this strategy is complicated by the perception of Chinese overreach (e.g., Hambantota Port lease) and political sensitivities toward Indian involvement in domestic policy. In this context, trade becomes a tool of geopolitics rather than merely an economic instrument. For Sri Lanka, the challenge is to sustain neutrality and maximise benefits without becoming overly dependent or politically compromised. Accordingly, while both India and China are essential partners, the nature of Sri Lanka's trade engagements with each highlights contrasting legal frameworks, economic vulnerabilities, institutional constraints, and geopolitical risks. Addressing these asymmetries will require not only better negotiated agreements but also improved institutional capacity and a more coherent trade diplomacy aligned with both WTO norms and strategic national interests.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the comprehensive analysis of Sri Lanka's trade engagements with India and China, the following policy recommendations are proposed to strengthen Sri Lanka's trade diplomacy, legal compliance, and geopolitical positioning:

1. Strengthen Legal and Institutional Capacity

- *Enhance Trade Law Expertise***:** Invest in training and capacity building for trade negotiators and legal professionals specialising in WTO law and bilateral trade agreements to better understand, negotiate, and implement complex trade rules.
- *Improve Monitoring and Enforcement Mechanisms***:** Establish or strengthen dedicated institutional units to monitor compliance with trade obligations, identify non-tariff barriers, and manage dispute resolution proactively.
- *Coordinate Inter-Agency Cooperation***:** Foster better coordination between ministries of trade, foreign affairs, finance, and investment to ensure a unified approach to trade policy formulation and implementation.

2. *Pursue Balanced and Transparent Trade Negotiations*

- *Advocate for Equitable Terms***:** Insist on inclusion of clear legal safeguards in future trade agreements, including asymmetrical tariff liberalisation and special and differential treatment, to protect vulnerable domestic sectors.
- *Ensure WTO Compliance and Transpare***ncy:** Maintain consistent notification of trade agreements and related measures to the WTO, improving transparency and reducing legal ambiguities.

- *Promote Diversification of Export Sectors*: Utilise trade negotiations strategically to open new markets for diversified Sri Lankan exports, extending beyond traditional commodities and textiles.

3. *Manage Geopolitical Risks Proactively*

- *Develop a Strategic Trade Diplomacy Framework:* Align trade policy with broader foreign policy objectives to effectively balance relations with India and China without compromising sovereignty.
- *Leverage Multilateral Platforms:* Engage actively in regional initiatives (e.g., SAARC, BIMSTEC) and multilateral forums to diversify partnerships and reduce dependency on any single power.
- *Monitor Debt and Investment Agreements:* Scrutinise infrastructure-related deals and investment contracts linked to trade to avoid unsustainable debt burdens and maintain regulatory sovereignty.

Conclusion

Sri Lanka's trade diplomacy with India and China highlights the complex intersection of law, economics, and geopolitics that small states face in a multipolar global order. As this paper has demonstrated, Sri Lanka's bilateral trade engagements exhibit varying degrees of legal formalisation, economic asymmetry, and strategic dependency. The India–Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (ISFTA) provides a more legally structured and WTO-consistent framework, but has delivered uneven benefits due to structural trade imbalances and persistent non-tariff barriers. In contrast, Sri Lanka's trade relationship with China is characterised by economic significance but legal ambiguity, dominated by investment-led cooperation rather than rules-based trade governance. Applying the four-part analytical framework-legal consistency, asymmetry assessment, institutional readiness, and geopolitical positioning-reveals key vulnerabilities in Sri Lanka's external trade policy. While both partnerships have brought economic benefits, they have also highlighted Sri Lanka's limited bargaining power, weak implementation capacity, and the strategic risks associated with dependence on larger powers. The absence of formal safeguards fragmented legal obligations, and lack of multilateral coordination further compound these challenges. To navigate these dynamics effectively, Sri Lanka must recalibrate its trade strategy. This includes enhancing legal expertise in trade negotiation, investing in institutional capacity for monitoring and enforcement, and developing a coherent policy approach that aligns bilateral ambitions with multilateral commitments under the WTO. At the same time, Sri Lanka must carefully manage the geopolitical dimensions of its trade relationships, maintaining a balanced diplomatic posture that safeguards sovereignty while leveraging economic opportunities. Ultimately, Sri Lanka's trade future lies in building resilient institutions, advancing equitable trade agreements, and pursuing a balanced foreign policy that

recognises the interdependence of legal integrity, economic development, and strategic autonomy.

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Debt Leveraging in India-Sri Lanka Relations

Amali Wedagedara

Introduction

Sri Lanka's relations with India, against the backdrop of the 17th programme with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), remind us that bilateral relations are like '*Bian Lian*' – face changing. Defeating the expectations that India would strengthen and empower the debt-battered Sri Lankan government to fend off intrusive and exploitative international forces, India held Sri Lanka's hand and walked to the IMF. Events unfolding since 2022 have exposed how India actively exploits bilateral relations with Sri Lanka to create new opportunities for Indian multinationals with regional aspirations. Rather than serving as a representative voice for economically and politically vulnerable Third World nations like Sri Lanka and advocating for an alternative global order, India has been leveraging its industrial capabilities and global influence to secure economically and geo-strategically advantageous deals. Mr Modi's visit on April 5, 2025, and the Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) signed during it have only added to the sense of insecurity and frustration. The realisation of the MoUs would reveal how leveraging debt to amplify opportunities would yield results, most importantly, how far India would benefit from the new vulnerabilities created by the default and the 17th IMF programme.

This article explores the Bian Lian of India-Sri Lanka relations, principally to understand how changing patterns of bilateral lending, either in the form of grants, financial assistance and loans, could demonstrate a transformation in the face of India-Sri Lanka relations. India's growing economic clout in Sri Lanka, as evidenced by its bilateral trade and lending over the years, has enabled debt leveraging that extends its geopolitical interests and creates market access for local business elites.

Debt Leveraging as a Geopolitical Instrument

Sovereign Debt, an unequal relationship between creditors and debtors, has historically functioned as an instrument of domination and control. Creditors – either powerful countries as bilateral lenders or International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and financial markets controlled by big powers- have used debt to undermine the national sovereignty of debtor countries and extend their geopolitical interests. The experiences of Greece, Haiti, Tunisia, China, and Egypt in the 19th and 20th centuries illustrate how creditor powers (United Kingdom, France, Italy and Germany), exploited debt to deny debtor countries independence, use them as vassal states, open markets and grab valuable assets such as rare minerals, land and ports. Debt has been a "weapon of domination over debtor countries" (Toussaint, 2019). Debt has also been an instrument of organising development at a global scale, rendering some countries dependent on developed countries with advanced technologies as suppliers of raw material and cheap labour (Hudson, 2009).

With the emergence of China as a major economic power in the 21st century, the term debt diplomacy/ debt-trap diplomacy was increasingly used to explain the geopolitical consequences of Chinese debt. However, debt diplomacy or debt-trap diplomacy is not limited to China. Debt disbursed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), capital markets, as well as any other state, could amount to debt-trap diplomacy, undermining the autonomy of debtor countries and people.

In contrast to debt trap diplomacy, which involves targeted disbursement of a high volume of debt to cause debt distress, the very act of lending, particularly to a debt-distressed country, could be a factor of who gets what, when and how. Lending new loans or using existing debt as a strategy to gain an advantage is ‘debt leveraging’. In finance, ‘leverage’ is defined as an act undertaken by banks, money managers and investors to make money out of debt (Sgambati, 2019). Banks leverage debt by investing it in financial markets to make more money. Consequently, it is a speculative activity counting on future returns – possibilities to gain in the future by investing today. To successfully leverage, one needs capital. Therefore, it’s an exclusive privilege bestowed on the creditors. Like banks and private investors (corporations and fund managers), governments can also leverage their debt to secure better deals. The US government leverages not only debt issued by the Government of the USA, but also all US dollar-denominated debt issued by banks and investors (Di Muzio & Robbins, 2016). The World Bank extends the definition of leveraging further to include public investments made to induce more investments by the private sector in a specific project (Griffiths, 2012). The World Bank claims that US$1 of their investments will leverage US$3 investments from others, often the private investors.

The word ‘debt leverage’ in this article carries a blended meaning to connote the practice adopted by creditor governments while lending to a debtor government with the expectation of future gains, political and economic gains, either for themselves or for the domestic private sector. Similar to the World Bank's definition, public investments by the creditor governments in the form of debt could prompt private investors from their respective

countries to invest in the debtor country. Debt leveraging, as a result, allows a creditor state to manoeuvre their privileged position in bilateral relations to win favourable deals, acquire assets, gain greater market access or political support in the multilateral forums. Likewise, debt enables a creditor to make claims over the debtor country, instrumentalising the indebtedness of another country to make political gains. It is a form of power. A scan of the global debtscape illustrates how debt leveraging has become a core element not only in economic diplomacy but in control and domination.

As economies grow, the role of debt in countries' bilateral relations has acquired new meanings. More than donations, grants, gifts and foreign aid, which appear benevolent and friendly, loans provided at an interest rate, and under specific conditions carry different implications. The following section examines how the economic transformation of India has impacted smaller neighbours in South Asia.

Changing role of India vis-à-vis small neighbours

As India emerges as a major power, more confident and assertive of its aspirations for regional and global dominance, smaller countries in the neighbourhood have lost a protective wing under which they sought to amplify their demands, particularly during multilateral negotiations. Even though India advocates for a new global order, including reforming the United Nations Security Council to reflect the contemporary world order and formulating alternative institutional frameworks for economic cooperation such as BRICS+, India' alliances with the status quo and imperialist powers such as the US, UK, and France, has taken an ascendency. As India fine-balances on the tightrope – taking advantage of both the old-world order and the call for a new world order, countries like Sri Lanka have lost an ally to seek support and a shield to withstand the pressure of IFIs and being heard at the multilateral forums.

A couple of recent developments indicate that India has also contributed to deepening the Washington Consensus in South Asia.

Why would India entertain the foray of neoliberal reforms, extending the grip of US-centric International Financial Institutions (IFIs) like the IMF over fellow South Asian countries? Instead, would India not be better off strengthening state capacities and safeguarding policy space to pursue independent paths of development on behalf of debt-distressed neighbours? Would not creating buffers for small states to withstand international pressure be a better role for India to adopt? At the same time, would it mould geopolitical leadership in South Asia and the greater developing world? Far from addressing these concerns, India has been debt-leveraging.

Although not a uniform approach, the new debt crisis affecting several countries in South Asia – Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and the Maldives - demonstrates how India has leveraged these crises to exert influence, control, and create market opportunities for Indian multinationals. As the strongest economy in South Asia, ranking 7th in terms of the vote share of 2.63% in

the IMF, India has been using IMF mediation to manoeuvre debt crises in the neighbouring countries to gain geopolitical advantage.

One example is India's intervention at the IMF. In 2024, Indian financial assistance helped the Maldivian government avoid an IMF programme. The debt distress of the Maldives forced Mohamed Muizzu, the Maldivian President, to abandon his “India Out” campaign and recalibrate his government’s foreign policy towards India.

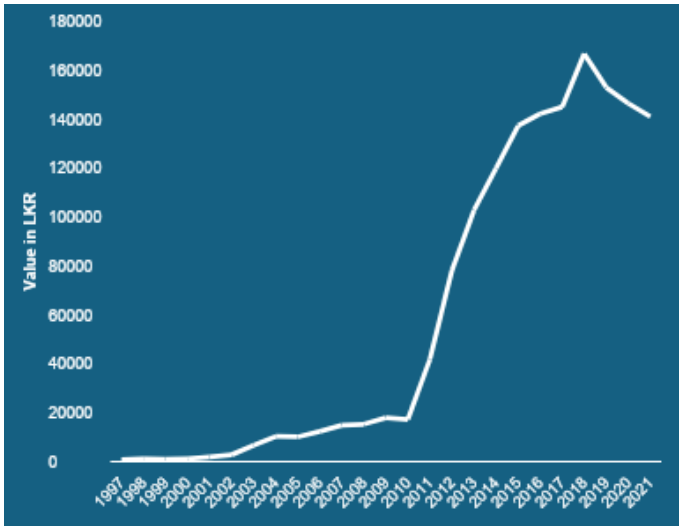
Vis-à-vis Pakistan – India’s estranged neighbour, the policy has been one of pinching and twisting arms. At times signalling that more favourable bilateral relations could have made India a better partner to Pakistan than IMF, “giving more money” (Pandit, 2024), India has also demanded “stringent monitoring of funds” disbursed to Pakistan to ensure that IMF funds would not be directed to supplement defence expenses or debt servicing (Press Information Bureau, 2025). With the escalation of tensions between India and Pakistan in parallel to the Operation Sindoor, India opposed a loan of US$800 million that the Asia Development Bank (ADB) granted to Pakistan. India cited "evidence of Islamabad diverting development funds for military use” (Jayaswal, 2025). India has also sought to thwart Pakistan’s initiatives to diversify external financing options by highlighting contradictions in investing in the New Development Bank (NDB) of BRICS+ while also relying on IMF funds (Sri Lanka Guardian, 2025).

India's ability to use its economic clout is the main force behind India's lobbying in the IFIs. In this context, it is crucial to understand how India’s increasing capacity to lend bilateral loans and provide financial assistance figures in its geopolitical interests. In order to contextualise how far the strategy of instrumentalising bilateral relations to navigate India’s geopolitical and economic interests in the South Asian neighbourhood goes, the following section explores changing patterns of India's lending to Sri Lanka across the years.

Analysis of India’s Lending to Sri Lanka

Economic and financial relations between countries in the long durée illustrate the changing nature of the States in terms of ideological orientation, domestic economy and geopolitical alliances. As a developing country with a weak economic structure dependent on low-end commodity exports such as tea and coconuts, while relying heavily on food imports, “preservation and expansion of her external export markets, and the maximisation of external economic assistance” (Kodikara, 1982, p. 17) has been important for Sri Lanka from the early days of independence. Although India's presence has always been significant in Sri Lanka's external relations, the early days saw the question of the Malaiyaha community's citizenship, ethnic conflict, maritime boundary disputes, and geopolitical tensions become overt in India-Sri Lanka relations. However, India’s economic relations with Sri Lanka took a distinct turn as India became economically stronger. India's lending patterns to Sri Lanka, as explored in this article, are illustrated in Graph 01, which shows a progressive increase from 2001 onwards. This article argues that India and Sri Lanka’s economic relations have assumed a geopolitical character simply by virtue of Sri Lanka's geographical proximity to India.

Figure 1: Lending by India



Source: Various issues of Annual Reports, CBSL

India's regional posture towards South Asia became systematic from the 1980s with the establishment of the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). SAARC, founded in 1985, marks the beginning of the deepening of regionalism in South Asia. The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) were established in 1997. The South Asia Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA), initiated in 1993, led to the creation of a broader trade framework in the form of the South Asia Free Trade Area in 2006. Regional economic and trade integration also parallels the proliferation of bilateral trade agreements with South Asian neighbours such as Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka (Weerakoon, 2001). The Indo-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (ISLFTA) that was launched in 1998 is India's first bilateral FTA in South Asia.

ISLFTA is unique. Even though a bilateral FTA seems sensible for enhancing economic ties between India and Sri Lanka and promoting the business communities of both countries, the trade density between the two countries at the time of signing the FTA was relatively low. Trade between India and Sri Lanka grew faster than their net trade with the world after 1980. However, their trade with each other remained marginal (Harilal & Joseph, 1999; Sarvananthan, 2000; Weerakoon, 2001). After liberalising the economy in 1977, Sri Lanka geared its exports more towards North America and Europe.

In contrast to exports, India was emerging as an origin of imports for Sri Lanka (Weerakoon, 2001). By 2022, India had emerged as Sri Lanka's largest import market. In terms of exports, India ranks third (World Bank, 2022). Sri Lanka's exports to India, valued at US$60.7 million in 2000, increased to US$571 million in 2010 and US$991 million in 2023. In contrast, India's exports to Sri Lanka, which were valued at US$677 million in 2000, have

multiplied to US$3.62 billion in 2023 (The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC), n.d.).

While the trade deficit has also multiplied over the years demonstrating the skewed benefits of bilateral trade, Sri Lanka's increasing imports from India also testifies for how some destinations – comparatively low cost, and tradable in alternative currency have become sources of support amidst structural vulnerabilities aggravated in the spectrum of import and export that liberalised economies like Sri Lanka has come to rely on as a result of the economic reforms advocated by the IFIs such as the IMF, World Banka and ADB.

Is there a correlation between expanding trade deficit and increasing lending by India to Sri Lanka? Hudson argues that "over the past two centuries, international investments have been associated with government lending and foreign aid to install infrastructure to facilitate raw material production, not to develop domestic industrial strength or otherwise achieve economic autonomy. The basic thrust has been to encourage raw material producers to become more industrially dependent, not self-sufficient" (Hudson, 2009, p. 235). Albeit the "government lending" that Hudson discusses are from those in the Global North, a bulk of Indian project-based loans too have been provided for infrastructure projects either in ports, railways, water supply or credit lines to purchase goods from India. Grants offered by the Government of India have been directed to the Indian housing projects and developing health services (Department of External Resources, n.d.). An analysis of the Indian loans and grants concerning various projects in which they were invested would facilitate making a more conclusive judgment of their developmental impact. Within the scope of this article, it is safe to say that their development aspect has been narrow in fostering Sri Lankan economy's industrial capabilities which could have aided adding value to tradable commodities and move away low-end commodities such as pepper, nuts, animal food, flavoured water and cloves that dominated Sri Lanka's export basket to India in 2023 (The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC), n.d.).

Japan, China and India have been the largest bilateral lenders to Sri Lanka. The deepening of economic and financial interactions between China and Sri Lanka during Mahinda Rajapaksa's tenure (2000-2015) enabled China to surpass Japan as the most prominent bilateral lender to Sri Lanka. Investments in landmark projects such as the Hambanthota Harbour, Lotus Tower, Colombo Port City, and Highways gained China more visibility, also leading to Chinese debt-trap hypotheses (Etsuyo, 2022; Moramudali, 2019). It also escalated tensions with India (Patranobis, 2017; Soni, 2022). As much as India's lending to Sri Lanka has been increasing parallel to India's economic growth, particularly from 2010, after the Civil War ended, also a period that China deepened its economic engagement in Sri Lanka, India's overt overtures at the economic realm commenced in the aftermath of the default in April 2022. The following section explores how debt diplomacy, or debt leveraging, assumed momentum in India-Sri Lanka relations as Sri Lanka struggled to come out of the crisis.

Debt Diplomacy in India-Sri Lanka Relations

India was the first respondent to the economic crisis in Sri Lanka in 2022. Starting with the currency swap of US$400 million in January, the credit line of US$500 million to purchase fuel was extended in February. In March, India offered another credit line of US$1 billion, just days after Sri Lanka announced its willingness to seek financial support from the IMF. Indian financial assistance came before Sri Lanka defaulted in April 2022. By delaying trade liabilities under the Asian Clearance Union amounting to US$2 billion, India had extended emergency financial support of around US$4 billion by the end of 2022. Subsequently, India also played a key role in negotiating the US$2.9 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) of the IMF, which kicked off in March 2023. The 17th IMF programme, ongoing, has been the most punitive in terms of the scale of reforms and the intensity of surveillance that Sri Lanka has seen in the last 60 years since it started rolling out neoliberal reforms. As an official creditor with US$1.74 billion in defaulted debt, India has legitimate interests in resolving Sri Lanka's debt crisis quickly. What is alarming, however, is the pursuit of grabbing the spoils of IMF reforms.

The highlight was the entry of Adani Green Energy into Sri Lanka's renewable energy sector in 2022, with an investment of US$442 million to build two wind power plants in Mannar and Pooneryn in the North of Sri Lanka. Adani's advancement coincided with the IMF-backed restructuring of the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB). The new draft Bill, which was tabled in the Parliament in early 2024, proposed to unbundle the CEB into 12 different companies formed for the generation, transmission and distribution of electricity. Starting from the disputes over the cost-effectiveness of the price of a unit of electricity, the ecological destruction that the wind power plants would cause to the sensitive ecosystem in Mannar Island and the impact on the livelihoods of the fisherfolks, Adani Green Energy was shrouded in controversy. The CEB Bill heightened tensions with speculations that Adani would benefit once the CEB disintegrated into different companies. The Indian Oil Company (IOC), a subsidiary of IndianOil, a SoE, operating in Sri Lanka, is another Indian company that benefited from energy sector reforms.

New energy-related investment projects initiated by India, such as the Trincomalee Energy Hub with Sampur Solar, an oil refinery, the supply of LNG, power-grid interconnection, and a multi-product pipeline, have been signed. One project initiated during Mr. Modi's visit has kindled fears that deepened energy relations with India will lead to dependency, eroding Sri Lanka's energy sovereignty. Developments in Bangladesh, with Adani Power halting power supply due to payment delays, have escalated these fears.

State sector reforms that the IMF commands, waning state control and ushering in private ventures, will create new market opportunities for Indian multinationals like Adani, Reliance Jio and the Tata Group, as well as Indian SoEs like IndianOil and the NTPC Renewable Energy Limited. Controversies surrounding the award of the renewable energy tender to Adani, under the pressure of the Indian government, also reveal how geopolitical interests intervene in the so-called free market operations. Market inroads Indian companies are

making in the South Asian neighbourhood illustrate India's expectations in deepening the grip of the Washington Consensus in South Asia.

However, tensions regarding Indian interventions in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, and the Maldives reveal that the present style of engagement is not going to create amicable and stable relations. Not only would the antipathy created destabilise India's bilateral relations, but it would also affect democratic governments in South Asia negatively. Defence MoU signed during Mr. Modi's visit, underscoring the 'inter-linked security' between India and Sri Lanka, is an example. The secrecy surrounding the MoUs, which have not been made public, has created a space for uncertainty and fear to breed, which will inevitably affect the new National People's Power government.

Alternative form of leadership, based on Solidarity and Equal Benefits

Instead of instrumentalising the spoils of debt to make a headway in South Asia, India could advocate a different leadership, aligned with the 'Neighbourhood First' policy, bringing back values such as decolonisation of geopolitics and international relations fundamental to the Non-Aligned Movement. India could leverage its economic strength to enable small states to navigate multilateral platforms like the IMF and WTO without losing their sovereignty. India could safeguard the autonomy of small states to pursue independent development paths, enabling them to grow sustainably, breaking free from debt. Development-oriented engagement, promoting technological transfers that foster industrialisation, skill development, and expand higher education opportunities in Indian academic institutions, is a short-term and intermediate policy that India could implement vis-à-vis its neighbours to nurture non-exploitative relations.

It is, of course, a question of whether India is willing to upset the bigger players like the US or the traditional status quo powers in Western Europe. But it is an urgent and vital role in today's era of tariff wars, where the Third World calls for an alternative world order.

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Mapping Sri Lanka's Migration Governance: Policies, Actors, and Paths Forward

Pavithra Jayawardena

Introduction

Migration is a defining feature of contemporary Sri Lanka, deeply influencing its economy, political landscape, social fabric, and transnational connections. As a major labour-sending nation, a source of asylum seekers, and a site of diverse migratory movements-including student migration, irregular boat migration, diaspora engagement, and return migration-Sri Lanka offers a complex and compelling case for migration scholarship. Notably, Sri Lanka was among the first countries to introduce dual citizenship in 1987, signalling an early institutional recognition of the importance of maintaining ties with its overseas communities, particularly long-term settlers. Despite the breadth of these migration trends, the country's governance framework remains underdeveloped and uneven. While the early adoption of dual citizenship suggests a forward-looking vision, Sri Lanka has yet to meaningfully expand its diaspora engagement policy. Instead, migration governance remains disproportionately focused on labour migration, reflecting a narrow, remittance-driven approach that prioritizes economic benefits over the long-term wellbeing, rights, and integration of migrants throughout the full migration cycle.

This article aims to critically examine Sri Lanka's migration governance, with a view to identifying existing gaps and proposing pathways toward a more coherent, inclusive, and rights-based policy framework. It maps the key actors in the field-including state institutions, international organizations, civil society groups, and private entities-and explores the role of academia and research in shaping the migration discourse. The article then analyses the inconsistencies and fragmentations in current policy and practice, concluding with a set of recommendations to address these shortcomings and contribute to a more comprehensive approach to migration governance in Sri Lanka.

Existing Migration Policy Frameworks in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's migration policy framework is primarily focused on labour migration. The cornerstone of this framework is the National Labour Migration Policy introduced in 2008/09, which was later expanded into the National Policy and Action Plan for Migration for Employment (2023–2027) (Ministry of Labour and Foreign Employment [MLFE], 2023). This policy aims to manage and promote safe, orderly, and beneficial labour migration, particularly in relation to overseas employment. Beyond labour migration, there are only a few institutional efforts addressing other forms of migration. One notable example is the dual citizenship policy, introduced in 1987, which allows long-term migrants and diaspora members to retain formal ties with Sri Lanka (Department of Immigration and Emigration [DIE], 2024). While this policy symbolises a connection to overseas communities, broader diaspora engagement remains limited.

Within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a Diaspora Affairs Division exists to facilitate engagement with Sri Lankan communities abroad. However, its operations have been inconsistent and often under-resourced, limiting its effectiveness (Ministry of Foreign Affairs [MFA], 2022). Consular services, such as the protection and support of Sri Lankan nationals abroad, are typically handled by Sri Lankan diplomatic missions as part of their routine responsibilities. Additionally, in response to concerns around irregular migration and exploitation, Sri Lanka launched a National Strategic Action Plan to Monitor and Combat Human Trafficking in 2015 (Ministry of Justice [MoJ], 2015). This plan marked an important step toward addressing human trafficking, although implementation and enforcement remain challenging. Below, the article provides brief analyses on the available key policies.

National Policy and Action Plan for Migration for Employment (2023–2027)

The National Policy and Action Plan for Migration for Employment (2023–2027)**,** led by the then Ministry of Labour and Foreign Employment, is currently Sri Lanka's most prominent national migration policy. It is an extension of the National Labour Migration Policy (NLMP)**,** which was developed in 2008 and officially adopted in 2009. Developed with technical support from the International Labour Organization (ILO)**,** the NLMP marked a shift from a remittance-based approach to labour migration toward a rights-based and development-oriented governance model (ILO, 2013). The updated 2023–2027 policy continues in this direction, aligning national migration governance with changing global labour market demands and international human rights standards. It is structured around four key thematic pillars: (1) strengthening migration governance, (2) promoting decent employment opportunities abroad, (3) protecting the rights of migrant workers and their families, and (4) leveraging migration for broader national development goals (Ministry of Labour and Foreign Employment [MLFE], 2023).

The policy outlines concrete measures such as enhancing the effectiveness of labour attaché services, expanding digital data management systems, and enforcing ethical recruitment practices. Notably, it emphasizes gender-transformative approaches, seeking to create more

diverse and safer migration pathways for women, particularly beyond traditional roles in domestic work. However, despite these progressive elements, critiques remain. Scholars and practitioners have noted persistent gaps in coordination with domestic vocational training programs and the continued marginalization of civil society voices in both the policy-making and implementation processes (Attanayake, 2019; ILO, 2013; Perera, 2024).

Dual Citizenship Policy

Sri Lanka's dual citizenship framework is governed by the *Immigrants and Emigrants Act No. 20 of 1948* (as amended) and is administered by the Department of Immigration and Emigration. It enables Sri Lankans who have acquired foreign citizenship to retain legal and symbolic ties with their country of origin. This policy is particularly significant for diaspora members who wish to invest, purchase property, or participate in professional, cultural, or philanthropic activities in Sri Lanka (Department of Immigration and Emigration [DIE], 2024).

Sri Lanka was among the earliest labour-sending countries to adopt a formal dual citizenship policy-well before many other nations-signaling an early institutional willingness to remain connected with its long-term emigrant populations. As Jayawardena (2020) argues, this was a notable departure from traditional state practices, as it acknowledged the possibility of multiple national loyalties. Many states have historically rejected the idea of dual allegiance, believing that a citizen's loyalty should be exclusive to one nation. However, despite this progressive beginning, Sri Lanka has made limited efforts to expand or institutionalize broader diaspora engagement policies since the policy's introduction. In fact, the dual citizenship scheme has been suspended at times, reflecting inconsistent political commitment. Access to dual citizenship has also been skewed by class, as the high application costs and bureaucratic procedures tend to restrict it to wealthier segments of the diaspora. Moreover, there remains a clear policy gap in integrating dual citizens into national development planning. Sectors such as education, health, and digital entrepreneurship - areas where diaspora knowledge and investment could be impactful - are rarely targeted in formal policy mechanisms.

Anti-Human Trafficking Strategy

In 2015, Sri Lanka, under the leadership of the National Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force (NAHTTF) and with support from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), launched its National Strategic Action Plan to Monitor and Combat Human Trafficking. The strategy emphasized a multi-sectoral response encompassing law enforcement, social protection, international cooperation, and public awareness (IOM Sri Lanka, 2016). The action plan sought to operationalize a victim-centered approach and increase institutional capacity to identify, assist, and rehabilitate trafficking survivors. It attempts to build synergies with migration management frameworks, especially in addressing exploitative recruitment and irregular migration. However, structural weaknesses-such as poor data collection, minimal victim identification, and legal ambiguities in differentiating smuggling from trafficking-continue to undermine its effectiveness (U.S. Department of State, 2023).

Actors in Sri Lanka's Migration Governance

Migration governance in Sri Lanka involves a complex network of actors spanning state, private, international, and civil society sectors. At the core are state institutions, which are primarily responsible for formulating policies, regulating migration flows, and providing consular and welfare services to migrants. Key state bodies include the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment and Tourism, Ministry of Labour and the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE), each playing distinct but interconnected roles in the governance process. The private sector, particularly licensed foreign employment agencies and their networks of sub-agents, serve as intermediaries in the recruitment and deployment of migrant workers as well as student and skilled migrants. While these actors facilitate access to foreign employment, concerns around unethical recruitment practices and exploitation persist, prompting calls for tighter regulation and oversight.

International organisations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) play a significant role by providing technical assistance, funding, and policy guidance. These actors also support capacity-building initiatives and help align Sri Lanka's migration policies with global human rights and labour standards. In addition, civil society organisations (CSOs) contribute to migration governance through advocacy, service provision, and community-level engagement. They often fill critical gaps by offering legal aid, psycho-social support, and reintegration assistance to returnees and victims of trafficking. Finally, diaspora organisations - though less formally integrated into the governance structure - represent an important stakeholder group. They engage in cultural diplomacy, remittance flows, philanthropy, and knowledge transfers, though their role is not yet fully harnessed within formal migration policy frameworks. This section provides an overview a few selected key actors and their respective roles in shaping and implementing migration governance in Sri Lanka.

The Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE)

The Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) is the principal government agency responsible for regulating and promoting foreign employment in Sri Lanka. Established under the *Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment Act No. 21 of 1985*, the Bureau plays a central role in managing labour migration by licensing recruitment agencies, monitoring overseas job placements, and providing pre-departure training and welfare services to migrant workers (Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment [SLBFE], 2024). It also facilitates dispute resolution, offers insurance schemes, and maintains a registration system to ensure the protection of Sri Lankan migrant workers abroad. The SLBFE is widely regarded as a key institutional actor in the country's labour migration governance framework (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2013).

Despite its pivotal role in managing labour migration, the SLBFE has faced significant criticism concerning its effectiveness, transparency, and institutional integrity. Traditionally tasked with regulatory functions such as licensing recruitment agencies, maintaining the standards of training and safeguarding migrant workers' rights, the SLBFE has

controversially entered the private recruitment market itself, thereby blurring the line between its regulatory responsibilities and commercial interests. This dual role raises concerns over conflicts of interest and unfair competition with private agencies. Furthermore, the Bureau has decentralized pre-departure training by allowing large private recruitment agencies to conduct migrant training independently, which has been criticized for compromising training quality and oversight. Critics also highlight bureaucratic inefficiencies and a lack of transparency that disproportionately affect low-income and rural migrants struggling to navigate complex registration procedures. Inadequate oversight of recruitment agents has led to persistent issues such as contract substitution, exploitation, and abuse abroad (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Additionally, while the SLBFE generates significant revenue from migrant fees, questions remain about whether sufficient resources are reinvested in migrant welfare and reintegration programs. The Bureau's limited engagement with civil society actors and limited attention to reintegration of returnees further constrains policy development and the delivery of comprehensive support services. Collectively, these challenges display the systemic weaknesses in Sri Lanka's migration governance framework.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM)

The IOM has operated in Sri Lanka since the early 2000s and has emerged as a central actor in policy formulation, technical support, and humanitarian interventions. Its overarching goal has been to promote safe, orderly, and regular migration, in line with the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). One of IOM's most influential roles was in the development and implementation of the National Labour Migration Policy (2008), its extensions and the Anti-Human Trafficking Strategic Plan (2015)**,** providing expertise on rights-based and development-oriented approaches (IOM Sri Lanka, 2016). Additionally, IOM has facilitated the reintegration assistance, community-based awareness programmes, and counter-trafficking initiatives targeting vulnerable groups, particularly returning migrant domestic workers and irregular migrants (IOM Sri Lanka, 2021).

While IOM's intervention has been central in Sri Lankan migration governance, there are several concerns on their approach. In general, while international organisations bring vital resources and technical knowledge, their interventions often reflect global migration agendas rather than localized priorities. Similarly, in the case of Sri Lanka as well**,** critics argue that IOM's emphasis on has at times aligned with the migration deterrence agendas of destination countries as opposed to Sri Lankan migrants' interests and realities. According to Geiger and Pécoud (2010), this is the case in relation to Sri Lankan irregular migrants returning from the Middle East or Southeast Asia. This raises questions about the balance between protection-oriented programming and geopolitical interests embedded in IOM partnerships. Another critic is IOM's weak interest in addressing the structural issues pertaining to labour migrants. For example, while IOM's reintegration programmes have

provided livelihoods support, they have not always addressed structural issues such as debt bondage from recruitment costs or gendered social stigma upon return. The result is a top-down policy environment in which international organisations shape the policies and action plans, sometimes without sufficient inclusion of migrant voices or sub-national actors.

Apart from the IOM the International Labour Organisation (ILO), through its Decent Work Country Programme, has contributed to the migration governance by integrating labour migration in a broader social and economic planning, advocating for decent work conditions and skills development, though enforcement gaps remain. Other actors like UNDP, UN Women, the EU, World Bank, and ADB also have contributed through gender-sensitive programming, counter-trafficking efforts, and funding employment reforms. However, their project-based approaches risk creating fragmented, donor-dependent interventions, challenging long-term policy coherence and sustainability in Sri Lanka's migration governance landscape.

Civil Society Actors

Various types of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) play a significant role in shaping the migration landscape of Sri Lanka. These include local civil society groups, diaspora organisations, religious institutions, and transnational networks situated in destination countries. Local CSOs are crucial in providing direct support to migrants and their families by offering legal aid, psychosocial services, and advocacy for migrant rights. They often conduct research to fill knowledge gaps and address institutional deficiencies left by state agencies, thus complementing official migration governance structures. Despite their contributions, the role of CSOs is frequently constrained by the top-down nature of Sri Lanka's migration policy environment, where state agencies retain control over formal policymaking and data access. Moreover, tensions sometimes emerge between state officials and civil society actors, particularly when the latter critique government shortcomings in rights protection.

On the other hand, diaspora organisations serve as community hubs in host countries, fostering social cohesion through cultural, religious, and community engagement activities. These diaspora communities, particularly in countries such as Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and the Gulf states where a large number of Sri Lankan migrants stay have become increasingly organised in the past two decades. They frequently mobilize resources and provide critical assistance during crises or national emergencies in Sri Lanka, strengthening transnational ties. They also engage in various political activities both at host and home. For example, Tamil diaspora networks show a grater interest in political engagements. However, the Sri Lankan state's relationship with some diaspora organisations has been highly politicised, particularly in the post-war context and ethno nationalism. While the government has created platforms time to time to keep engaged with diaspora – such as Sri Lanka Diaspora Engagement Policy, or Global Sri Lankan Forum, their outreach has been uneven and often mistrustful, especially toward diaspora groups perceived to have links with separatist or critical narratives.

A significant policy gap in Sri Lankan migration governance is the absence of a formal institutional framework to effectively engage with diaspora organizations. Many diaspora groups are eager to contribute to Sri Lanka's development by collaborating in areas such as education, innovation, business, entrepreneurship, and health. However, there is no centralized or formal platform in Sri Lanka to facilitate and coordinate these engagements. Although initiatives like the Office for Overseas Sri Lankan Affairs (OOSLA) have been established, they have often lacked sufficient resources and support to strengthen relationships with diaspora communities effectively. Meanwhile, civil society organizations (CSOs) play a crucial role across all stages of the migration cycle-from pre-departure awareness and preparation to support during migration and protection of rights, and finally to reintegration assistance upon return. These CSOs frequently collaborate with government bodies, international organizations, and donor agencies, serving as essential intermediaries and advocates within Sri Lanka's multifaceted migration governance system.

Research on Sri Lankan Migration

Research on Sri Lankan migration has gained popularity in recent years, though it remains a relatively young field of study. Consequently, only a limited number of academic institutions and research organizations focus on this area, often addressing specific aspects of the migration phenomenon. Despite this, these institutions play a crucial role in advancing migration scholarship and shaping public discourse on issues such as labor mobility, diaspora relations, and migrant rights. While their direct impact on national policy may be limited, the evidence and critical insights they provide have been vital in framing migration as a complex socio-economic and political process.

Independent research institutes such as the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) have played a key role in shaping migration governance in Sri Lanka through policy-oriented research. IPS, through its Migration and Urbanisation Policy Research Pillar, has produced extensive work on labour migration trends, youth aspirations, remittances, and reintegration of returnees (IPS, 2023). It has collaborated with government agencies and international organisations to promote evidence-based policymaking, policy coherence, and better alignment between skills training and international labour market needs (Gunatilaka, 2021). Meanwhile, CEPA brings a rights-based, intersectional approach to migration research, focusing on the social and gendered impacts of migration, such as the psychosocial well-being of migrants and the vulnerability of women in domestic work sectors (CEPA, 2018). Other institutions such as the Social Scientists' Association (SSA) have explored the political and ethnic dimensions of migration, the Law and Society Trust (LST) has examined migrant workers' rights and legal protections, and the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES) has conducted research on displacement, return migration, and the role of migration in post-war reconciliation. While the research outputs produced by these institutes are instrumental, they have been constrained by various realities such as aligning their research agendas with donor priorities, which can narrow the scope of inquiry

and exclude more politically sensitive or underfunded topics. Additionally, their Colombo-centric orientation-characterised by English-language outputs and urban elite staffing-has been seen as limiting the representation of grassroots realities and the diverse lived experiences of migrants across Sri Lanka.

Sri Lankan universities are also contributing meaningfully to the production of migration-related knowledge, primarily through more academic, conceptual, and theoretically grounded research. Institutions such as the University of Colombo, University of Jaffna, and Sabaragamuwa University have examined diverse aspects of migration, including irregular migration, dual citizenship, human trafficking, diaspora identity, and the post-conflict mobility of communities. A key strength of university-based research lies in its relative independence from donor-driven agendas, which often shape the priorities and thematic boundaries of research institutes. This autonomy enables academics to pursue more critical, exploratory, and long-term investigations-often tackling questions that are underexplored or politically sensitive. While migration is taught as a sub area and a topic in several disciplines such as Sociology, Demography and Economy - both in undergraduate and postgraduate levels - in 2024, Department of Demography at the University of Colombo started offering a Diploma on Migration, marking the first formal Diploma dedicated for migration studies.

However, despite its scholarly contributions, the policy influence of university research remains limited. Much of it circulates within English-language academic spaces, restricting its accessibility to local policymakers and non-academic stakeholders. In addition, the absence of strong institutional linkages between universities and government policy platforms further hinders knowledge transfer. The lack of longitudinal and comparative studies also limits the ability of academic research to inform timely, evidence-based policy responses to the evolving realities of migration. Nevertheless, in a landscape where donor agendas can constrain the scope of inquiry, university-based research plays an essential role in sustaining a more independent, nuanced, and critical understanding of migration in Sri Lanka.

Incoherences of the Migration Governance

Sri Lanka's migration policy landscape is marked by significant incoherences that hinder its effectiveness and responsiveness. One major challenge is the fragmentation across overlapping policy frameworks, such as the National Labour Migration Policy (2008), the National Policy and Action Plan for Migration for Employment (2023–2027), and the National Anti-Human Trafficking Plan (2015–2019). These policies have often been developed independently by different government bodies-with donor involvement-but lack harmonisation in objectives, monitoring, and implementation. This results in duplication of efforts, inefficiencies in service delivery, and inconsistent data collection.

Furthermore, governance remains highly centralised in Colombo, with limited subnational capacity and weak coordination among ministries responsible for labour migration, consular

protection, and gender-specific vulnerabilities. This top-down approach creates a disconnect from local realities, leaving migrant families and returnees underserved by reintegration programs that are often poorly tailored to community needs. Regulatory weaknesses also persist, including uneven enforcement of ethical recruitment guidelines and the absence of protections for informal domestic workers, compounded by overstretched monitoring by the SLBFE. Together, these factors contribute to an often reactive, remittance-dependent policy environment with limited grievance redress and psychosocial support for migrants.

In addition to structural fragmentation and enforcement gaps, Sri Lanka's migration policies suffer from critical blind spots. Gender remains a persistent oversight: despite women comprising a large share of low-wage migrant workers, policy frameworks tend to frame them either as vulnerable victims or economic actors, neglecting their agency as rights-holders. Dual citizenship policies are also underdeveloped, failing to engage the diaspora beyond economic or security considerations, despite evidence that migrants' attachments to citizenship are multifaceted and emotional. Moreover, Sri Lanka lacks strategic frameworks for skilled migration, missing opportunities to leverage the potential of educated youth and avoid the brain waste of skilled migrants relegated to low-skilled jobs abroad. Gaps in data collection pauses another major challenge to construct effective policy and initiatives. Without comprehensive, disaggregated, and longitudinal data particularly on return migration and undocumented flows policy responses remain ad hoc and disconnected from migrant realities. Addressing these incoherences is vital for developing a coherent, inclusive, and forward-looking migration governance framework in Sri Lanka.

Policy Recommendations

To address the fragmented and reactive nature of Sri Lanka's migration governance, a focal hub – as a central point – can be recommended. A dedicated, inter-ministerial coordinating body would be able to bring key ministries such as Foreign Affairs and Foreign Employment, Labour, Justice, Education and Women and Children along with international organisations, civil society and academic representatives, to streamline policy formulation, harmonise overlapping frameworks, and ensure coherence with global commitments like the Global Compact for Migration and the Sustainable Development Goals. Complementing this centralisation, migration governance must also be decentralised by strengthening subnational capacity. Local government institutions and district officers need resources and training to provide pre-departure awareness, support for migrant families especially female-headed households and effective reintegration services tailored to local contexts. Partnerships with provincial universities, CSOs, and diaspora volunteers, alongside embedding migration focal points at divisional secretariats, can help ground national policies in community realities.

Beyond structural reforms, Sri Lanka's migration policy should embrace a gender-transformative approach that goes beyond protection to recognise women migrants' agency and decision-making power. This includes fostering non-traditional skill development,

ensuring safe migration pathways in skilled sectors, and designing reintegration programs with mental health, credit access, and leadership opportunities for returnee women. Skilled migration pathways must be developed through expanded vocational training aligned with international demand, bilateral mobility agreements, and national skills recognition schemes that facilitate migrant reintegration and curb brain waste.

Additionally, diaspora engagement should shift from a narrow focus on remittances to a strategic partnership model that reduces bureaucratic barriers to dual citizenship, includes second-generation migrants, and fosters knowledge exchanges to benefit public service and entrepreneurship. Finally, embedding academic and civil society voices in policymaking through advisory groups, policy forums, and collaborative research grants can bridge the gap between evidence and practice. Robust migration data systems disaggregated by gender, region, and sector and linked across agencies are essential for informed, anticipatory policymaking, enabling Sri Lanka to respond effectively to emerging challenges like climate displacement and digital labour markets.

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Historical Legacies and Peace Education: Analyzing Conflict Resolution Mechanisms in Post Conflict Sri Lanka

Nirmali Wijegoonawardana

Introduction

The end of Sri Lanka's civil war in 2009 marked a significant turning point in the nation's modern history. After nearly three decades of armed conflict between the Sri Lankan state and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the cessation of hostilities brought a sense of relief but not closure. The structural roots of conflict, embedded in the country's colonial legacy, post-independence nation-building, and majoritarian governance, continue to influence political dynamics and interethnic relations (De Silva, 1981; Wickramasinghe, 2006). As such, the post-war period has revealed that peace cannot be reduced to the mere absence of violence; it requires deeper efforts toward justice, recognition, and social transformation (Lederach, 1997; Höglund & Orjuela, 2012).

In this context, education emerges as a crucial but contested site for peacebuilding. While physical reconstruction and economic recovery have been prioritized in post-conflict development agendas, peace education remains underutilized as a strategic tool for reconciliation (Bajaj, 2008a; Uyangoda, 2024). Educational spaces both formal and informal offer the potential to challenge dominant narratives, promote intergroup empathy, and cultivate the cognitive and emotional tools necessary for peaceful coexistence. Yet these possibilities are constrained by enduring tensions between memory and forgetting, inclusion and exclusion, national unity and pluralism (McLoughlin, 2020).

This article explores the intersection between historical legacies and peace education in post-conflict Sri Lanka. It investigates how colonial and postcolonial state practices contributed to the fragmentation of national identity and how these legacies continue to shape the possibilities and limitations of peace education today. The paper examines multiple levels of intervention from state-led curriculum reforms to grassroots community initiatives and

assesses the extent to which they engage with structural inequality and historical grievance (Samuel, 2016a; Smith, 2010).

Drawing from both historical analysis and contemporary educational discourse, this study argues that integrating peace education into broader reconciliation strategies is essential for addressing the deep-seated divisions that persist in Sri Lankan society. This integration must be grounded in inclusive pedagogy, context-sensitive approaches, and a willingness to critically engage with the past. Only then can education become a space not only for learning, but for healing, dialogue, and transformative justice (Freire, 1970; Lederach, 1997).

Peace Education in Post-Conflict Contexts: A Review of the Literature

Peace education is broadly defined as an interdisciplinary approach that fosters the values, knowledge, and behaviors necessary for building peaceful societies. Scholars such as Bajaj (2008a), Danesh (2006), and Harris (2004) emphasize that effective peace education must be context-sensitive responding to the root causes of conflict and the psychosocial needs of post-conflict communities. This includes an emphasis on human rights, social justice, environmental awareness, conflict resolution, and intercultural understanding.

In the Sri Lankan context, peace education has largely been promoted through state-led curricular reform and civil society initiatives. However, much of this work has centered on moral instruction and promoting coexistence, rather than critically engaging with the historical and structural roots of conflict. Höglund and Orjuela (2011) observe that Sri Lanka's post-war reconciliation has focused on economic development and national unity, often at the expense of justice, memory, and pluralism thereby limiting the transformative potential of education.

The challenge of engaging with difficult historical narratives is not unique to Sri Lanka. Drawing on comparative insights from post-conflict Aceh in Indonesia, Riyani et al. (2021) introduce the concept of "difficult knowledge" the emotional and political dilemmas involved in teaching traumatic or contested histories. Their study shows that both students and teachers in Aceh continue to carry unresolved trauma, which often leads to the avoidance of sensitive historical topics in civic or history education. The absence of institutional support or enabling curricula further contributes to pedagogical silence. Riyani et al. propose the use of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) techniques to address these emotional legacies. CBT, they argue, enables both educators and learners to process trauma and challenge inherited cognitive distortions shaped by collective memory. While this model has not yet been adopted in Sri Lanka, it offers clear relevance given the shared challenges of emotional healing and contested identity in post-war education.

The literature on unconscious history and collective memory further supports this argument. Scholars such as Roper (2014) and Thomson (2019) highlight how unresolved grief, inherited prejudice, and ideological narratives often passed down through family and community shape students' worldview. In both Aceh and Sri Lanka, classrooms are

inhabited by intergenerational assumptions about "the other," reinforcing division. A peace education approach that promotes critical empathy, dialogue, and memory work can help mitigate these effects and foster reconciliation.

History education, in particular, plays a pivotal but underutilized role in peacebuilding. Cole and Barsalou (2006) argue that teaching history after identity-based conflicts is central to reconciliation. They emphasize that the way history is framed whose voices are included or silenced shapes how societies remember conflict and construct collective identity. In many post-war settings, national curricula tend to promote a dominant narrative that legitimizes majority perspectives while erasing minority experiences. This pattern is evident in Sri Lanka, where Sinhala-Buddhist narratives dominate official textbooks, often excluding Tamil and Muslim historical grievances.

Cole and Barsalou (2006) call for the integration of multiple perspectives into history curricula and the adoption of pedagogies that support dialogue and critical inquiry. Avoiding sensitive topics leads to what they term a "pedagogy of silence," which hinders both truth-telling and mutual understanding. Their findings align closely with the observations of Riyani et al.(2021) in Aceh and further validate the importance of teacher training and institutional commitment in navigating controversial themes.

Finally, scholars caution that peace education should not be treated as a technical fix to complex social problems. Bush and Saltarelli (2000) stress that education is inherently political it can either mitigate or exacerbate conflict depending on how it is structured and delivered. For peace education to be transformative in Sri Lanka, it must move beyond superficial coexistence and engage deeply with contested histories, political grievances, and structural inequalities.

Methodological Approach and Analytical Framework

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in document analysis and thematic content coding. Given the ethical and logistical limitations of conducting interviews on politically sensitive topics in post-conflict settings, the research relies on publicly accessible materials such as policy documents, NGO reports, educational curricula, and oral history archives. These documents provide a rich source of data for understanding how peace education initiatives have evolved in Sri Lanka's post-conflict landscape, particularly in relation to historical memory, structural inequality, and identity formation.

The analysis employed a thematic coding strategy informed by both deductive categories drawn from the existing literature and inductively derived patterns identified within the data. The coding process was guided by principles outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), allowing for a flexible yet systematic approach to identifying recurring themes and discourses. This analytical lens facilitated a nuanced understanding of how educational practices reflect and reproduce power relations, collective memory, and contested narratives in the Sri Lankan context.

Key thematic categories included: historical framing and colonial legacies; state-led curriculum reforms and their limitations; civil society and grassroots interventions; language, identity, and educational access; gender inclusivity in pedagogical spaces; and forward-looking reconciliation strategies. These themes not only structured the analytical framework of the article but also served as interpretive lenses to evaluate the effectiveness, tensions, and omissions within peace education practices.

As an interpretive inquiry, this study does not aim for statistical generalizability. Rather, it seeks to offer a context-sensitive and critically engaged account of peace education as a transformative project in a society emerging from protracted conflict. The chosen methodology foregrounds reflexivity, contextual awareness, and the importance of meaning-making processes core principles in qualitative research on education and post-conflict reconstruction.

Historical Legacies and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka

To fully grasp the challenges of peace education in post-conflict Sri Lanka, one must engage with the deep historical layers of ethnic tension and state formation that predate the civil war. The roots of contemporary divisions lie not only in recent political failures but also in colonial-era transformations that institutionalized ethnic hierarchies and disrupted pre-colonial patterns of coexistence.

During British colonial rule, the strategy of divide and rule deliberately restructured local identities and power dynamics. English education and administrative positions were disproportionately accessible to certain groups particularly Tamil elites in Jaffna while the majority Sinhalese population experienced relative marginalization in the colonial bureaucracy (Wickramasinghe, 2006). Simultaneously, the drawing of administrative boundaries and the privileging of ethnic categories in census-taking helped reify communal identities that had previously been more fluid (Rogers, 1994). These practices sowed the seeds for competition over state resources and political representation in the post-independence era.

After independence in 1948, the rise of Sinhalese majoritarian nationalism ushered in a series of exclusionary policies that deepened minority grievances. The Sinhala Only Act of 1956, which made Sinhala the sole official language, effectively disenfranchised Tamil speakers from public service and education. Policies such as the standardization of university admissions further restricted Tamil youth's access to higher education, while state-sponsored colonization schemes altered the demographic composition of Tamil-majority regions, raising concerns over land, identity, and political autonomy (De Silva, 1981; Shastri, 1990).

These cumulative injustices and the absence of meaningful political dialogue catalyzed cycles of protest, repression, and ultimately, armed resistance. The civil war that erupted in 1983 between the Sri Lankan state and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was

not merely a product of extremism, but a manifestation of long-standing structural grievances rooted in history. Importantly, these legacies are not confined to the past. They continue to shape how different communities understand citizenship, justice, and reconciliation today. Competing historical narratives often passed down through families, schools, and media contribute to fragmented collective memories that hinder the emergence of a shared national identity. In this context, peace education must move beyond generic calls for harmony to actively interrogate the historical foundations of conflict, acknowledging the multiplicity of experiences and claims to belonging. By critically engaging with these historical legacies, peace education can help bridge the gap between memory and justice, creating space for inclusive dialogue and mutual recognition.

Post-Conflict Challenges

The end of the armed conflict in 2009 marked a decisive military victory for the Sri Lankan state, but it did not bring about a comprehensive or inclusive peace. Rather, the post-conflict landscape has been shaped by a "securitized peace" characterized by centralized governance, militarized development, and a lack of political accommodation for the grievances that fueled the conflict in the first place (Venugopal, 2011; Höglund & Orjuela, 2013a). In this environment, the promotion of peace education faces structural and ideological barriers that must be carefully navigated.

One of the most pressing challenges is the absence of a political settlement. Although the war has ended, deep-seated ethnic tensions persist, in part due to the state's failure to implement meaningful power-sharing arrangements or constitutional reforms. Demands for devolution, language rights, and minority inclusion have remained largely unmet, perpetuating feelings of political alienation, particularly among Tamil and Muslim communities (Shanmugaratnam, 2018).

Moreover, the continued militarization of the Northern and Eastern provinces presents a significant impediment to civic engagement and trust-building. High levels of surveillance, restrictions on assembly, and the presence of military-run economic activities have constrained local autonomy and reinforced perceptions of occupation rather than reconciliation (International Crisis Group, 2012). In such a climate, critical education especially when it addresses themes of justice, rights, and memory can be seen as subversive or politically sensitive.

A further concern is the limited progress in transitional justice mechanisms. While the Sri Lankan government has made rhetorical commitments to reconciliation, truth-seeking, and reparations, these efforts have remained partial, inconsistent, or politically contested. The lack of accountability for wartime abuses continues to haunt victims and survivors, who see education as one of the few remaining spaces for truth-telling and historical recognition (Uyangoda, 2024).

Against this backdrop, peace education initiatives operate within a fragile and often contested terrain. Teachers and institutions may face political pressures, social backlash, or institutional constraints that discourage open discussion of the conflict's legacy. Yet, despite these limitations, educators, civil society actors, and community leaders have continued to harness education as a medium for healing, dialogue, and social transformation. Their efforts underscore the resilience of grassroots peacebuilding and the importance of sustained investment in inclusive pedagogical practices.

Peace Education in Sri Lankan Context: Overview

In the Sri Lankan context, peace education has emerged as a response to decades of civil conflict, ethno-political division, and social fragmentation. The efforts to integrate peace education can be broadly categorized into three overlapping domains:

State-led initiatives: These include top-down efforts such as curriculum reforms aimed at fostering social cohesion, the introduction of civic education, and the promotion of bilingual or trilingual language policies. While well-intentioned, these programs often reflect political and ideological constraints that limit their reach and impact.

Civil society interventions: Numerous NGOs and community-based organizations have filled critical gaps through informal peace education initiatives. These range from storytelling and oral history projects to interethnic youth camps, trauma healing workshops, and memorialization efforts. Such interventions often engage more directly with local realities and offer a space for voices and experiences excluded from formal education systems.

School-based programs: At the grassroots level, peace education manifests through student-led peace clubs, school twinning arrangements, teacher training workshops, and intercultural events. These efforts are essential for fostering peer-level understanding and promoting dialogue among students from different ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Despite these efforts, the transformative potential of peace education in Sri Lanka remains constrained by structural inequalities, political sensitivities, and insufficient support mechanisms. Initiatives that do not meaningfully address the historical roots of the conflict or confront prevailing social hierarchies may reproduce, rather than dismantle, existing divisions. To be effective, peace education must be embedded within broader efforts to promote equity, justice, and critical engagement with collective memory.

By recognizing peace education as both a pedagogical and political project, Sri Lanka can harness its power not merely to prevent violence, but to build a more inclusive and resilient society. This requires a long-term vision, grounded in both policy commitment and grassroots innovation.

State-led Initiatives and Their Limitations

Following the end of the civil war in 2009, the Sri Lankan government undertook several education reforms to promote national unity and reconciliation. Central to these efforts was the National Policy on Education for Social Cohesion and Peace (2008), which sought to revise curricula, promote bilingual education, and encourage intercultural dialogue among students from different communities (Ministry of Education, 2008). These reforms signalled a formal acknowledgment of education's role in peacebuilding.

Despite these intentions, the implementation of peace education remains limited in scope and depth. First, the integration of peace-related content across the curriculum has often been superficial. Peace education is commonly confined to specific subjects like civics or moral instruction, rather than embedded throughout the educational system (Jayasundara-Smits, 2015). This compartmentalization reduces the potential for long-term attitudinal change among students.

Second, curricular materials, especially history textbooks, have drawn criticism for perpetuating a narrow and often majoritarian national narrative. Scholars have noted that these materials frequently reflect a Sinhalese-Buddhist perspective, which risks marginalizing the historical experiences of Tamil, Muslim, and other minority communities (Wickramasinghe, 2006; Perera, 2020). This exclusion may inadvertently reinforce the sense of historical grievance and alienation that contributed to earlier tensions.

Third, teachers play a crucial role in shaping how peace education is delivered, yet many educators report feeling ill-equipped to handle sensitive subjects. There is limited training on how to address issues such as war trauma, interethnic violence, or collective memory in classrooms. In some instances, fear of controversy or community backlash has led to avoidance or self-censorship, particularly when discussing politically charged topics (Cole & Barsalou, 2006; Lopes Cardozo & Hoeks, 2015).

Collectively, these limitations highlight the gap between policy and practice. While Sri Lanka has taken meaningful steps to institutionalize peace education, its transformative potential remains constrained by structural, pedagogical, and socio-political challenges. Addressing these gaps requires a more inclusive curriculum, culturally competent teacher training, and sustained political will to promote pluralism and critical engagement with the past.

Civil Society and Community-Based Peace Education

Beyond state-led mechanisms, civil society actors in Sri Lanka have played a pivotal role in advancing peace education at the grassroots level. These initiatives have often emerged in response to the limitations of formal curricula and have sought to create alternative spaces where communities can engage in dialogue, healing, and critical reflection. Drawing on local knowledge and participatory methods, civil society organizations have contributed meaningfully to peacebuilding, especially in regions most affected by the war.

One of the most effective strategies employed by these actors has been the use of storytelling and oral history to challenge entrenched narratives and foster empathy. Organizations such as the National Peace Council and the Centre for Peacebuilding and Reconciliation have facilitated programs where individuals share personal testimonies of conflict, displacement, and survival. These narratives serve to humanize the "other" and create emotional connections across communal divides (Briggs, 2014). Such approaches recognize the transformative power of memory and narrative in reshaping intergroup perceptions.

Another important strand of civil society engagement has been youth-focused education. Various NGOs and community-based groups have conducted workshops on human rights, democratic values, and pluralism, aiming to empower young people as active citizens. These programs often incorporate arts-based learning, critical dialogue, and experiential education to help participants question inherited biases and envision inclusive futures (Perera-Mubarak, 2012). In doing so, they cultivate youth leadership in reconciliation and civic engagement, which is crucial for long-term peace.

Interfaith dialogue has also emerged as a key component of community-based peace education. Faith-based organizations, including Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, and Muslim groups, have initiated collaborative projects that draw upon shared moral teachings to promote compassion, tolerance, and reconciliation. These efforts not only build bridges across religious lines but also reframe spirituality as a unifying rather than divisive force in post-conflict society (Ruwanpura, 2016).

Despite their significant contributions, civil society-led peace education initiatives face considerable challenges. Many operate under financial constraints, with short-term donor funding threatening the sustainability of long-term programming. Additionally, some initiatives encounter political interference or suspicion from local communities, particularly in highly militarized or ethnically polarized areas. These conditions complicate efforts to scale or institutionalize successful practices within the formal education sector.

Nonetheless, civil society continues to offer vital platforms for inclusive, bottom-up peacebuilding in Sri Lanka. Their emphasis on relational healing, local ownership, and culturally grounded pedagogy provides important lessons for expanding the reach and depth of peace education beyond state frameworks.

School-Based Peace Education: A Critical Reflection

In post-conflict Sri Lanka, school-based peace education has emerged as a crucial, yet underexamined, component of broader reconciliation efforts. Programs such as student peace clubs, intercultural school twinning projects, and teacher-led workshops aim to instill values of coexistence, tolerance, and empathy among youth. These initiatives hold promise, especially in a society where protracted conflict has left deep interethnic and intergenerational divisions. However, their actual impact remains constrained by a combination of structural segregation, curriculum limitations, and political sensitivities.

One of the central challenges is that Sri Lankan public schools are often ethnically and linguistically homogenous due to historical settlement patterns, language policy, and educational zoning. As a result, many students especially in the North and East or the Sinhala-majority South rarely engage with peers from other ethnic communities in their daily school environments (Little, 2010). This spatial and linguistic separation undermines the foundational aim of peace education to build interpersonal trust and intergroup understanding through direct, sustained contact.

Moreover, peace-related school activities in Sri Lanka frequently adopt a depoliticized and moralistic tone, emphasizing harmony and national unity while avoiding discussions of historical injustices, wartime trauma, or structural inequalities. This "soft" approach to peace education risks reinforcing a state-sanctioned narrative of reconciliation that neglects the lived experiences of minority communities (Uyangoda, 2017). Without a meaningful reckoning with contested histories such as the roots of Tamil grievances, the impact of state militarization, or the role of religion in nationalist ideologies school-based programs may inadvertently reproduce dominant narratives rather than foster critical reflection (Höglund & Orjuela, 2012).

Teachers, who are central to the success of such initiatives, often report feeling ill-equipped to handle politically sensitive issues in the classroom. Many lack formal training in conflict-sensitive pedagogy, and some fear reprisal or community backlash if they engage in discussions about the civil war, ethnic violence, or political rights (Lopes Cardozo & Hoeks, 2015). This leads to self-censorship and a cautious, surface-level engagement with themes of peace and justice. Furthermore, peace clubs and extracurricular initiatives are often donor-driven, temporary, and unevenly implemented, raising concerns about their long-term sustainability and institutional integration.

Nevertheless, when locally rooted and contextually adapted, school-based programs in Sri Lanka can offer transformative potential. In several cases, school twinning projects between Sinhala and Tamil schools have facilitated mutual learning, cultural exchange, and the humanization of "the other" (Perera-Mubarak, 2012). Youth-led initiatives that incorporate arts, dialogue, and memory-sharing have shown the ability to break silences and build empathy, even in communities scarred by violence. For these efforts to thrive, however, they must be supported by inclusive curricula, teacher capacity-building, and a broader educational policy that recognizes peace education as a strategic pillar of national healing.

In sum, while school-based peace education in Sri Lanka is a valuable space for post-conflict social transformation, its effectiveness depends on moving beyond tokenistic projects toward systemic reform. This requires confronting difficult histories, addressing structural inequalities, and enabling educators and students alike to engage critically and courageously with the legacy of conflict. These dynamics of inclusion and exclusion within school settings are further reflected in the ways language and gender operate as powerful forces in shaping access, identity, and voice in post-conflict education a theme explored in the following sections:

Language and Identity in Peace Education

Language plays a central role in shaping identity, belonging, and access in post-conflict societies. In Sri Lanka, the politics of language have long been entangled with the roots of ethnic tension. The prioritization of Sinhala as the sole official language in 1956 marked a turning point in the country's interethnic relations, contributing significantly to Tamil marginalization and fuelling the grievances that escalated into protracted conflict (DeVotta, 2004).

In the post-conflict era, the government introduced a trilingual policy promoting Sinhala, Tamil, and English as mediums of instruction and administration as part of broader reconciliation efforts. This policy represents an important step toward linguistic equity and mutual understanding (Ministry of National Languages and Social Integration, 2012). However, implementation remains inconsistent, with significant disparities across regions and school systems. In many cases, schools continue to operate along linguistic lines, often reflecting the ethnic composition of their catchment areas. This de facto segregation undermines opportunities for intercultural learning and reinforces communal boundaries among students (Little, 2010).

The implications for peace education are profound. Language is not only a tool for communication but also a symbol of power and cultural recognition. It mediates access to public services, employment, and civic participation. Therefore, peace education must critically engage with how language policy affects students' sense of inclusion or exclusion within the national framework. Simply teaching multiple languages is insufficient unless accompanied by policies that challenge linguistic hierarchies and affirm the cultural legitimacy of all language communities.

Moreover, promoting bilingual and trilingual proficiency in a context-sensitive manner-without asserting cultural dominance is key to fostering a shared sense of national identity. Programs that encourage language learning through collaborative projects, cross-school exchanges, or culturally inclusive materials have shown promise in creating empathy and reducing stereotypes (García & Wei, 2014). When language education is embedded within a broader framework of equality and mutual respect, it can serve as a powerful bridge across historical divides.

In sum, language policy must be recognized not only as a technical matter of curriculum but as a core component of peacebuilding. Addressing linguistic inequalities and promoting intercultural fluency are essential steps in cultivating a more inclusive and cohesive Sri Lankan society.

Gender Perspectives in Peace Education

Gender is a critical yet often underemphasized dimension in peace education, particularly in post-conflict contexts like Sri Lanka. While women have experienced profound impacts from the civil war including displacement, loss, and gender-based violence they have also emerged as pivotal agents in community-level peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts (Alison, 2009; Samuel, 2016b). However, these contributions are seldom acknowledged in formal education policies or curricula, resulting in a significant gender gap in peace narratives.

Mainstream educational materials frequently portray women primarily as victims, overlooking their active roles as negotiators, community mobilizers, and cultural custodians. This omission reinforces patriarchal norms and limits students' understanding of the full spectrum of human agency in conflict and recovery. Integrating gender-sensitive content into peace curricula is essential to ensure a more inclusive and accurate representation of history and social dynamics.

A gender-responsive peace education framework should prioritize three key objectives. First, it must recognize women's agency during conflict and recovery, highlighting diverse roles beyond victimhood. Second, it should address issues such as gender-based violence (GBV), wartime sexual exploitation, and the psychosocial trauma many women continue to face often in silence. These topics remain taboo in many educational settings, yet acknowledging them is crucial for healing and justice. Third, curricula must actively promote gender equity in peace processes, encouraging both male and female students to engage with questions of power, justice, and participation.

Additionally, involving female educators, grassroots leaders, and women's organizations in the design and delivery of peace education ensures that programming reflects lived experiences and responds to context-specific gender needs. In post-conflict regions of Sri Lanka, women's collectives have initiated community dialogue forums, interfaith vigils, and memorialization projects that challenge dominant narratives and advocate for inclusive reconciliation. These initiatives serve as powerful educational resources that can enrich formal peace curricula. Ultimately, gender-sensitive peace education not only benefits female learners it broadens the ethical and epistemological foundations of peacebuilding. By challenging gender hierarchies and amplifying marginalized voices, it cultivates a more just and empathetic society, better equipped to reckon with its past and co-create a peaceful future.

Opportunities and the Way Forward

Despite the complexities that continue to shape Sri Lanka's post-conflict recovery, the current context also presents critical opportunities to advance peace education. These opportunities, if harnessed strategically and inclusively, can transform education into a sustainable foundation for reconciliation and coexistence.

One promising avenue lies in curriculum reform, where national commissions and educational authorities can draw on both local experiences and international best practices to revise textbooks and teaching methods. Emphasizing historical pluralism, civic responsibility, and human rights in a way that resonates with diverse communities is essential. Such reforms must not only correct historical omissions but also promote the values of mutual respect and nonviolence across all subject areas (Smith, 2010).

At the tertiary level, university-based peace and conflict studies programs offer a platform to cultivate a new generation of educators, researchers, and practitioners. These programs can provide students with critical analytical tools and interdisciplinary perspectives necessary for engaging with complex social issues. Importantly, they also create space for interethnic dialogue and collaborative knowledge production, helping to reframe historical divides through academic exchange. The rise of digital media and storytelling platforms presents another underutilized tool in the peace education landscape. Online archives, digital oral histories, and participatory video projects can bridge physical and cultural distances between communities. These platforms allow marginalized voices to be heard and shared beyond local settings, expanding the reach of alternative narratives and fostering empathy across generational and ethnic boundaries (McLoughlin, 2020).

Furthermore, cross-sectoral partnerships linking government institutions, civil society, and international donors can enhance both the scalability and sustainability of peace education initiatives. Such collaborations are particularly important in war-affected regions, where community-based approaches require institutional backing to survive political turnover or resource scarcity.

Yet, the success of these opportunities hinges on deeper structural and political conditions. Genuine political will is required to embed peace education beyond rhetoric and into the heart of national policy. Inclusivity across ethnicity, gender, class, and region-must be a guiding principle at every stage of design and implementation. And most importantly, there must be a collective willingness to confront the uncomfortable truths of the past, without which education risks reproducing silence rather than fostering healing.

Peace education in Sri Lanka thus stands at a crossroads. With sustained commitment, courageous leadership, and participatory engagement, it can serve not only as a tool for preventing future conflict, but as a transformative space for rebuilding trust, justice, and shared national identity.

Conclusion

Sri Lanka's journey from conflict to peace is shaped by enduring historical legacies that continue to influence the country's political structures, interethnic relations, and education systems. This study has shown that peace education, when approached as a critical and context-sensitive practice, holds significant promise for advancing reconciliation and healing in the post-conflict era.

However, peace education cannot succeed in isolation. Its effectiveness depends on whether it meaningfully addresses structural inequalities, acknowledges multiple historical narratives, and fosters inclusive civic engagement. The article demonstrates that both state-led and grassroots interventions offer valuable, though often fragmented, contributions to the peacebuilding process. Yet their impact is limited without a coordinated, long-term strategy grounded in political will and institutional commitment.

To transform post-conflict education into a force for sustainable peace, several key elements must be integrated. First, peace education must be grounded in historical accountability, enabling learners to confront past injustices without reproducing nationalist or exclusionary ideologies. Second, it requires pedagogical inclusivity that affirms the voices and experiences of all ethnic, linguistic, and gender groups. Third, it must incorporate emotional and psychological healing by addressing trauma, grief, and intergenerational memory through safe and empathetic learning spaces. Finally, peace education must be supported by cross-sectoral collaboration between government, civil society, educators, and international partners to ensure both innovation and sustainability. Peace education, thus, must be understood not merely as a curriculum reform, but as a transformative social process one that redefines national belonging and citizenship through dialogue, empathy, and critical reflection.

As Sri Lanka stands at a crossroads, the task ahead is to embed peace education deeply into the national consciousness. By cultivating a generation equipped with historical understanding, moral imagination, and a commitment to pluralism, the country can move beyond the limitations of a “victor’s peace” and toward a future marked by justice, coexistence, and genuine reconciliation.

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South Asia's Quest for Nuclear Weapons: The Story of How India and Pakistan Achieved the Bomb

Sanath de Silva

Introduction

Every year, 'Doomsday Clock' statement is issued by the Science and Security Board, an initiative founded in 1945 by scientists of the University of Chicago, in their 'Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists'. They participated in the Manhattan Project and introduced the 'Doomsday Clock' two years later from the first nuclear test. Doomsday clock is now only 1 minute and 29 seconds (89 seconds) to midnight (thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock) due to issues with fuel cycle facility and nuclear power plant safety concerns as well as due to wars, especially between Russia-Ukraine, Israel-Palestine, among others, when at least one party to the conflict is a nuclear power (Collins, 2025). Knowing how dangerous nuclear power is, it is imperative for the world to be aware of the dangers and how countries become nuclear powers and the safety measures undertaken. This paper reveals how Indian and Pakistan achieved their nuclear weapon status.

Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)

The Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) was the most popular international legal instrument of nuclear non-proliferation. From the beginning, NPT was seen as an unfair legal instrument by both India and Pakistan. The NPT only recognized five states as nuclear-weapon states. In this backdrop, it was reasonable for India and Pakistan to think that NPT favors the power ambitions of those five states and therefore it was biased. So, India and

Pakistan refrained from signing the NPT and even the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

There is an emerging complex problem among the middle-ground states and this new complex situation has undermined the value of arms control regimes and transparent nuclear order. The view presented by Dalton *etal* (2017) on the international nuclear environment is important to review in this regard. According to him, India and Pakistan hold the view that the international nuclear environment pays less attention to the perspectives of the states that occupy the middle ground such as Argentina, Brazil, China India, and Pakistan. These middle states find the nuclear nonproliferation regimes unjustifiable and want reform. Moreover, the history of nuclear weapons programs in South Asia reveals that the civil nuclear programs have compensated for the barrier of finding the raw material for the weapons programs at the initial stages (Roy, 2016).

India's Nuclear Program

It is known that "India has a largely indigenous nuclear power programme" (world-nuclear.org). In 2025, India has 24 nuclear power reactors in operation with 6 reactors under construction (world-nuclear.org). These plants are operated and managed by the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited and by BHAVINI. These are Public Sector Enterprise which comes under the Government of India. India's quest for nuclear weapons was a response to the emerging nuclear threat from China (in 1964). The Indo-China war in 1962 had made India extra nervous (Chengappa, 2000).

The evolution of the nuclear program was as a defense project, under three phases. Bajpai (2002) says that the strategic culture of India took different shapes during these phases. *Phase One* is a passive period from 1947-1961. During this time India had practiced the 'non-aligned, honest peace-broker role' (Panikkar, 1955) in the international system. *Phase Two* is the period with an offensive posture from 1962-71. This is the time India realized that there is a realistic threat emanating from the neighborhood and that threat could not be addressed by resorting to her moral legacy. *Phase Three* is the deterrence posture from 1971 and beyond. This study is more relevant to the third phase because nuclear weapons came into play a significant role in South Asian security during that period (Bajpai, 2002).

The first Indian attempt on nuclear research was initiated with the establishment of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) in 1945. Homi Bhabha, a world-renowned nuclear scientist, was the driving force behind this initiative. There is a famous letter that he wrote to his distant cousin J.R.D. Tata, then Chairman of Tata Group, asking for the financial support to establish a nuclear research facility in Mumbai. It is the initial document that portrays Bhabha's clear vision for the future of India. In that letter, he states

> "When nuclear energy has been successfully applied for power production in say a couple of decades from now India will not have to look abroad for its experts but will have them ready at hand" (Homi Bhabha's letter to JRD Tata 12th March 1944).

This statement shows the farsightedness of the Indian scientists even before receiving independence from the British. On the other hand, conducting nuclear experiments was the trend of the elite scientific circles of European powers in those days.

Given the mass scale of the state - as Nehru also pointed out - India would also have had great power ambitions. According to Sethna, India originally did not have any purpose in producing the weapons of mass destruction (Sethna, 1979). This argument could be further supported by another important point written about government involvement in nuclear research depicted in the same letter which was written to JRD Tata by Homi Bhaba. The point is that Bhaba did not want much government involvement in atomic research at the beginning. Even though Bhabha highlights government support for nuclear research he categorically denies the government control over it (Babha 1944). The letter to Tata was sent in 1944 March, one year and four months before the Hiroshima nuclear explosion, and India was still under British colonial rule. The letter reflects the preparedness of the Indian scientific community to take the steering wheel of independent Research and Development for the future of India.

According to Bagla (2018) in 1948, soon after independence, the Atomic Energy Act of India was passed. In 1954 India's Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) was established with the sole responsibility of nuclear activities in the country. In the same year the Atomic Energy Establishment, Trombay (AEET) was established by Homi Bhabha to further intensify the nuclear research. After Bhabha's demise in 1966 AEET was renamed Bhabha Atomic Research Center (BARC). BARC, as the headquarters of the Indian nuclear research, had the support of many other subsequently established research reactors such as Apsara, Purnima I Poornima II, Poornima III, Zarlina, Dhruva, and Kamini. These reactors were set up to provide information about different types of nuclear tests. At the very initial stages of establishing research reactors, India did not have the required ground resources to operate them. When 'Apsara' was launched in 1947 as the first research reactor, the necessary assistance was provided to India's Atomic Energy Commission (IAEC) by the United Kingdom (Current Science, 1956). 'Apsara' went critical[12] in 1956 and inaugurated in 1957.

Civil-Nuclear Domain of India

The civil nuclear domain of India had always reinforced the nuclear weapons programme. In 1964, the year India achieved the reprocessing capability and two years after the Sino-Indian war, the Chinese 'Lop-nor' nuclear explosion took place. This new situation would have persuaded India to seek new strategic options to counter the emerging Chinese threat (Chengappa, 2000). The declassified CIA document on nuclear proliferation published in 1963 estimates that if the Indian government decides to embark on a nuclear weapons program, she has the capability of producing the first nuclear weapon of their own in 4-5

[12] Criticality is the state that a nuclear power reactor can produce efficient and controlled atomic chain reaction within the reactor.

years (CIA, 1963). There was also a realistic debate emerging in Lok Sabha to push towards the realization of the bomb.

A cable sent by the Chinese embassy in Delhi about the Indian reaction for Chinese nuclear test reveals that India has shown mixed feelings about it, but China warns their authorities that they should seriously 'consider the issue of India conducting nuclear tests' (Chinese Embassy in India, 1964, Para 2:4).

Chengappa (2000) states that had India not acquired the nuclear infrastructure to support the nuclear bomb production by the time the Chines nuclear explosion took place in 1964; it would have taken at least another 10-15 years to set the mere groundwork to produce a nuclear weapon. However, by 1964 India had the strength of running a complete civilian nuclear energy program.

Mubarak (2016) states that India during the leadership of Gandhi and Nehru was poor, illiterate and the share of the industrial sector to the whole economy was less than 15%. In the backdrop of the Chinese invasion of Indian territory in 1962, Nehru realized that Gandhian morals might not the best to serve the national strategic needs. However, he never went to the extent of commissioning a nuclear bomb as a strategic solution.

According to Mishra (2006), there were three occasions that proved the strong connection of the civil nuclear programme to the reinforcement of weapons production. They are:

1. Withdrawal of Canadian support from the Indian civil nuclear programme in 1974.
2. Establishment of Nuclear Supplies Group in 1974 as a response to the "Smiling Buddha" nuclear explosion.
3. India's refusal of signing the NPT in1968.

Withdrawal of Canadian Support

As per the India–Canada agreement of 1956 under the Colombo Plan aid programme the Canada India Reactor Utility Services (CIRUS) reactor was established (Bratt 2006). Canadians were very concerned about the diversion of the nuclear material provided for third world countries for anything beyond peaceful purposes. They truly wanted to support the peaceful principles set forth by the IAEA in 1957. In 1963 Canada signed another agreement with India to set the first part of the Rajasthan Atomic Power Plant (RAPP I) and later the construction of RAPP II in 1966. Both these agreements were based on the concept of 'Atoms for Peace'[13].

In 1961 Indian scientists commenced a building of a reprocessing plant totally by their technology, material and human resource. The plant was built in Trombay, Mumbai in Maharashtra which went critical in 1964. With the initiation of this plant, India became the

[13] A concept advocated by President Dwight Eisenhower at the United Nations in 1953 by promoting an international effort to regulate the uses of nuclear substance for non-violent purposes such as energy generation.

fifth country with reprocessing facilities. Mishra (2006) writing about the nuclear policy of India points out that the 40-megawatt CIRUS reactor reprocessed the spent fuel into weapons-grade Plutonium. These initial establishments paved the way for India to acquire the technology of producing and separating Plutonium which supported the way to India's first nuclear weapons test in 1974 (Mian, Nayar, Rajaraman & Ramana, 2007). However, during that time it was not considered as an act of breaching nuclear safeguards since the IAEA was not established by then.

In 1971 October the Canadian Prime Minister (PM) wrote to his Indian counterpart regarding proliferation of nuclear explosive devices (Government of Canada External Affairs, 1985). PM Indira Gandhi wrote back to continue the agreement

> "the development and application of nuclear energy for peaceful purpose … it should not be necessary now in our view to interpret these agreements in a particular way based on the development of a hypothetical contingency (1985: 6)."

In 1974 when India detonated a nuclear explosion said to be using the Uranium of the CIRUS reactor it was a breach of the agreement with Canada. This made Canada withdraw from the nuclear co-operation with India in 1976.

Nuclear Supplies Group

According to IAEA reports, India's strategic nuclear programme is a byproduct of the civilian programme (IAEA, INFCIRC/731, and 25 July 2008). The first-ever South Asian nuclear explosion was commissioned by PM Indira Gandhi in 1974. It was code-named as 'Smiling Buddha' and portrayed to the world as a 'peaceful nuclear explosion'. During her tenure, after listening to many of the moral arguments to delay the weapon programme PM Gandhi said the following at a crucial government meeting to decide the nuclear weapons programme: "While there may be enough logic for not doing it, I don't accept it. We should go ahead with a test" (Chengappa, 2000, p.57). The 1974 explosion was a strong gesture of the emerging power of India. According to many strategic thinkers such as Bajpai (2002) and Barzu (2001), it was a major shift in the strategic culture of India.

India took another twenty-four years to execute its second test. PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee commissioned to execute a series of nuclear blasts in 1998 (Mishra, 2006). During these twenty-four years, the Indian scientific community was continuously pushing the politicians to go ahead with the bomb plan. If India did not have an energy infrastructure it would have been very difficult to have embarked on a nuclear weapons programme. India portrayed its second nuclear weapon explosion to the world as 'weapons of peace' explosion (Chengappa 2000).

India's refusal to sign NPT

The Indian strategic community could not easily accept the fact that China has become a legal nuclear weapon state under the provisions of the NPT. The refusal of signing the NPT is a gesture for India's desperate stance for being excluded by the nuclear circle. Even though the scientific community of India pushed hard towards the realization of nuclear weapons it was the Indian political community that dragged the experiment. Nehru and his supporters who believed in moral politics were very reluctant to embark on a weapons programme because the political and diplomatic communities of India knew that deviation from their moral character would not be easy to safeguard before the international community (Perkovich, 1999, Zahoo, 2016).

The NPT was an unfavorable international legal instrument for India. When NPT was initiated in 1968, India had already embarked on its nuclear weapons programme. The NPT has three pillars: nonproliferation, the peaceful use of nuclear energy and disarmament. (www.un.org, 2017). Even though India pointed many reasons to justify its refusal to sign the NPT, the most compelling reason behind the decision could have been NPT taboo on using nuclear material and technology for destructive purposes.

Indian critics view that the NPT decision to recognize the countries which have already acquired the nuclear capability by 1968 as legal nuclear weapons states as a morally bankrupt decision (Doyle, 2009). Especially, it would have been very difficult for India to accept that China is getting special favoritism since it has been recognized under this provision of the NPT just because it had conducted the weapon test earlier than India.

Pakistani Nuclear Programme

Pakistan has one of the fastest-growing nuclear programme in the world (Kristensen & Norris 2015). As of 2023, it had 6 reactors in operation to India's 19 and to 93 in United States of America (USA) and 55 in China (nuclear power by country 2023, 2025). Pakistan has 170 nuclear weapons to India's 180 (nti.org). It is important to understand how Pakistan historically evolved as a nuclear power and whether it followed the same path of using civilian nuclear material for military purposes.

Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme was a direct response to India's nuclear weapons programme. The asymmetry of the traditional military capabilities between India and Pakistan was such that Pakistan's strategic community could not imagine anything effective than nuclear weapons to successfully deter the Indian power (Khan, 2012). While USA was the traditional ally of Pakistan, this relationship had ebbs and flows, especially after the Indo-Pakistani war in 1965 and the Bangladesh war in 1971 (Armstrong & Trento, 2007; Khan 2012; Abbas 2017). Realizing the need to rely on itself for its security, Pakistani strategic community decided to establish their own independent defense and security establishment. However, through the decades, Pakistan gained assistance from China and the USSR as well as from USA (Dori & Fisher, 1998).

Pakistan Nuclear Arsenal

Unlike India, Pakistan's nuclear weapons' programme began in relative secrecy.

> Pakistan developed nuclear weapons outside of the NPT and is believed to possess an arsenal of about 170 nuclear warheads, as of 2022. Pakistan continues to significantly build up its nuclear force and develop new delivery systems, including work on the sea-based leg of a nuclear triad and medium-range ballistic missiles. Pakistan's nuclear program has largely been driven by its regional rivalry with India since Delhi conducted its first nuclear test in 1974. (https://www.armscontrol.org/)

Stages of Pakistani Nuclear Power Development

Canada and France withdrew support due to the first Indian nuclear explosion in 1974. In this backdrop, and especially with NPT debate, Pakistan suspected restrictions for the supply of nuclear-related material. In this backdrop, the nuclear weapons programme. Pakistan's strategic community was very clear on addressing the threat emanating from India and openly stated that if India becomes the 06th Nuclear power there will also be a 07th one (Khan, 2012). However, they had other barriers. When the world sensed that Pakistan was also eying for a nuclear weapon, it was a problem of nuclear proliferation in the third world (Roy, 2016).

As discussed earlier, India's original nuclear objective was to deter the Chinese threat. There is hardly any literary evidence to believe that India wanted to deter Pakistan. However, it was the Indian decision to go ahead with the bomb that made the Pakistanis also try to develop its own nuclear programme. PM Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was the driving force in the realization of the Pakistani nuclear dream. In a later date Abdul Qadeer Khan acquired nuclear designs and other secrets from the Eurenco, one of the largest nuclear material suppliers in the world. Even with needing technological advancements, Pakistan launched the programme by taking a risk that had successfully securitized the Indian threat. Pakistan could be identified as a third party who got affected by the China-India balance of power game. Therefore, such proliferation could be described as an externality or a third-party effect of strategic actions.

The Pakistan nuclear programme was mutually supported by its energy programme. The first phase of the Pakistani nuclear programme spanned from 1974-78. This was the time that Pakistan felt the heat of India's first nuclear explosion 'Smiling Buddha' in 1974. Since it was almost three years after the war between East Pakistan-West Pakistan, and subsequent independence of Bangladesh with support from the Indian armed forces, Pakistan would have understood it as another gesture of Indian hegemony in the region. Pakistan could not afford another defeat.

Nuclear power generation in Pakistan was also seen as the main source to provide the material for the weapons programme. Pakistan produces 17.4% of the total energy production by nuclear means (Nuclear Power by Country 2025). At the early stages, the Pakistani nuclear programme was inspired and assisted by the US 'Atoms for Peace' initiative, introduced by President Dwight Eisenhower to strengthen American leadership

during the cold war. Therefore, in 1956 Pakistan's Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) was established.

While the first phase began in the 1970s, by 1957, Pakistan and the USA signed an agreement to cooperate on civil nuclear purposes. In that agreement, the USA was to supply a research reactor to Pakistan. This covered assistance on design construction and operation not exceeding US$ 350000 (Khan, 2012). By 1959 Pakistan's purchasing of commercial reactors was delayed due to financial reasons. The unstable Pakistani government during the 1950s also contributed to the delay. The need for a strong stable government was felt and the emergence of military in the political arena took place during this period. Defense Chief Iskanda Mishra and Army Chief Ayub Khan were the key figures that highlighted the importance of military involvement in governance during this time (Khan, 2012).

After the first Chinese nuclear test in 1964 Pakistan expected Indians to advance the nuclear weapons capability. (Khan, 2012). In anticipation of possible international pressure that could be mounted against its nuclear journey in the future, Pakistan established a Nuclear Safety Committee (PNSC) in 1964, at the very initial stages of its energy programme. On the other hand, such self-imposed security mechanisms would have eased the difficulties of embarking on the nuclear weapons programme outside the auspicious of the NPT at a later stage. In 1962 PAEC started the first five-megawatt Pakistan Atomic Research Reactor (PARR-1) with the assistance of the US. In May 1965 Pakistan signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Canadian General Electrical Company for a 137MW heavy water nuclear power reactor. In this MoU, Pakistan was imposed a condition by Canadians that India initially did not have to go under when it bought the CIRUS reactor (NTI, 2011).

The Pakistan - Canada MOU highlighted an establishment of an "independent nuclear safety committee that would oversee the safety appraisals, site evaluations, and other regulatory requirements" (Khan, 2012, p.54). This clause had been included due to the proliferation risk of heavy water reactors. However, Pakistan raised an issue against the discriminatory conditions. The Canadians replied that "India has paid for its reactor in full and if Pakistan wants to do away with the IAEA inspections it too could pay in full" (P.54). Finally, Pakistan accepted the Canadian reactor established as Karachi Nuclear Power Project (KNUPP).

Pakistan's intention was to get its nuclear programme started without hampering the economic and foreign policy interests. KNUPP was a Pressurized Heavy Water Reactor that had the capability of producing the weapons-grade plutonium for Pakistan. However, the plant was under the IAEA verifications from its inception (NTI, 2011). USA State Department reports reveal that by 1970 the USA had information to suspect that Pakistan was pursuing a Uranium enrichment plant.

As noted by Weiner,

> China, a staunch ally of Pakistan's, provided blueprints for the bomb, as well as highly enriched uranium, tritium, scientists and key components for a nuclear weapons production complex, among other crucial tools. Without China's help, Pakistan's bomb would not exist, said Gary Milhollin, a leading expert on the spread of nuclear weapons. (Weiner: 1998)

AQ Khan was the key figure behind the operation of this new nuclear plant project. In their official bilateral meetings with the USA, Pakistan officials denied the fact and told the USA that it is planning to produce only low enrichment uranium. By 1980 USA national intelligence found out that Pakistan was on its way towards building a nuclear weapon (Kerr & Nitikin, 2011).

Conclusion

The contemporary problems between India and Pakistan are mainly revolving around the Kashmir.The seeds of the problem were cultivated within the tragic events that took place during the partition and it also emerged as a primary source of the dispute between India and Pakistan for decades to come. The gradual escalation of the issue took the nuclear dimension in 1998, the year in which they showed the nuclear muscle at each other by subsequent nuclear weapons tests. The present danger owing to this dispute is the signaling of willingness to cross the nuclear threshold by the two states.

It is important to understand how India and Pakistan have decided to resort to the nuclear option. Jusjit Sing (1999) and Raj Chegappa (2000) and Bajpai (2002) have stated that the unexpected Chinese invasion of the Indian border in 1962 made India commence its nuclear weapons programme. Similarly, Feroz Khan (2012) states that the defeat of 1971 and the creation of Bangladesh[14] has a significant influence on Pakistani policymakers to fast-track their nuclear programme. In both these instances, India and Pakistan were humiliated by an opponent's offensive action. Therefore, national humiliation' could be considered as the common reason for them to embark on a nuclear weapons programme. This national humiliation and the ongoing Kashmir stalemate have determined the strategic behavior of India and Pakistan to a great extent.

[14] Pakistani literature refers to this incident as the 'Fall of Dhaka'.

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Checkmating Anthropogenic Climate Change: Argument for Expanding R2P to Include the Existential Crisis of Ecocide under Freedom from Fear

Maneesha S. Wanasinghe-Pasqual

Introduction

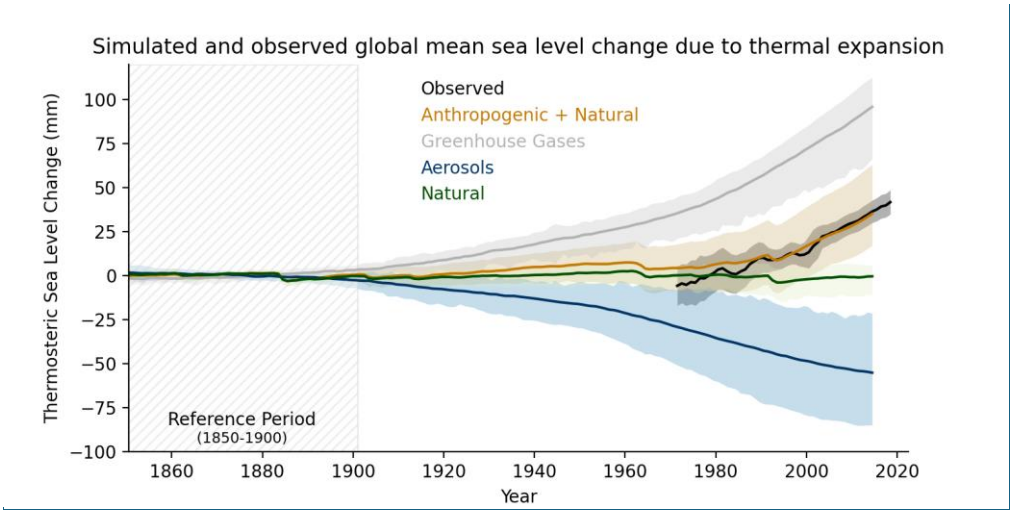
This research argues that Responsibility to Protect (R2P) under 'Human Security', the newer and broader lens into security, provides a best approach to mitigate climate change and environmental degradation. At its foundation is a pondering on whether expanding R2P, with all the legal requirements placed on states, can 'checkmate' the anthropogenic climate change that is fast occurring. It is apparent that anthropogenic climate change is steadily getting worse. Over the decades, there have been many great strives in attempts to prevent the tipping to a worse scenario, a scenario where people and the world cannot return from. The Paris Agreement, the ongoing COPE meetings are but a few of these strides. Yet, the anthropogenic caused climate change continues. This paper assumes that it is due to the inability of laws to be enforced on states, to punish those who are exploiting resources, who are polluting the land, sea, and air for profit, for short-sited benefits or due to wars.

The core argument here is that environmental security can be realized through accepting that ecocide is an existential threat to all. Through expanding the 'Freedom from Fear' rubric under R2P, it could be possible to practically and legally intervene in incidents of ecocide. The article initially examines the legal foundations of human security-inclined interventions. It subsequently examines whether the freedoms – the fundamentals of human security – can be applied to R2P. It explores ways in which to incorporate ecocide under existing legal obligations under human security. Finally, taking primary sources to emphasize the legality of R2P fundamental laws and secondary data that highlights the dangers of environmental degradation, this research aims to recommend ways to 'checkmate' anthropogenic climate change.

Anthropogenic Climate Change

As depicted in Diagram 1 (below), the *Sixth Assessment Report* of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) confirmed that "the balance of evidence suggests that there is a discernible human influence on global climate" (2021). This has continued despite the Paris Agreement (2015), which strived to strengthen global response to climate change; the multiple Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP) meetings from COP 1 in Berlin, Germany in 1995 to COP 29 in Baku, Azerbaijan in 2024. This deterioration of the climate has continued despite multiple green policy platforms (greenpolicyplatform.org), re-greening efforts and carbon capture technology developments by state and non-state actors. The increase in human population, from 1.6 billion in 1900 to 8.2 billion in 2025 (Worldometer.info), has led to resource depletion and placed considerable strain on the planet's land, water, and even the ozone layer.

Figure 1: Anthropogenic Impact on Climate Change



Source: IPCC, 2021.

Climate change has come to a stage where it is nearing a tipping point, an irreversible change which human ingenuity and technological knowhow will be unable to change. Ice Sheets are melting, impacting ocean currents (especially the Gulf Stream), which in turn will influence (monsoon) rains. The thawing of the permafrost can release greenhouse gases and ancient viruses and bacteria. There is a cascading effect. The oceans impact the land, the weather, the temperature, the rains, the very air we breathe. This tipping point is fast approaching and technological advances in weaponry (especially nuclear weapons) are exacerbating this tilt towards an existential threat. This is highlighted by the 'Doomsday Clock' approaching 89 seconds to midnight as of July 2025 (thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/).

The energy sector is heavily responsible for the greenhouse gases that impact climate change. Indeed, "Approximately 71 percent of carbon emissions can be traced to just 100 fossil fuel producers since 1988" (Oxfam, 2023) Some countries, such as rich industrialized

nations, are more impactful with their polluters than other, less developed countries. According to a New York Times report, "23 rich industrialized countries are responsible for 50 percent of all historical emissions and more than 150 countries are responsible for the rest." (cited in Oxfam, 2023). The top 1 percent of the global population (i.e, 125 billionaires) are responsible for

> "emitting an average of 3 million carbon tons each year. From 1990-2015, the carbon emissions of the super-rich globally were more than double the emissions of the poorest half of humanity. Over that same time, the poorest 50 percent-around 3.1 billion people-were responsible for just 7 percent of emissions." (Oxfam, 2023)

Instead of curtailing pollution and being conscientious about global warming and climate change, non-state and the state actors continue to exploit land, air and the sea. China's rare earth mining and processing activities have polluted its soil and poisoned its water (bbb.com 2025). While the state actors play multi-player chess, sacrificing their pawns for a better advantages whilst protecting rooks, knights or bishops in their quest to win, it is apparent that the world cannot allow for such a game of chess to continue. It is important to checkmate those who wish to sacrifice the world for short term benefits. Thus, it is apparent that the state and non-state actors often pay 'lip service' to the agreements signed to curtail anthropogenic climate change. It is imperative, for the present and for future generations, to find a way to 'checkmate' the chess-board.

Human Security

Let's start with a small caveat; while Human Security as a named concept has been in existence for over 30 years (UNDP 1994), in practice, security of people, in all its varied understandings, has been part and parcel of the national-level politics for centuries and in international politics from around 1899, when the Hague Laws came into effect. With the inclusion of Human Security concept, the narrow definition of security of states transformed over the decades, not just centuries. Now, in the 21st century, Human Security "seeks to challenge attitudes and institutions that privilege so-called 'high politics' above individual experiences of depravation and insecurity" (Newman, 2010: 79). In terms of human security, the UNDP has defined it as

> "freedom from fear and freedom from want" and characterized as safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease, and repression as well as protection from sudden and harmful disruptions in the patterns of daily life – whether in homes, in jobs or in communities" (UNDP, 1994)

At its core, human security is achieved through protection and empowerment. It incorporates multiple stakeholders, not merely states. The stakeholder overview includes states and non-state actors such as researchers, general public, private sector, non-governmental organizations, media, experts and even policy creators (cimic-coe.org, 2019).

However, human security has faced extensive criticism, from being too vague in definition to not having a specific definition, i.e. being merely the same wine in a different bottle (Jolly

& Roy 2006). Human security as a 'new' approach to security reiterates the idea that threat to individuals arises from internal conflict, access to food and health services, violence and crime as well as from the state and external forces (Newman, 2010). Indeed, the narrow and the broad definitions of human security reflect the two approaches to achieving human security: the narrow targeting freedom from fear while the broader including freedom from want and from indignity as well. The broad definition takes into account economic insecurity (unemployment, economic opportunities); food insecurity (hunger, famine, malnutrition, lack of access to nutritional food); health insecurity (lack of access to healthcare, increase in pandemics and epidemics); personal insecurity (crime and violence, no rights or opportunities); political insecurity (political repression, abuses); community insecurity (tensions, crime, conflicts); and environmental insecurity (environmental degradation, depletion of resources and increased pollution, extreme weather).

Legality of Three Freedoms

Human Security is Freedom from Fear, Freedom from Want, and Freedom from Indignity; with the human as the "referent and primary beneficiary" and therefore linked the "positive and negative freedoms and rights" (Newman, 2010: 78). According to the United Nations, Freedom from Fear is freedom from threats to the safety of people from all forms of violence; Freedom from Want is freedom from threats to basic needs such as economic, social, environmental, core aspects of life; and Freedom to Live in Dignity entails freedom from threats to rights and access to opportunities and services (UN.org 2015). However, these three freedoms are not separate entities. Indeed, "human security is about the interrelationship between freed fear and freedom from want and about physical as well as material insecurity" (Kaldor 2011: 445). What is not often spoken of is the legal basis of these three freedoms.

The legal basis of the freedom to live in dignity lies with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The UDHR and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) are the legal basis of Freedom from Want. While the UDHR has been the standard-bearer in the naming of human rights, it is pertinent to recall that it is still merely a declaration and therefore non-binding. The ICESCR, whilst enforceable, not all countries have signed this covenant. (ohchr.org). As with 'Freedom from Want' and 'Freedom to Live in Dignity', the UDHR underlie Freedom from Fear. It also has the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) along with further stringent legal documents.

Freedom from Fear has powerful and binding legal basis. These range from Geneva Convention, which all UN members have signed onto, the Genocide Convention where 153 countries have signed onto, and the Rome Statute, which 125 countries have signed onto. All these, including Resolution 1894 (Protection of Civilians) S/RES/1894 (2009), Resolution 63/308 (The responsibility to protect) A/RES/63/308 (2009), and Resolution 75/277 (The responsibility to protect and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic

cleansing and crimes against humanity) A/RES/75/277 (2021) provide a strong legal foundation on which to intervene.

Unlike the above Freedom from Want and Freedom to Live in Dignity, which are tied to international human rights laws, the legal basis for 'Freedom from Fear' is intrinsically tied to both international human rights law and international humanitarian law. The fact of the matter is that Freedom from Want and Indignity have legal foundations that focus on implementation at state level. These laws – UDHR, ICESCR, ICCPR – do not have any inherent criteria for intervention. Whilst the state remains the guarantor of security for humans, Human Security concept requires intervention if the state is unable to or unwilling to do so.

The Responsibility to Protect

As Newman comments, "Human security is normative; it argues that there is an ethical responsibility to re-orient security around the individual in line with internationally recognized standards of human rights and governance" (2010: 78). For most proponents of R2P, this responsibility is limited to Freedom from Fear only. Also, within Freedom from Fear, only to the four war-related fear issues: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing. Under these four war-related crimes, the international system has agreed on intervention under Responsibility of Protect (R2P0.

As with the definition of Human Security, the concept of 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P), has faced numerous challenges. At is most basic, it argues that states have an obligation to protect the citizens and those living within its borders. Indeed, "R2P should be understood as a solemn promise made by leaders of every country to all men and women endangered by mass atrocities." (ipu.org, 2008).

From the very outset, R2P was limited to,

> four types of mass atrocities: genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Save for ethnic cleansing, an abuse only recently understood as an atrocity crime, these terms have been clearly and comprehensively defined in a range of documents, including the founding statute of the International Criminal Court. (ipu.org, 2008)

This determination that R2P must rest only on four grade crimes provided a clear set of criteria for intervention. If the state is complicit in waging war on people and there is evidence, then the country is in breach of the R2P. Then, international system/regional powers/neighboring countries can intervene to prevent, protect or prosecute. As with the definition of Human Security, the concept of 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P), has faced numerous challenges. It became politicized around the start of the second decade of the 21st century.

Under Rule 156 of the Customary International Humanitarian Laws and the Statute of the International Criminal Court,

> defines war crimes as, inter alia, "serious violations of the laws and customs applicable in international armed conflict" and "serious violations of the laws and customs applicable in an armed conflict not of an international character" (ihl-databases.org).

This concept came into effect on January 2nd of 2009. However, its foundational ideas, including focus of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing emerged since the UN World Summit Outcome Document of 2005.

R2P is a "multidimensional and nuanced concept" (Evans, Thakur, & Pape, 2013: 200). The rub lies in how R2P under the four international crimes lead to humanitarian interventions. R2P is presented not as a 'right to intervene' but as a 'responsibility to protect'.

The international community was to ensure that 'never again' sentiment was upheld. The R2P has faced a deadlock in whether it can intervene in situations where there is a clear breach in states not taking up their solemn promise to protect people within its boarders. There have been cases where genocide occurred (i.e. Darfur, Chechnya, Myanmar, South Sudan, Islamic State (ISIS) held areas, etc.) where the world merely watched. This paper argues that irrespective of the politicization of the concept and the justification to intervene, environmental security should become part of international crimes for interventions to occur under humanitarian grounds.

Environmental Security in Human Security

Environmental security depends on the availability of resources and the ability of humans to live within the environment. Over the centuries, due to industrialization and globalization, among others, there is an ever-growing environmental insecurity.

- *resource depletion*-extraction of non-renewable minerals and energy without development of proper alternatives ; overharvesting of renewable resources such as fish and forest timbers;
- *disposal problems*-relating to waste generated in production, distribution and consumption processes, and pollution associated with transformations of nature, burning of fossil fuels and using up of consumables;
- *corporate colonization of nature*-genetic changes in food crops; use of plantation forestry that diminishes biodiversity; preference for large-scale, technology dependent and high-yield agricultural and aquaculture methods that degrade land and oceans and affect species' development and well-being;
- *species decline*-destruction of habitats, privileging of certain species of grains and vegetables over others for market purposes; super-exploitation of specific plants and animals, due to presumed consumer taste and mass markets. (White, 2010, cited in White, 2014: 836-837)

Environmental destruction in times of war has increased this issue. This is evident in how scorched earth tactics of fighters in midst of war have impacted the environment. Oil fields

in Kwait and in Iraq, the defoliation in Vietnam, - “the environment is often both a victim and a tool of armed conflict” (Banerjee, 2012: 145).

Laws to protect nature in times of war have existed for centuries, some agreed upon by parties to the conflict (i.e. 1868 St Petersburg Declaration). There have been legal texts and statements that have added strength to the argument that the environment should not become a tool of war nor a victim of it.

1. The ENMOD Convention
2. Additional Protocol I of 1977 (to the Geneva Convention of 1949)
3. Rome Statute
4. Protocol on Prohibition or Restrictions on the Use of Incendiary Weapons (Protocol III), 1980
5. The Chemical Weapons Convention

As the above highlights, the legal basis for protection of the environment exists. Whether these laws are implemented in times of war is where a majority of the problem lies. Furthermore, what remains missing is on the protection of the environment in times of peace. When examining the discourses on R2P, most note that the 4 crimes under its purview. These crimes are not only presented as abhorrent to humanity, they are also linked to punishments.

Whose responsibility is to protect the environment is the question that is never analyzed deeply. Data emphasizes that the richest 10 percent are responsible for two-thirds of global warming (E360 Digest, 2025). As Jagger pondered in 2014 whether it is possible to control the corporations which are committing crimes against future generations (2014). The statement that the richest are the worst destroyer of the environment provides the answer that it has become impossible to control corporations because the laws are inadequate. To safeguard the future, it is imperative to reframe R2P.

Reframing R2P

Rold Paris very starkly questioned whether Human Security was merely ‘hot air’ (2001). He focused on four cells, which present different clusters of threats. The source of threats for states come from conventional military threats (cell 1) and from the environment and the economy (cell 2). Threats to societies, groups and individuals include military concerns, especially civil wars, ethnic conflict (cell 3) but human security, which involves military, non-military or both threats, focus on “environmental and economic threats to the survival of societies, groups, and individuals” (Paris 2001: 98).

This article argues that crimes against present and future generations should be part of R2P. Freedom from Fear, Want and Indignity are intertwined. Jagger’s idea that

> developed countries that have caused the most harm will suffer least – it is the developing world that will be hit first and hardest by rising sea levels, desertification, food and water scarcity, political unrest, and all the many other effects of climate change. It is both a profound injustice and a cold, hard fact (Jagger, 2014: 41).

This unfairness, though true for the moment, will not remain. Any and all changes to the weather will impact us all. It is possible that recovery from climate change shocks and resilience after the effects will depend upon the wealth of nation. Developing countries have understood this reality and have consistently requested funds to stem the worst effects of climate change. Despite climate fund promises, it is apparent that R2P is weak with regards to environmental degradation.

What is happening to the world is 'Ecocide'.

> Ecocide in the broadest sense describes the destruction of the natural environment. The term became known after World War Two and in particular the Vietnam War which demonstrated the horrors of intentional environmental destruction to a large audience around the world, leading to widespread public protest. A draft Ecocide Convention was published in 1973, calling for ecocide to be recognised as an intentional war and peace crime. (Merz, 2014: 17).

Ecocide was part of the draft to the Rome Statute. It was watered down to from an international crime in times of peace and war to now, whereby the widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment' is the focus of the Rome Statute only in times of war.

> ecocide as "*unlawful or wanton acts committed with knowledge that there is a substantial likelihood of severe and either widespread or long-term damage to the environment being caused by those acts.*" However, the use of terms such as "severe," "widespread" and "long-term," implies *dolus eventualis*, making the definition less effective. This is because such terms require a significantly high threshold to prove the knowledge that an act is likely to cause severe, widespread, or long-term damage which is extremely challenging for prosecutors to prove. (Sharma, 2025)

It is a human right – the right to a good healthy environment. It is also the right of mother earth (Sólon 2018). Ecocide should be the fifth international crime, to be linked to the four current anthropocentric crimes. The International Criminal Court should be part of the prosecution process. Instead, it is apparent that the, Despite the existence of ecocide as a crime, the Rome Statute cannot prosecute due to the vagueness of the concept. Sharma (2025) notes how the Rome Statute is 'ill suited' to lead prosecutions on ecocide.

As Merz insisted, while only governments have the power to request amendments in international humanitarian laws (e.g. Rome Statute), people – millions and billions of people – have a voice. Citizens' movements have already focused on demanding rights to rivers, forests, and protection to current and future generations. Focusing on 'earth' and the 'environment' has already begun. The World Chater for Nature (1982) and the Declaration on the rights of Indigenous People (2007) are two examples where people pressured states to advance ecocide as a crime (2014).

Checkmating anthropogenic climate change

Checkmating anthropogenic climate change entails having laws to 'prevent' ecocide, 'protect' those facing climate change, 'promote' ways to safe mother earth, 'provide' tools to fend off existential threats to survival. If ecocide is linked not merely as a 'war crime' but also as a crime in times of peace would enable it to be taken seriously. There must be shift in thinking (Evans & Sahnoun, 2002). It is imperative to understand that the damage that can result in ecocide – whether in the short term or generationally – is tantamount to genocide. In conclusion, this paper argues that the right tool to ensure the prevention/protection of climate change for future generations is the expansion of R2P to include the fifth international crime: the crime of ecocide.

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International Law in International Relations

Peshan Gunaratne

"I think the King is but a man, as I am. The violet smells to him as it does to me. The element shows to him as it does to me. All his senses have but human conditions. His ceremonies laid by, in his nakedness he appears but a man"

William Shakespeare

Introduction

Kings of princely States, aeons before the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, were regarded as sovereigns who were equated with the State and hence enjoyed sovereign immunity during their foreign visits. Such immunities were subsequently extended to their representatives, proxies, or diplomats which also constituted a substantial portion of Customary international law. However, as Shakespeare portrays, if the King is not God but is merely mortal, how can he be immune from foreign jurisdictions and be entitled to special and exceptional treatment? If not for such recognition and immunities, the very foundations of international relations and international law will fracture and cease to exist thus plunging the international system into a vortex of anarchy and mayhem. If international relations is the skeleton, then international law would be the blood, nerve, and sinew which regularizes such practices. Not for international law, such customary rules would not have been crystalized into the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. Had international law been disregarded by States in the contemporary context, special domestic legislation on Foreign Sovereign Immunities would only be a figment of imagination.

The birth of international relations and international law can be attributed to the extraordinary works of Grotius and Bentham in the 17th and the 18th centuries. Jeremy Bentham was the wordsmith and the architect of the term "international law" who supplanted

the archaic term *Droit des gens* (Law of Nations) in 1789 through his book, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789) (Ekeløve-Slydal, 2018). Hugo Grotius, dubbed as the father of international law, with his doctorate at the age of 15, and through his works titled *Marie Liberum* (The Free Seas) (1609) and *De iure belli ac pacis* (On the Law of War and Peace) (1625) (Hugo Grotius: from Leiden student to founding father of international law, 2014) won the hearts and minds of many European scholars. The impact of such contributions on international law and international relations since 1648 was profound. Not for the influence of such Titans, the Law of the Sea, and International Humanitarian Law would not have constituted an integral part of modern international law. The paramount importance and the indispensable nature of the said laws can be witnessed through their application in the determination and the delimitation of the continental shelf, in the resolution of South and East China Seas disputes before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), and in determining whether genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity were committed by either party in the Russia – Ukraine war.

Although international relations and international law are two distinct disciplines, they are both mutually complementary and intertwined. When foreign ministers and diplomats engage in foreign policy decision – making, the Attorney General, legal advisors and other international legal scholars peruse international legal instruments and customary international law and advice their superiors from a legal perspective on such foreign policy matters. However, certain scholars are not inclined to accept international law as "true law" *vis-à-vis* municipal law. Unlike laws in a domestic context, international law is applicable to States and not to individual citizens. The lack of an obligatory and a binding nature of such laws enable the States to oscillate between co – ordination and subordination. H. L. A Hart in "*The Concept of Law*" posits that, albeit rules and principles of international law have been in usage for more than 150 years, "the absence of an international legislature, courts with compulsory jurisdiction and centrally organized sanctions have inspired misgivings, at any rate in the breasts of legal theorists. The absence of these institutions means that the rules for states resemble that simple form of social structure, consisting only of primary rules of obligation… Is international law really law?" (Hart, 1997) According to Hart, neither the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) nor the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) can formulate legislation which will bind all the member States; the world's sole super power cannot be equated with a definitive sovereign legislative authority who will impose laws on other States in international relations; and no world court will have universal jurisdiction. It is credible therefore to deduce that, Austin's portrayal of positive law may also have had a permanent impression on Hart's conception of law when the former had identified "law, simply and strictly so called: or law set by political superiors to political inferiors". (Cotterrell, 2003) As scholars of international relations and law, we must not completely be oblivious to the facts that States adhere to the provisions of the United Nations (UN) Charter; UNSC resolutions are binding; and foreign ministers and their legal advisors respond to allegations of human rights violations, war crimes and crimes against humanity at international fora. As a consequence, it is a crime to classify international law as weak

law. Such were the arguments and debates between the proponents of natural law and positive law which made a resounding impact on international law.

The spectrum of international relations theory, since the inception of the discipline, ranged from Rationalists, to Realists and Revolutionists until its transformation in 1919 when international relations was taught in conjunction and under the rubric of History and Political Science at American universities. Since then, Idealism, Realism and Marxism dominated the study of this discipline while morphing into diverse branches under different sub – divisions such as security studies, political economy, international organizations, and diplomacy. As a self – confessed neo – classical Realist, I have been cognizant of the growing impact of aggressive non – state actors and the domestic intervening variables in foreign policy making and have regularly assimilated such contemporary developments into my research. Hence the international arena today is much more diverse, complex, and insecure than the system which existed many decades ago. Machiavelli will not be surprised of Trump's tariff wars; Putin's and Zelenski's extensive use of armed drones; and Iran's threat to withdraw from the Nuclear Non – Proliferation Treaty (NPT). His amoral and pragmatic approach to government as articulated in "*The Prince*" appears to be the bible of every statesman in a self – help anarchic international system. The Treaty of Westphalia of 1648 heralded an international system with the Nation State at the very heart of international relations. The League of Nations suffered a natural death during the inter – war period but provided a solid foundation for the UN after the *dénouement* of the Second World War (WW II). The ascent of international non – governmental organizations (INGOs), the UN Charter, the Geneva Convention, and international human rights legal instruments marked a new chapter in both international relations and in international law thus diluting the differences between the two disciplines. In the 1990s, non – traditional security threats began to emerge from the shadows of Cold War rivalries. Climate change, terrorism, Piracy in the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Aden, and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing began to make unpardonable inroads into States thus emphasizing the necessity for a concerted effort through an international legal framework to mitigate the harshness of the same. International financial institutions, non – governmental organizations (NGOs), multi – national corporations (MNCs) and influential individuals also have made incursions into the policy making circles of the State thus raising questions about the credibility of terms such as sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Hence it is evident that both the disciplines have evolved since their inception many centuries ago. International law and international relations are to undergo further evolution due to the growing influence of artificial intelligence, drone warfare, proliferation of nuclear weapons, the spread of global pandemics, exploitation of the sea bed, climate change, and space exploration. Another factor which is of cardinal importance is China's ascent in the contemporary context. China's aspirations of becoming another super power thus transforming the *status quo* uni – polar world order into a bi – polar system has unnerved the West. De – dollarization and the establishment of alternative INGOs and international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the BRICS (Brazil, Russai, India, China, South Africa)

and the AIIB (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank) compounded with proposals to radically restructure the UNSC have further created and exacerbated tensions between China and the US. These events may heighten the probabilities of China re – writing Eurocentric, Anglo – Saxonized international law with an East Asian Buddhist flavour. The relative decline of the West will expedite the ascent of China where the latter will supersede the West in both economic and military terms. A complete re – orientation of the orthodox international financial system will also give birth to new laws governing the same but spear – headed by China. This diffusion will not only be restricted to hard power but also to soft power attributes. As a consequence of China's expanding research and development budgets, foreign students and scholars will seek opportunities to study in Chinese or Hong Kong Universities than in Harvard or Oxford.

Washington's suspicions of China's machinations will at a certain juncture provoke both Titans into another World War or a Cold War. As a consequence, new laws of war will be formulated in addition to the *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*. History will be re – written by the victors of war as was during the post WW I and WW II contexts. Perhaps a new UN, a new Bretton Woods Agreement, a new UN Charter, new international legal instruments on human rights and environmental law, and a new international trade regime are reasonably foreseeable consequences of the Thucydides's trap. Hence international relations and international law are intensely dynamic social sciences which are molded by constantly fluid social, economic, and political events that are meticulously regulated by the foreign policy executive (FPE) of the State.

The State

The primary actor at the heart of the study of international relations and international law is the State. The dominant role played by the State in the international stage is to a certain degree weakened due to the growing influence of non – state actors (NSAs). However, the latter's influence is dwarfed by the active engagement of States with multilateral organizations and even due to unilateral actions initiated by a few powerful States. David A. Lake in the *Oxford Handbook of International Relations* further clarifies this by emphasizing that, "the State is central to the study of international relations and will remain so into the foreseeable future. State policy is the most common object of analysis. States decide to go to war. They erect trade barriers. They choose whether and at what level to establish environmental standards. States enter international agreements, or not, and choose whether to abide by their provisions, or not… International relations as a discipline is chiefly concerned with what States do on the world stage and, in turn, how their actions affect other States". (Lake, 2008) This presumption distinguishes actual international relations from international relations as an academic discipline. It must be further understood that interactions, policies and developments within the State would disseminate through porous borders and would impact the policies of other States. The direct effect of the industrial

revolution, the two World Wars, the Cold War and globalization augmented the frequency of relations and created a global village.

J. G. Starke in *Introduction to International Law*, defines international law as "that body of law which is composed for its greater part of the principles and rules of conduct which States feel themselves bound to observe, and therefore, do commonly observe in their relations with each other, and which includes also:

1. the rules of law relating to the functioning of international institutions or organizations, their relations with each other, and their relations with States and individuals; and
2. certain rules of law relating to individuals and non – state entities so far as the rights or duties of such individuals and non – state entities are the concern of the international community". (Starke, 1984)

Although Starke stresses the centrality of the State, he further reckons that scholars must be cognizant of the growing influence of institutions, organizations, NSAs and individuals. This appears to be a radical departure from the orthodox interpretation of international law which was State centric. One of the primary arguments against the acceptance of international law as "true law" by States is that the latter may have to sacrifice their sovereignty to a greater extent if they are to benefit and to be bound by the rules and principles of international law. This reservation has given birth to the Monist and Dualist doctrines of incorporation. From the most radical notion of monism postulated by Kelsen through his "Grundnorm" (Kelsen, 2003) to the pluralist view of the existence of international law and municipal law as two separate legal systems, the doctrine has been utilized by both the Common law and Civil law States interchangeably. *The Free Zones Case* (Free Zones of Upper Savoy and the District of Gex Case (France/Switzerland), 1929) has nevertheless challenged the superiority of the State in international law where the Permanent Court of International Justice (PCIJ) emphatically emphasized that "it is certain that France cannot rely on her own legislation to limit the scope of her international obligations". The two disciplines therefore harbour diametrically opposed views of State primacy which prompt powerful States to act in violation of the UN Charter when they militarily intervene in other States *sans* UNSC authorization.

The Dance of the Devil

The Bush administration's war on terrorism in a post 9/11 (September 11, 2001) context marked a tectonic shift in US military intervention in other States. Although the President was authorized by the Congress to "use all necessary and appropriate force" (Congressional Record, 2001) against terrorists and was also authorized by the UNSC to militarily intervene in Afghanistan, the latter vetoed any military intervention in Iraq. Nevertheless, the Bush administration with Prime Minister Blair of the United Kingdom (UK) invaded Iraq in contravention to international law. Similarly, the Trump administration conducted air strikes

with surgical accuracy targeting three nuclear facilities inside Iran without any UNSC approval and even without Congressional authority. Threats to international peace and security were canvassed by the US as the primary justification for such unilateral action. In addition, the Bush administration even targeted American citizens who were terrorists thus resulting in the intervention of the US Supreme Court through *Hamdi v. Ramsfeld* (Hamdi et al. v. Ramsfeld, Secretary of Defense, et al. (plurality opinion), 2004) where the latter further strengthened executive powers. This further buttressed the above argument that State sovereignty has trumped over international law and the policy decisions of the FPE have outmaneuvered international law. Foreign and security policy decision making by the head of state will be strictly limited to the borders of the State with national interest being the ulterior motive. Based on such decision, any utilization of hard power against any external actor might be in accordance with or contrary to international law. It is this very dance of the devil which will determine whether order or anarchy will prevail as a consequence of unilateral steps orchestrated by a powerful State in international relations. The FPEs when driven by Machiavellian ideas *vis-à-vis* rules and principles of international law, formulate foreign and security policies which shall benefit the Nation State but not the international system. In contrast, diplomacy and international peace keeping may promote stability and order. Such pragmatic and constructive steps will strengthen international organizations and international law. Even the prosecution of individuals for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity in the International Criminal Court (ICC) or hybrid courts will be considered as a step towards order and global stability. Conversely, the 1919 Treaty of Versailles did not prevent the outbreak of WW II; the *Tadić case* (Prosecutor v. Tadić, 1995) did not bring closure to the Yugoslav conflict, the *Kambanda case* (Prosecutor v. Jean Kambanda, 1998) failed to address the underlying issues in Rwanda, and the ICC could not prosecute Tony Blair despite the fact that the UK had ratified the Rome Statute. Hence the dance of the devil appears to be an intricate balancing act between order and disorder thus striking an equilibrium between policy and law or international relations and international law. Both international relations and international law therefore appear to be not immune from the deficiencies of social sciences.

Where is My Money?

The ulterior motive of the Trump Administration's trade wars is to Make America Great Again (MAGA). Trump appears to be driven by his ambition to resurrect the ailing US economy from stagflation and to maintain its position as World's number one economy. Such initiatives were reminiscent of the steps taken by the victors of WW II in establishing the World Bank (WB) (also known as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / IBRD), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO) through the Bretton Woods Agreement of 1944. This tripod facilitated the reconstruction and development of war affected economies in Europe and the legalization of international monetary relations while pegging other currencies to the US Dollar. This firmly established that US will dominate global trade and also benefit from the

same. However, due to the relative decline of the West compounded with the rise of China and the latter's moves towards de – dollarization, the power of the world's reserve currency appears to be fading. As a consequence, Trump has followed the footsteps of his predecessors in making no exceptions by subjecting both ally and foe to tariffs. It is merely a unilateral step taken by a US President to radically recalibrate the world trade system which was infested and paralyzed by "free – loaders" (BBC, 2025) for decades but are devoid of any drastic changes to the Bretton Woods system. In fact, there won't be an America without the Dollar!

The IMF facilitated States to overcome their balance of payment crises with short – term funding while the WB was to provide long – term financial assistance to States with regard to their infrastructure and development projects. The IFIs masquerade themselves as technocratic, autonomous, apolitical and neutral institutions when they are mere vessels which further the interests of their powerful creators. The bone of contention however is the intervention of these two IFIs in the Less Developed Countries (LDCs). The WB and its relations with South Africa and Portugal during the 1960s challenged the very foundations of international human rights laws and the Articles of Agreement of the WB which prohibited intervention in political issues unless the crux of the matter was tied to "development". Similarly, the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) (Skogly, 1993) of the IMF had devastating consequence on the economies of Sub – Saharan Africa (World Bank, 1989) and Latin America. Anti – IMF riots implied that such policies based on the "cookie – cutter approach" (Anghie, 2004) had detrimental effects on LDCs. Moreover, numerous development projects funded by the WB were in conflict with the very principle of sustainable development and international environmental law. In addition, the architects of the Bretton Woods system appear to dominate the IFIs through the weighted voting system where both the US and the UK elect their members to the governing boards and top posts almost uncontested. Last but not least, a lack of accountability and judicial review of decisions of these specialized agencies were the cynosure of arguments made by their former legal advisors. (Gold, 1980) Hence it is cogent to conclude that the US as the world's number one economy will resort to extreme stratagems to safeguard the *status quo* and to strengthen the Dollar. Hence the *raison d'être* of Trump's tariff wars would not only be national interest but also money and profits!

It is too early to predict the out come of Trump's actions, however "in the decade after the end of the First World War, the United States continued to embrace the high tariffs that had characterized its trade policy since the Civil War. These were enacted, in part, to appease domestic constituencies but ultimately they served to hinder international economic cooperation and trade in the late 1920s and early 1930s". (Office of the Historian, n.d.) The direct consequence of such protectionist measures was the outbreak of WW II and similarly whether the actions of the Trump administration will lead to a Hot War between US and China is yet to be seen. China's attempts to restructure the global financial landscape through the AIIB and the BRICS is vehemently challenged and opposed by the US. The answer to the question on whether Trump, as a business minded deal – maker, would be satisfied with

the best deal against China or whether he will choose a more forceful method of convincing China, is as complicated as US politics and foreign policy. Again, this will be an intricate balance between order and anarchy!

The Coda

States continue to exist in an anarchic, self – help world order which is plagued by a trust deficit. They enter into secret pacts, sponsor terrorists, promote the proliferation of nuclear weapons and arms races. The collapse of the USSR in 1990 has given rise to a new world order populated by not only States but also by aggressive NSAs. From exploding walkie talkies in the Middle East to surgical precision strikes conducted by Israel, and from swarms of drones wreaking havoc in Russia and Ukraine to waves of ballistic missile strikes between Israel and Iran, a diabolical escalation of conflicts has made the present world order much more dangerous and unpredictable than what existed many decades ago. Putin's intention to utilize nuclear weapons against Ukraine and Iran's motives of withdrawing from the NPT have pushed the world, once again, to the brink of nuclear Armageddon. The competition between the US and China on inventing the best hypersonic missile, the most powerful drones, and 6th generation fighter jets have escalated arms races between States. The Trump administration's trade war has rattled the feathers of both enemy and ally alike thus gradually plunging the world into a vortex of self – destruction. The dance of the devil with its butterfly effect being felt in multiple parts of the world has buttressed the Realist presumption that the international system is anarchical. Such anarchy may give rise to new international laws on drones, nuclear weapons and the proliferation of hypersonic weapons. In this backdrop, it is imperative that laws regulating new conflicts and the use of weapons must be revisited and a fresh legal regime be introduced in effectively addressing such eccentricities.

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Some Small States Rise while Others Stagnate: Why and How? A Comparative Study of Sri Lanka, Singapore, and Malaysia

Shashikamal Kodithuwakku

Introduction

As viewed by realists, states struggle for power. This is a manifestation of humans' very nature in the state's behavior (Toledo, 2005). This power struggle has resulted in variations of power among states. It has created a hierarchy in the international system of superpowers, middle powers, and small states. This hierarchy helps maintain the rule-based order in the world. According to Nye (2023) who analyses power as a three-dimensional chessboard, the hierarchy is created based on military, and economic capabilities as well as transnational relations. Through meticulous conduct of foreign policy, these power-seeking states can increase their material capabilities and rise in the hierarchy.

The Indo-Pacific is a region with enormous geopolitical value. This area's significance has resulted in major powers such as the US, China, India, and Japan vying for dominance in the region. Therefore, all the region's middle and small powers have to consider this major power rivalry when conducting their foreign policy. Considering Sri Lanka, a country with more than 2600 years of history, it found itself exerting influence over trading networks and empires by taking its strategic location to its advantage. However, despite its strategic location in the Indian Ocean and a long history of diplomatic engagement, Sri Lanka remains classified as a small power, unlike other states in the region that have successfully transitioned into middle powers. Existing literature provides sufficient insights into the domestic and systemic factors influencing Sri Lanka's foreign policy, but fails to address a crucial puzzle; Why has Sri Lanka's foreign policy, despite being shaped by both domestic political dynamics and external pressures, not led to a greater shift in its power status? While countries like Singapore, Malaysia have used similar strategic tools such as non-alignment, multilateralism, and hedging strategies to elevate their international positions, Sri Lanka

remains stagnant as a small power. Accordingly, a question arises as, why hasn't Sri Lanka transitioned from a small power to a Middle power, while similar nations in the Indo-Pacific have successfully advanced in the global power hierarchy?

This article intends to find answers to this puzzling question of why Sri Lanka has remained a small power despite adopting strategies similar to those of rising middle powers. To achieve the objective of the study first, the foreign policy concerning major power rivalry of Sri Lanka in the post-independence period is analyzed. Then, the foreign policy of Singapore and Malaysia as middle powers is analyzed. When studying the literature related it becomes evident that all these states use similar foreign policy strategies such as hedging and balancing yet have landed in different positions in the hierarchy. Therefore, finally, the foreign policies are compared and contrasted to find similarities and differences between Sri Lanka and the case studies to find the factors resulting in Sri Lanka's stagnation. Accordingly, this study would be conducted as a qualitative study and the use of secondary data.

Sri Lanka's Foreign Policy: Historical Overview

Sri Lanka is an island nation with a little over 2600 years of history. Its societal complexity and regional influence expand to pre-colonial days. Further, its International Relations praxis dates back to the pre-colonial era (Melegoda & Hasangani, 2020). According to Arasaratnam (1996) Sri Lanka played a crucial role in the Indian Ocean trade from 1500-1800 AD. The country's strategic location shaped its relations with other nations paving the way for international diplomatic and commercial relations.

The country's strategic location also was a reason for the Portuguese, Dutch, and British presence in the country. The British specifically used the natural resources and the location to realize their Indo-Pacific objectives. Kandaudahewa (2023) states that the strategic location of the country attracted a lot of major powers threatening the country's sovereignty and independence. With independence, Sri Lankan leadership consequently has to be more conscious of its foreign policy to protect the country's autonomy and sovereignty. The solution that came up with accordingly was following the non-aligned stance. According to Kodikara (1973) anti-colonialism, disarmament, and non-involvement in power blocs have been a consensus among each political party when conducting foreign policy. However, the question arises of how this stance helped Sri Lanka achieve its foreign policy objectives and improve national power.

When assessing the foreign policy of each administration of the country, it is apparent that there have been deviations in the alignment strategy the country intended to follow. That is to say, the strategic hedging strategy of Sri Lanka's foreign policy has had deviations. For example, from 1948 to 1956, the United National Party (UNP) in power followed a foreign policy similar to that of Britain and excluded Communist countries. However, Bandaranaike's administration succeeded in establishing ties with Communist countries as

well as India as he believed that Sri Lanka needed a foreign policy similar to that of Switzerland (Kodikara, 1973). These deviations could be seen in recent administrations in the country as well.

The Rajapaksa administration was widely perceived as pro-China due in part to its foreign policy alignment and strategic partnerships with Beijing. Consequently, this regime collapsed. In the aftermath, President Sirisena came to power with a new political mandate, pledging to restore good governance and recalibrate Sri Lanka's foreign relations. Unlike his predecessor, Sirisena adopted a more balanced approach by strengthening ties with India and attempting to hedge between major powers rather than align too closely with any single actor.

Similarly, across different governments, notable foreign policy directional changes could be observed. Accordingly, questions such as, do these deviations result in Sri Lanka's stagnation in the same position in the power hierarchy without being promoted to the middle power position in the region? And did Sri Lanka's inability to successfully hedge result in its failure to rise to be a middle power? Remain important. To understand the uniqueness of Sri Lanka's stagnation, it is necessary to examine two other Indo-Pacific states, that follow similar strategies with divergent outcomes.

Singapore: A Successful Middle Power Hedging

Even though Singapore has a relatively limited history and geographical constraints as a small state, it is considered a middle power in the literature, which gives the impression that it's the general norm. Despite the state's small land area and population, it stands as a middle power in Southeast Asia due to its economic importance and military capability. Singapore has one of the highest living standards in the world, which is a feat they have achieved in just three decades, which also constitutes it as a middle power (Leifer, 2000). Singapore's foreign policy is carefully created by taking the major power rivalry in the Indo-Pacific as well as the neighboring states of Malaysia and Indonesia into consideration. Neutrality is a cornerstone of Singapore's foreign policy (Klingler-Vidra, 2012). Accordingly, the country conducts its foreign policy in a way that maximizes benefits and minimizes/ avoids confrontation (Lee, 2024). Because of this feature, its foreign policy is described as using a "hedging" strategy (Lee, 2024; Klingler-Vidra, 2012).

However, Singapore presents a sharp contrast to Sri Lanka. Despite its geographical and demographic limitations, it has effectively risen to middle power status by pursuing a pragmatic, coherent, and forward-looking foreign policy. Like Sri Lanka, Singapore employs hedging, but its approach is rooted in strategic planning and institutional stability. Singapore's foreign policy is driven by clearly defined national interests, preserving autonomy, ensuring economic survival, and maintaining security. Its consistent leadership under the People's Action Party (PAP), Lee (2024) has ensured continuity in foreign policy, which has allowed the state to invest in long-term diplomatic, defence, and economic strategies.

Also, Singapore maintains robust economic ties with China while simultaneously engaging in security cooperation with the United States and India. Moreover, it plays an active role in regional and multilateral institutions such as ASEAN, the FPDA, and the Indian Ocean Rim Association, reinforcing its status as a regional stabilizer. Crucially, Singapore's hedging is not merely about balancing threats; it is a tool for maximizing agency. It hedges not because it is vulnerable, but because it allows the country to extract benefits from multiple relationships. The success of this strategy is partly due to domestic factors such as political stability, strategic vision, a highly competent bureaucracy, and an emphasis on meritocracy and technocratic governance.

Malaysia: Strategic Engagement and Multilateralism

The rise of Malaysia to a middle power can be specifically traced to its following "middle powership" strategy in its foreign policy. This strategy is specifically used by small states to maximize their agency and dealings with other major powers. It includes using regional bodies for norm-setting and neutrality/ non-alignment. Through these platforms, Malaysia started to take the role of a leader in both regional and international affairs which elevated its middle-power status. Malaysia's ascent to middle-power status started with Datuk Sri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, sworn in as the fourth prime minister of the country from 1981. His leadership made Malaysia a model of a stable, multicultural, developing country with a relatively impressive economy. The extraordinary and sustained growth of the country garnered them international recognition. There are special features that can be identified in his foreign policy. Accordingly, he followed a "Look East policy", where Malaysia established close ties with Northeast Asia, specifically Japan and South Korea. ASEAN centrality and close economic ties with China can also be identified as features of his foreign policy. However, his attitude towards the West was negative, and he was known for his anti-West stance despite the bilateral defense relations that existed between the two countries. Malaysia and South-South Cooperation, which connected the country with other developing nations, is also a special feature (Nossal & Stubs, 1997; Saravanamuttu, 1996).

Accordingly, the foreign policy followed by the state currently has the features of maintaining a strong economic presence of China in the country and pro-Japan economic orientation, and maintaining defense ties with the US and new arrangements with other Western countries, paving the way for a 'nuanced hedging'. Further, the country maintains its middle power position through active engagement in preserving multilateralism. Concurrently with that, Malaysia's foreign policy has emphasized autonomy, neutrality, and non-alignment, much like Sri Lanka. However, it has implemented these principles more consistently and strategically (Saravanamuttu, 1996). For example, Malaysia's Look East Policy and strong ties with Japan and China have boosted its economic resilience, while defense relations with the West and regional diplomacy through ASEAN have helped it shape regional norms and promote multilateralism.

Further, Hedging is a clear element of Malaysia's strategy, yet unlike Sri Lanka, it is accompanied by a conscious effort to use regional platforms to influence outcomes. Malaysia's role in ASEAN, as well as its contributions to multilateral norm-setting, reflects a functional approach to move the middle powership. Domestically, while Malaysia has experienced political fluctuations, its foreign policy establishment has remained relatively insulated, enabling strategic continuity. Moreover, Malaysia demonstrates that small states can rise to middle power status not solely by economic or military metrics, but also through leadership in regional affairs, promotion of norms, and diplomatic initiative. This has been possible due to the presence of a coherent foreign policy identity, even amid domestic political change.

Sri Lanka's Contemporary Foreign Policy

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the eighth executive president of Sri Lanka, after facing a heavy financial and economic crisis, became the first president of Sri Lanka to resign from office in 2022. President Ranil Wickremesinghe became his successor by assuming the interim presidency through parliamentary votes (Kandaudahewa, 2023). According to Kandaudahewa (2023) this interim government faces five dilemmas in foreign policy. Those challenges are maintaining the long-standing nonaligned policy, restructuring debt, seeking global assistance to address the economic crisis, restoring democracy and the rule of law, and pursuing a balanced foreign policy. The current foreign policy focuses on overcoming the mentioned challenges in that context.

Sri Lanka has found itself entangled in great power rivalry in the Indo-Pacific. It is mainly because of its significant geostrategic location in the maritime region (Eudon, 2024). Domestic factors such as the economic crisis and the political landscape have made the state an easy target to fall into the control of the major powers (Eudon, 2024; Kandaudahewa, 2023). To navigate this external environment, Sri Lanka continues to follow the hedging strategy in its foreign policy. Accordingly, the Wickremesinghe government has recognized the presence of the three major powers US, China, and India in the country (Kandaudahewa, 2023) and conducts foreign policy in a way that helps to achieve their objectives amidst the power play (Eudon, 2024).

The interim government was successful in overcoming strategic deadlocks. For example, when the Chinese Navy surveillance vessel Yuan Wang 5 requested refueling at a facility in Sri Lanka the Sri Lankan government was able to reassure India over their concerns and balance both countries without displeasing the two countries. Further, the country has secured assistance from the US through gaining economic and humanitarian aid (Kandaudahewa, 2023) The Wickremesinghe government has not limited itself to these three external powers and extended the relations to other countries such as Japan as well.

When observing the current foreign policy of the country the fact that even though Sri Lanka cannot play a defining role in the greater Indo-Pacific, the country continues to cooperate

with all the major powers to achieve its best interests, could be seen been highlighted. The other small states in the Indo-Pacific are also caught up in this major power rivalry, which has made them pursue a foreign policy that directly addresses the power play. When observing the foreign policy of small powers in the Indo-Pacific, similarities and differences can be identified with the foreign policy of Sri Lanka. A major similarity is the navigation of major power rivalry in the region when achieving the national interest of the country. Even though strategic competition stands as a common factor that affects all the small powers in the region, how each state navigates it differs from each other. The Maldives for example, uses a hedging strategy just like Sri Lanka (Pizzol & Pelaggi, 2023; Lim & Mukherjee, 2019). However, the domestic factors can be seen as being a variable in comparison (Pizzol & Pelaggi, 2023), which has created differences in overall foreign policy compared to Sri Lanka.

Yoshimatsu (2023) and Dupont (2021) mention that the major power rivalry affects the middle powers such as Australia, Taiwan, and New Zealand, in the Indo-Pacific. These middle powers use a 'hedging' strategy to navigate through this rivalry. Phuong Tao (2023) states that a state is considered a middle power when that state has the capacity to hedge and negotiate among great powers. According to that, it can be said that the use of a hedging strategy is a commonality in the region. However, when focusing on specific middle powers, it can be found that there are differences and nuances in the strategy. Especially, when comparing the features of the hedging strategy of those countries with Sri Lanka, differences can be identified, which we can theorize as what differentiates those countries' position and Sri Lanka's position in the hierarchy. However, it is not explicitly mentioned in the literature.

Taking an example, Yoshimatsu (2022) in his study focuses on ASEAN and its approach towards the Indo-Pacific. Here, he mentions the role ASEAN plays in mitigating major power rivalry in the region to maintain regional order. Phuong Tao (2023) also mentions this fact, and he also mentions that ASEAN countries promote multilateralism in order to protect the autonomy of the member states. Accordingly, most of the countries, such as Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia, use hedging strategies; however, the changes in the domestic factors have made each approach unique to each country (Phuong Tao, 2023). For example, Indonesia's material capability has allowed it to play a greater role in the region compared to Singapore, which is also a middle power but a small state. Vietnam although it got out of the shackles of instability in recent decades, has positioned itself as a middle power by using its vision and assuming a leadership role in the region.

Analysis: Why does Sri Lanka remain a Small Power?

Domestic Factors

As mentioned, how a state conducts its foreign policy affects its power. Foreign policy is intertwined with domestic factors or domestic policy (Lenka & Pattanaik, 1979), which can also be identified when analyzing Sri Lanka's foreign policy. When referring to the domestic

factors that contribute to Sri Lanka's foreign policy, which has resulted in the country's stagnation as a small power, it should be mentioned that Sri Lanka's foreign policy was traditionally designed according to the cadre of Civil service (Kodikara, 1973). This lack of a strong foundation from the get-go resulted in inconsistencies in foreign policy. In that context, foreign policy has been affected a lot by changes in the internal regime. The objectives and goals of the leader have been imprinted in foreign policy, as highlighted in many literatures (Kodikara, 1973; Kodikara, 1980;).

Following non-alignment as a strategy began during Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike's tenure. It has been a foreign policy pillar of every regime. However, due to the fact that leadership plays a huge role in foreign policy determination, there have been many deviations in the strategies, i.e. the leaders have showcased variations in the alignment. For example, even though both Mr. and Mrs. Bandaranaike followed a non-aligned foreign policy, their relations with the Western bloc greatly suffered during their tenure. Further, Mr. Dudley Senanayake, who became the Prime Minister succeeding Mrs. Bandaranaike, bonded more with the Western allies and declined relations with the communist bloc, specifically with China, even though he claimed to follow a non-aligned stance (Kodikara, 1973).

As Lenka & Pattanaik (1979), mention, the nature of the ruling elite also has played a role in Sri Lanka's foreign policy determination. For example, the UNP governments, which greatly antagonized communism ruled the country, and the relations with the Communist bloc countries declined (Lenka & Pattanaik, 1979).

External Factors

Various external/ systemic factors have determined Sri Lanka's foreign policy. According to that, when observing the current world structure, the shift from US-centered world order to Asian centered world order can be identified (Kandaudahewa, 2023). Kandaudahewa (2023) underlines how this new shift has called upon great power rivalry between the US and China to be the global hegemon. Kissinger (2014) points out that this shift in the balance of power would challenge the existing international order. China intends to build this new international order where it stands at the top of the hierarchy by controlling its environment through diplomacy and economic hard power (De Silva, 2022).

Sri Lanka's strategic location has increased its geostrategic importance, which has resulted in not only the US and China but also the regional superpowers, India, Japan, and Pakistan struggling to gain control over the country. Sri Lanka's domestic vulnerabilities have also played a part in the country falling into a mere chess piece in the game played by the superpowers (Kandaudahewa, 2023). These current circumstances are no different than the post-independence world order, where the country had to navigate the Cold War. Accordingly, the leaders of the country had to formulate foreign policy by taking these systemic factors into account, so that the country can protect its sovereignty and autonomy.

A great example of a policy pushed out by the country to navigate these realities in a way that doesn't harm the independence of the state can be mentioned as Mrs. Bandaranaike's introduction of the Indian Ocean Peace Zone in 1971, which got immense support from the non-aligned nations and later endorsed by the United Nations (Kodikara, 1973). Further, the changes in non-aligned stance from regime to regime were not only a fault of domestic realities but also systemic realities.

The literature related to Sri Lanka's navigation in the changing international and regional order is abundant (Kandaudahewa, 2023). However, the foreign policy formulated by intertwining both domestic and systemic realities, having an impact on Sri Lanka's position in the international hierarchy order is not something explored. Further, the successes and failures of the navigation of the major power rivalry through the foreign policy of the country which directly affects Sri Lanka's power should be explored, which would be done in this study. Accordingly, it is noted that Sri Lanka's post-independence foreign policy, while nominally anchored in non-alignment, has suffered from significant inconsistencies due to shifts in political leadership and domestic instability (Kodikara, 1973). While hedging has been the primary strategy used to manage relations with great powers such as China, India, and the United States, this strategy has lacked a long-term vision and institutional coherence.

Accordingly, each administration has displayed significant variation in strategic alignment. For instance, the Mahinda Rajapaksa administration leaned heavily toward China, culminating in the controversial Hambantota Port lease. His successor, President Maithripala Sirisena, attempted to pivot toward India and the West but was constrained by the economic dependencies created by his predecessor (Colombo Telegraph, 2023). Most recently, the Wickremesinghe government has maintained a more balanced approach, seeking assistance from Japan and the West while managing relations with both China and India. However, Sri Lanka's hedging is often reactive rather than proactive. The country has failed to embed strategic autonomy within its foreign policy institutions. Domestic political volatility, lack of long-term planning, and economic vulnerabilities have limited the effectiveness of its hedging strategy, resulting in a constrained foreign policy that is insufficient to elevate its status in the international hierarchy.

Comparative Analysis

Crucial key patterns could be identified through this comparative analysis. The most important finding was the fact that foreign policy strategy alone is not determinative. All countries practice a form of hedging, but the outcomes differ. However, the strategic and consistent it is applied that determines foreign policy successes. When looking into Singapore and Malaysia, they implement coherent, long-term hedging strategies embedded in an institutional framework. However, Sri Lanka in contrast, displays an ad hoc, politically driven hedging policy.

Moreover, another finding is that domestic political stability enhances strategic foreign policy. Accordingly, Consistent leadership and institutionalized foreign policy structures in

Singapore and Malaysia have facilitated upward mobility in the international hierarchy. In contrast, Sri Lanka's frequent changes in leadership and politicization of foreign policy have led to inconsistent strategic directions. Another finding is that the economic resilience enables strategic autonomy. The countries like Singapore and Malaysia possess diversified economies that allow them to choose patterns without excessive dependence. However, in contrast, Sri Lanka, due to economic vulnerabilities are often compelled to accept unfavourable terms from the powerful states.

Moreover, multilateralism and regional engagement act as power multipliers. Accordingly, Middle powers like Singapore and Malaysia play active roles in ASEAN and other multilateral forums, enhancing their diplomatic capital. Sri Lanka, however, has failed to fully exploit such platforms, limiting its regional leadership role. Furthermore, the matter of Strategic Vision is also a great finding of this research. What separates middle powers from stagnant small powers is not just resources, but vision. Malaysia's Look East policy and Singapore's pragmatic hedging demonstrate proactive planning. Sri Lanka has largely lacked such a long-term foreign policy vision, often responding to crises rather than shaping its strategic environment.

Conclusion

This study indicates that both internal and external factors have played a significant role in keeping Sri Lanka a small player on the global stage. While many nations have successfully navigated their development paths, Sri Lanka's unique circumstances have resulted in a prolonged period of stagnation. This research further has demonstrated that Sri Lanka's failure to transition from a small power status to a middle power status cannot be attributed solely to geography or external pressures. Rather, it stems from internal weaknesses particularly fragmented political leadership, economic fragility, and an underdeveloped strategic culture. In contrast, countries like Singapore and Malaysia, though also small, have leveraged coherent foreign policy, economic planning, and multilateral engagement to rise in the international hierarchy.

Considering all the factors, by analysing the convergences and divergences among the selected case studies, this research highlights that small powers are not condemned to marginality. With the right mix of domestic coherence, economic strategy, and institutional vision, it is possible for a small state to punch above its weight. In the context of Sri Lanka, the lesson is clear that consistent, strategic, and independent foreign policy grounded in national interest and institutional continuity is the only path to power transition in an increasingly competitive Indo-Pacific.

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Revisiting the concept of Regionalism in International Relations

S. Chaminda Padmakumara

Introduction

The existing scholarship of International Relations suggests that the concept of Regionalism has become a highly contested theme in the discipline. Many theories have emerged from these studies to explain varies dynamics involved in Regionalism. Some theories mainly emphasize the role of states in promoting regionalism giving more attention to state – bargaining and common interests shared by the states. These theories primarily offer a state - eccentric view on regionalism. There are also some theories that pay reasonable attention to non-state actors and their motives behind the cooperative mechanisms. According to these theories non – state actors are also playing an important role in the process of regionalism. These theories extend the scope of regionalism encompassing multiple actors including multi-national cooperations, humanitarian organizations and other global civil society actors.

Recent instances of the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change challenges, and natural disasters indicate that regionalism is not confined to a particular geographic area or a specific group of actors. These examples further show that regionalism should be understood as a dynamic relationship between states and non-state actors, requiring a broader perspective that transcends traditional territorial confines. There is now a broad consensus among scholars regarding the impact of non-state actors and other non-territorial factors on regionalism, supported by extensive literature. According to Baysoy , in contemporary era, regionalism is gaining importance in many dimensions. First, it offers a level of analysis that all factors of an issue can be observed. Second, it can be accepted as a confronting area of two contradictory trends of globalization and localization. Third, it is a leverage or a control mechanism in parallel with the widening and deepening of multi-dimensional security structure (2020, p.19). One of the prominent scholars in the field of regionalism, Fredrik

Söderbaum, in his seminal work on Rethinking of Regions and Regionalism argues that while there is a strong tendency in both policy and academia to acknowledge the importance of regions and regionalism, the approach of different academic specializations varies considerably, and regionalism/regional integration means different things to different people in different contexts. Such diversity could be productive (2013).

Much of these arguments drive to the idea of new regionalism that generally highlight functional considerations. Economic change and development have escaped the bounds of the state and become global; but at the same time the specific character of particular places is ever more important in explaining economic dynamism (Keating , 2011).Somehow this idea shows the continued relevance of territorial dynamics in analyzing regional outcomes, raising the question of whether territorial factors are obsolete or still significant for analysis. As further argued by Keating , "yet we cannot reduce regions and regionalism to a mere functional logic. Functional considerations may provide reasons for rescaling; they do not constitute causes, without agents to take up these reasons and give them institutional expression (2011, p.5). Amid these debates, another group of scholars argue that regionalism significantly influences global politics. According to them, today's regionalism is closely linked with the shifting nature of global politics and the intensification of globalization. Regionalism is characterized by the involvement of almost all governments in the world, but it also involves a wide variety of non-state actors. This results in a multitude of formal and informal regional types of governance and regional networks in most fields of politics (Söderbaum , 2011). These debates indicate that the notion of regionalism derives meanings from diverse contexts and methodologies employed by different scholars to interpret the term , but hardly provide analysis on how and why these interpretations are varied with a logical framework. Therefore, it is still needed to examine the shifts in understanding and analyzing the concept of regionalism focusing on both agency and structural dynamics, by highlighting the significant trends emerged in contemporary regionalism.

First, this qualitative study aims to define the term 'regionalism' and provide an overview of the different scholarly debates regarding the term. Secondly, it will identify several shifts in the analysis of the concept within scholarly work and will create a logical framework to present these variations focusing both agency and structure. Finally, the paper will discuss some pragmatic changes that have emerged in contemporary regionalism to supplement the conceptual analysis, illustrated with real-world examples.

Conceptualizing the idea of Regionalism

The current scholarship on regionalism suggests that the concept of Regionalism has been interpreted in multiples pays. Many scholars have agreed that regionalism has become more prominent after the Second World War, mainly depending on the geographical proximities and increasing interdependence of the states. For instance, Baral explains that Regionalism is a movement that emerged after World War II and it involves countries that are geographically close and interdependent, collaborating with the help of governments and

NGOs to achieve mutual benefits in a particular area of shared interest. Such regional clusters have evolved due to geographical proximity, economic interdependence, security issues, social and cultural background, and more (2024). From this point of view, the states engage with regionalism for various reasons, many of which are functional necessities rooted in common interests. Furthermore, it indicates that regionalism is not confined to the state actors, non-state actors also play a crucial role in the process of regionalism. Barbieri also asserts that regionalism emerged as a phenomenon after the Second World War. According to Barbieri, "regionalism emerged as a distinct post-World War II phenomenon, initially based on geographical proximity, socio-cultural homogeneity, economic transactions, and security concerns. Its early forms were largely influenced by political and ideological contexts during the Cold War (2019, p.45). The existing literature on regionalism further suggests that the end of the Cold War has added new features to regionalism because of the growing intensity of globalization. Notably, the end of the Cold War has led to the rise of new regionalism shaped by various factors such as globalization, emergence of new players, shifts in global power dynamics, increased interdependence, alterations in security paradigms, the advent of multipolar, and various other influences. This shifting pattern has had a major impact on world politics and power dynamics. (Baral, 2024). In this context, the end of Cold War has revitalized regionalism in many ways. According to Söderbaum "anyone following international affairs in the post-Cold War era is likely to be struck by the revitalization and proliferation of regionalism in most parts of the world, almost as a new 'urge to merge' into regional entities" (2004, p.1).

According to the above discussion , regionalism has become more evident since the end of the Second World War, and the beginning of the post- Cold War era has played a significant role in its revitalization through various means. This revitalization can be attributed to the intensification of globalization, the emergence of new actors, the evolving security environment, and the growing economic interdependence among political entities. While the discussion focuses heavily on the structural factors that contribute to regionalism and forming regional entities, it fails to sufficiently highlight the role of agency.

From an agency perspective, the term regionalism refers to the proneness of the governments and peoples of two or more states to establish voluntary associations and to pool together resources (material and nonmaterial) to create common functional and institutional arrangements (Mace and Therien 1996, 2). As Yuzhu point outs, regionalism can be understood as a cooperation model among nation states that arose quickly in the 1980s in some parts of the world, typically reflected by the establishment of various regional organizations (2020). This cooperation model led by state actors is typically reflected by the establishment of various regional organizations. These regional entities are generally targeted at enriching the contents, expanding the dimensions of regional cooperation and eliminating the existent legal and institutional barriers to investment and trade, such as MERCOSUR, ASEAN, NAFTA, SADC, ECOWAS, SAARC, etc (Yuzhu, 2020). Furthermore, the concept of regionalism can be best described as a process occurring in a given geographical region by which different types of actors (states, regional

institutions, societal organizations and other nonstate actors) come to share certain fundamental values and norms. These actors also participate in a growing network of economic, cultural, scientific, diplomatic, political, and military interactions (Mace and Therien ,1996).

This illustrates how the agencies of states, organizations, people and other non- states actors play different roles in the regional processes. Such processes within international relations can be understood as manifestation of collective identity and shared interests that lead to establishment and execution of institutions that reflect regional identity and influence actions within that specific geographical area (Bloor, 2022). From this perspective, not only the role of agencies, understanding how the regencies establish shared interests and create collective identities is also significant to the idea of regionalism. This refers to the fact that shared understanding, ideas and other ideational factors associated with agencies are important to explain how and why actors engage with region- building processes through various means. In this context, regionalism means the body of ideas, values and objectives that contribute to the creation, maintenance or modification of a particular region or type of world order. It is usually associated with a formal policy and project and often leads to institution-building. Furthermore, regionalism ties agents to a specific project that is limited spatially or socially but not in time (Söderbaum, 2011).

The debate pertaining to agency and structure in regionalism has been examined through various lenses. Scholars such as Björn Hettne emphasize the importance of understanding regionalism from both exogenous and endogenous perspectives. The exogeneous perspective generally looks at external influences on regionalism while the endogenous perspective focuses on internal dynamics involved in regionalism. This dual approach highlights the complexity of regionalism and the interplay between outside forces and local contexts (Söderbaum, 2011). In this context Amitav Acharya also offers two important aspects to explain Southeast Asian regionalism based on external and internal factors (Padmkumara, 2020). In his explanation, Acharya describes them as 'inside and outside' factors. According to him, the outside factors refer to the external strategic or economic interests of the region and explain how outside agents such as great powers or hegemonic actors can shape those interests. In contrast, the inside factors refer to the local elements of the region, which is called as Southeast Asian real agency (2012). This discussion reveals that regionalism is viewed through the lenses of both agency and structure. Additionally, it shows that exogenous and endogenous perspectives on regionalism are also significant for understanding how the debate on agency and structure affects the conceptualization of regionalism.

Understanding Regions in Regionalism

Understanding about regions is central for analyzing outcomes and processes of regionalism. In general, the concept of regionalism refers to the political and cognitive idea of forming regions. It is usually associated with a formal program, and since the mid-1980s

there has been an explosion of such regional programs on a global scale (Söderbaum, 2011, p.1). The definitions of regions depend on the context in which the idea has been framed and demand for varies factors to encompass (Padmakumara, 2020, p.9). The "region" has no one single definition. Different disciplines and different contexts define regions in various forms (Baysoy, 2020). From a constructivist perspective, regions are not self-confined entities and are products of socialization among their units. They can be socially constructed, and ideational factors are also important to understand regions. Hence the constitutive sources of regions can be varied from one region to the other. Due to this complexity, study of regions cannot be confined to a single domain and requires multidimensional framework for understanding (Padmakumara, 2020). From a historical point of view, the concept of region evolved historically to mean a space between the national and the local within a particular state. This meaning may be captured by the term micro-region, or subnational region. The concept of region may, however, also be used to refer to macro-regions which are larger territorial units, as opposed to nonterritorial units or sub-systems. They exist between the state level and the global system level (Söderbaum, 2011). In this context, regions are geographically and functionally defined areas as sub- systems of the international system. These regions could be responses to either structural demands coming from the international system or shared interests identified by a group of political actors in a geographical proximity. As shown by the scholars, one of the difficulties in dealing with any region is the problem of delineating its exact spatial borders. Although many regions are denoted by obvious geographic or cultural boundaries, there is always some arbitrariness in their definition (Kacowicz, 1999).

Some scholars have also applied the agency - structure debate to conceptualize the idea of regions which is essentially linked with regionalism. Consequently, these scholarly ideas could provide more insights into the discourse on regionalism. According to Padmakumara, another significant conceptual venue for understanding region is structure-agency debate. It argues whether regions are structurally oriented or agency oriented (2020, p.34). Arnoud Lagendijk indicates that questions within regional studies have typically been explored using either a structurally oriented or an agency-oriented framework. (2007). From this point of view, exogenous and endogenous factors become more significant to understand regions. Therese exogenous factors refer to various structural changes that take place in socio-economic and political domains to explain region formations while latter is to examine how regions are constructed by different elements and actors which are associated with either material or non-material domains (Padmkumara, 2020). However, some scholars are skeptical that solely exogenous and endogenous factors can offer reasonable understanding about regions. According to them, there are no natural or given regions, but these are made and unmade intentionally or unintentionally, endogenously or exogenously by collective human action and identity formation. In other words, regions are not structurally or exogenously given but socially constructed by historically contingent interactions (Söderbaum, 2013). In this context, regions and the concept of regionalism have been interpreted in different ways. Various dynamics, sources and methodologies have been adopted to analyze regionalism and regions. Somehow, it is reasonable to argue that most

of these scholar debates are closely linked with the structure- agency debate and at least they have some relevance to it. The subsequent table analyzes the connection between the existing literature on regionalism and regions with the structure – agency debate.

Table 1: Overview of the Existing Literature on Regionalism and Regions

	Core theoretical and conceptual argument	**Connection to structure -agency debate**
1.	Actor oriented approaches: debates over state actors / non- state actors involved in regionalism	Agency oriented understanding of regionalism
2.	Institutional approach to regionalism	More attention is given to agency while reasonably accommodating structural factors
3.	Functional approach to regionalism and regions	Provide both structure -agency oriented analysis
4.	Regionalism as a response to globalization	Structure oriented approach to regionalism
5.	Geographical and Territorial approaches to regions	Provide more structural understanding about regions
6.	Regions as sub-systems of the international system	More attention is given to structural factors
7.	Exogeneous approach to regionalism and regions	When the external players are considered, can provide both structure – agency perspectives
8.	Endogenous approach to regionalism and regions	When the local players are considered, can provide both structure – agency perspectives
9.	Constructivist approach to regionalism and regions	Provide agency-oriented understanding of regionalism and regions
10.	Cognitive approach to regionalism and regions	Provide a more agency-oriented understanding of regionalism and regions

Source: Author. 2025

The above analysis indicates that most of the literature concerning regionalism and regions aligns with the structure-agency discourse, providing diverse interpretations of regionalism emphasizing multiple dynamics. This further illustrates that understanding of regionalism should not be confined to solely structural factors or agency; rather, it necessitates more inclusive and adaptable approaches.

New Trends in Regionalism

The new regionalism demands that it should be understood from the interplay of structure-agency perspectives to effectively capture the complexities of the newly emerged trends. These new trends are significantly shaped and reshaped by various structural factors and the interests of the actors involved in the regional processes. On the other hand, advancement of technology and communication has fundamentally altered the understanding of how structure and agency relate to regionalism. One of the major changes in the contemporary regionalism is shifting from territorial fixed understanding to issue specifics. In the contemporary world, many entities claimed to be regional have been established to address common issues that cannot be solely defined in geographical factors. The member economies APEC, expansion of BRICS membership , interregional cooperation in organizations such as BIMCTEC , Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) , OPEC based on oil- producing countries , Pacific Islands Forum and membership expansion of OECD are few examples to show that today regionalism has no strict regional boundaries and it is more fluid framing around shared understanding and interests regardless of fixed boundaries.

Another important feature of the current regionalism is that the involvement of multiple actors. Regionalism was traditionally driven by the state actors and now it has been promoted by various actors including both state and non-state actors. Non- state actors are increasingly important to regionalism as they actively engage with regional issues challenging state – centric model of regional governance. Their presence is more visible in the issue areas like climate change, human rights , development, security and migration. Discriminatory regionalism is another important point that explains the impact of Regional Trade Agreements (RTA) where they favor member countries while discriminating other countries. This may potentially impact on the global trade and international trade rules established by organizations like World Trade Organizations (WTO).

Despite the emerging discriminatory practices of regional entities, minilateralism has become a visible trend in the contemporary regionalism. This trend is generally led by cooperative mechanisms established by a small group of political entities to achieve a common goal based on their shared understanding. The Quad, AUKUS, Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD), JAPHUS (Japan-Philippines-United States), Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) are some expels for minilateralism . These minilateral initiatives

are mostly linked with the security, strategic, trade and environmental concerns of the group members.

With the advent of the digital era, Techno- regionalism has increasingly become important to countries to collaborate in technical aspects. Regional Trade Agreements, Harmonization of Digital Standards and Cooperation in Science and Technology are some of the means to promote Techno- regionalism among the countries. This trend has contributed to regional innovation and to reduce the risk of any country becoming dominant in technological aspects within respective regions.

Conclusion

The paper concludes that the concept of Regionalism has been interpreted in multiple ways, with an emphasis on various dynamics associated with the concept. The scholars have developed numerous approaches to conceptualize regions and regionalism, each focusing on different aspect/s of regionalism. The paper also shows that many of these scholarly approaches and debates are connected to the structure-agency dichotomy, and no single approach can provide a reasonable understanding of regionalism. The recent trends in regionalism observed in the contemporary world demand the development of new analytical methods to facilitate a more effective analysis of regionalism. Consequently, a holistic approach that integrates both stature and agency-oriented perspectives would be better suited to capture the complexities of regionalism in the contemporary world.

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The Nexus of National Security and Stability: The Case of Sri Lanka

Chandana Wickramasinghe

"If you want 1 year of prosperity, grow grain. If you want 10 years of prosperity, grow trees. If you want 100 years of prosperity, grow people"

Ancient Chinese Proverb

Introduction: A Short History of National Security

National security is essential for the stability, sovereignty, and sustainable advancement of Sri Lanka in all its pursuits. This stability is crucial for promoting economic growth, attracting foreign investment, and guaranteeing a secure environment for trade and commerce. A robust commitment to regional cooperation can enhance resource sharing and produce reciprocal advantages, so strengthening the island state's position in the Indian Ocean. By addressing these issues, the island state can skilfully manoeuvre through the complexities of regional geopolitics and enhance its overall stability (Wickramasinghe 2015).

In this context, the contemporary notions of national security emerged in the 17th century during the Thirty Years' War in Europe and the English Civil War. In 1648, the Peace of Westphalia established the principle that the nation-state possesses sovereign authority over both domestic matters, including religion, and exterior security. The concept of the nation-state is prevalent today; yet it would be erroneous to presume that it is the sole perspective on international security. The pre-Westphalian international system operated under the premise of a universal principle regulating state affairs, overseen by emperors, popes, kings, and princes (Osiander, 2001). That was, in fact, the tenet of the Holy Roman Empire. The novel concept of the nation-state adopted an alternative method. Peace and stability would be enhanced if individuals refrained from killing one another over a universal ideal, such as

religion. An international system founded on the equilibrium of nation-states, focused on the restricted objectives of national sovereignty and state self-defence, would be significantly preferable (Osiander, 2001). The philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) contested this notion by reviving the concept of a universal principle, not within a religious framework, but in a secular one influenced by the Enlightenment. In his 1795 essay "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch," he proposed that the system of nation-states should be supplanted by a new enlightened global order (Kleingeld, 2006).

Nation-states ought to prioritise the collective welfare over their national interests and adhere to international law. Consequently, the secular perspective on supranational organisations overseeing international relations emerged, which is currently embodied in the global ideology of liberal internationalism, most prominently represented by the United Nations. It is essential to examine these two paradigms while evaluating the diverse conceptions of national security. They feature prominently in contemporary discussions over national sovereignty, international law, and the function of international institutions in global affairs. American liberal internationalists, characterised by their commitment to the United Nations and international governance, align with neo-Kantian principles, while realists are more inclined towards the perspectives of Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), and other philosophers who advocated for the primacy of the nation-state.

International systems of security

Understanding the major schools of thought on international security that have arisen since the end of World War II will also help to explain the international context in which American national security is expected to operate. These schools of thought include as Collective defence is an official arrangement among nation states to offer some defence support to other member states if they are attacked. It is the basis of the classic defence alliances like the Triple Entente among the United Kingdom, the French Third Republic, and the Russian Empire before World War I and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization today. It is distinguished not only by geographical limitation, but also by its focus on military commitments. Collective security refers to various types of arrangements. Strictly speaking, collective defence involving mutual commitments of member states could be considered a form of collective security, albeit one limited geographically to military defence. More often, however, collective security is thought of as a regional and global concept represented by such international institutions as the League of Nations and the United Nations (UN). Often, their distinguishing characteristic is their hybrid character between collective action at the international level and the acceptance of nation-states being ultimately responsible for their own security.

Global security is a set of ideas, developed largely by the UN since the end of the Cold War, that the world's security is everybody's business. It rests on the premise that no single nation is secure unless all are secure. While lip service is given to the idea of national defence, the far greater focus is on attempting to eliminate conflict through international law, aid,

confidence-building measures, and global governance. The use of force should thus be reserved largely for international peacekeeping, peace enforcement, and the protection of innocent citizens from violence and should be decided upon and organized by the UN.

Non-military ideas of national security

It's crucial to have an idea. National security was primarily concerned with military security during the most of the twentieth century, but as a concept, it grew beyond what armed forces could (or could not) accomplish. The National Security Council was established in 1947 to "advise the President with respect to the integration of domestic, foreign, and military policies relating to national security." Following total war and the onset of the nuclear age, it was widely acknowledged that the days of defining national security only in terms of armies fighting in set-piece conflicts were over (National Security Council, 2001). Since then, the term "national security" has taken on various meanings. Today, there are various types of "national securities." They encompass economic, energy, and environmental security, as well as health, gender, and food security. The multiplication of definitions has not always been for the better. In some cases, for example, it is simply a rebranding of domestic goals to move resources according to the ideas of the USA and its allies in current literature. Homeland Security, often known as internal security, refers to domestic security tasks that, after 9/11, have been organised under a single body, the Department of Homeland Security. It encompasses airport and port security, border security, and transportation security. The notion has evolved throughout time to encompass economic security, environmental security, food security, health security, personal security, community security, political security, and the protection of women and minorities. Its distinctive feature is that it avoids or downplays national security as a military dilemma between nation-states, instead emphasising social and economic factors, as well as a supposed worldwide "responsibility to protect" people from violence. It will be determined and governed by the UN.

Environmental security has numerous meanings. One is the more traditional concept of responding to conflicts caused by environmental difficulties such as water scarcity, energy disruptions, or severe climate change; these problems are thought to be "transnational" and hence capable of causing conflict across nations. The other, more recent concept is that the environment and the "climate" should be protected as ends in themselves; the assumption is that human-caused environmental degradation is a threat that must be addressed through treaties and international governance as if it were the moral equivalent of a national security threat. Historically, natural disasters were not considered threats to national security, but that premise is changing as the idea of "climate change" and global warming takes hold in the national security community

Focusing the idea of national security

Policymakers necessitate a more precise comprehension of the elements that define national security. It cannot serve as an all-encompassing phrase; if it did, its importance would be undermined. National security must be delineated to specify the actions the government should undertake and, equally crucially, those it should refrain from executing. This stage is especially vital due to financial limitations. While it is vital to scrutinise the United States government, the methodology presented in their literature is more conducive to assessing a diverse range of national security concerns. The government ought to prioritise the allocation of its focus and financial resources towards safeguarding the nation and its interests against external threats. This procedure requires a comprehensive analysis of domestic policy and international ties to establish a strong defence strategy. Moreover, prioritising resource allocation for intelligence and cybersecurity initiatives would bolster the nation's resilience against prospective attacks. Focussing national security policy on critical priorities necessitates a more precise comprehension of power.

National security encompasses the protecting of the nation and its citizens from external dangers through the maintenance of armed forces and the fortification of the state, so ensuring continuous advancement for its populace and stability for the nation. There will inevitably be varying viewpoints on national security matters, reflecting both individual and communal dynamics, especially with national security expenditures and related expenses. This discussion must maintain relevance to understand current events in local, regional, and international contexts. The public should not be astonished that, in an increasingly interconnected world, national security is of utmost significance. As countries face transnational threats, governments must formulate comprehensive policies that tackle urgent issues while promoting enduring societal stability and resilience. Diverse perspectives on national security concerns will persist, mirroring both individual and communal dynamics. As a result, the public will continually examine spending and related expenses. Consequently, comprehending the progression of contemporary events in diverse situations necessitates significant focus. The public should not be astonished that, in an increasingly interconnected world, national security is paramount. As nations face transnational dangers, governments must adopt comprehensive policies that address present difficulties while fostering long-term societal stability and resilience. Formulating a comprehensive national security policy exceeds the parameters of this study.

National Security Strategy

National security strategy is a term often used interchangeably with national strategy or grand strategy. It may be defined as the nation’s plan for the coordinated use of all the instruments of state power, non-military as well as military, to pursue objectives that defend and advance its national interest. Like all strategy, it is concerned with the relationship between ends and means, power and objectives, capabilities and intentions, and in particular with how resources can be applied to achieve results. Just as military strategy can be

distinguished from the operational and tactical levels of war, so the 'thinking/ planning' activity of national strategy is implemented by 'doing' statecraft. National security strategy is a highly intentional art: it imparts purpose to what would otherwise be a statecraft that merely reacted to events.

National security strategy is an emerging field of study that is receiving more and more attention from the great powers as governmental economic stringencies, the nature of the international system, and the danger of nuclear holocaust make purely military solutions to most foreign affairs problems less and less feasible. Grand strategy was initially defined by military analysts as the domain in which non-violent policy tools were coordinated with the military in wartime end through which uniformed planners considered objectives not solely related to the efficient pursuit of military victory.

According to Liddell Hart,

> The role of grand strategy or higher strategy is to co-ordinate and direct all the resources of a nation, or band of nations towards the attainment of the political object of the war, which is the goal defined by fundamental policy." (1954)

But as the post-World War II peace has lengthened and deterrence become as important as defence, analysts seem more and more to define grand and especially national security strategy so as to embrace all nations' security policy, as a 'strategic' requirement that is, a means/ends, and conscious way of thinking about foreign policy itself.

The term grand strategy thus might best be reserved for use as a near-synonym of national security strategy in wartime, when the military instrument s necessarily the focus of strategic thought. National strategy, for its part, would imply at least an equal if not greater focus on domestic than foreign affairs, leaving national security or foreign affairs strategy as the broadest strategic term applicable to the whole of foreign relations. In this article, however, all these terms are used as rough equivalents.

Further this can be considered as *focus* for national security_National strategy writings emphasise the instruments of policy, encompassing the state's resources or power, which include diplomacy, negotiation, covert operations, foreign military and economic aid, arms, information and propaganda, international law and organisations, trade policy, economic sanctions, political military force, and warfare.

The national strategy pertains directly to the formulation, administration, and coordination of all policy instruments available to the statesman while national strategy encompasses military force as one of its policy instruments; it extends much beyond mere military capabilities. John Collins (1973) asserts that military strategy is based on actual violence or the potential for violence. It pursues success by military might. An effective grand strategy eliminates the necessity for violence. Equally significant, it transcends mere victory in pursuit of enduring peace. Military strategy mostly resides within the domain of generals. Grand strategy mostly falls under the domain of statesmen. Grand strategy governs military strategy, which constitutes merely one of its components.

The particular tools or instruments of national strategy might be regarded as diverse manifestations of actual or mobilised power. Grand strategy also pertains to the latent or potential power of the state that underpins these instruments, including the state's landmass, population, available natural resources, educational attainment of its populace, and particularly the size and technological sophistication of its economy. The strategist acknowledges that trade-offs are invariably necessary between investments in prospective power and the allocation of state resources to particular policy instruments. The components of macroeconomics, technological advancement, national economic interdependence, and governmental budgeting are therefore significant strategic considerations. This scope, along with the emphasis on coordinating all facets of foreign policy across time while considering the extensive context of domestic and international limitations and prospects, is what renders grand strategy 'grand'.

The national security plan is paramount, governing all other aspects. Once identified the way the policy or strategy driving then comes how it should elaborate to *focus on ends*. As a fundamental component present in nearly all definitions of national security strategy is a focus on objectives and policy goals. The unified direction of all policy instruments is to seek, support, fulfil, reach, accomplish, or achieve numerous policy objectives. The national security strategy is primarily focused on the objectives that statecraft should pursue and purpose is inherently linked to national interest, which is operationally defined as the value framework that directs foreign policy decisions. The national interest serves as the benchmark for national strategy, functioning as the definitive rationale for all governmental actions. All states' national interests encompass physical security and survival, the maintenance of the national social and political framework or 'way of life,' economic prosperity, and the promotion of national values abroad.

The *primary objective* of national strategy is to delineate interests within the specific international framework in which the nation exists, while conducting a thorough evaluation of external threats. The *secondary objective* is to formulate policy goals that, at a minimum, discourage and defend against dangers, and ideally, promote and enhance national interests. In defining the national interest and establishing objectives to fulfil it, the strategist must consider the domestic context. In democratic nations, strategic objectives are established concurrently through two processes: top-down, by strategic thinkers; and bottom-up, by the state's representative institutions. Its frequently mirrors domestic imperatives that transcend national strategy, these two processes may indeed yield competing objectives or divergent interpretations of the national interest. Furthermore, domestic political processes dictate the availability of resources for the strategist's objectives and the degree to which his goals will garner political support. In a democracy, the national security plan necessitates meticulous attention to maintain the unity of purpose critical for strategic success.

The government of a strategically minded state is neither the only player in the game nor one whose strategy addresses some inanimate object. National security strategy is a dynamic process that assumes the existence of other rational actors whose interests and objectives are partly if not wholly competitive. Kai Holsti writes that “Statecraft is the organized actions

governments take to change the external environment in general, or the policies and actions of other states in particular, to achieve the objectives set by policymakers." (2976).

In Game theory, this characteristic distinguishes 'strategic' games from those of skill or chance. Games of strategy are those in which the best course of action for participant depends on what the other players do, so a large part of national strategy has to do with assessing what other states are capable of doing, what they want to do, and what influence or power 'we' have relative to 'them', all to arrive at the best possible judgements about how their behaviour can be influenced. Edward Luttwak has argued that this condemns the strategist to follow 'paradoxical logic', in contrast to the 'linear logic' that most people use most of the time to achieve objectives. Paradoxical logic takes into account what other players are likely to do in response to one's strategy and recognizes that proceeding directly toward a goal will almost certainly result in their erecting obstacles and taking countermeasures. What Liddell Hart called the indirect approach; the roundabout or even devious course will often be more productive. What has been said thus far about the dynamic nature of national strategy is familiar to the military strategist. But while the soldier necessarily thinks in terms of enemies in wartime, the statesman must deal with a much broader range of relationships and situations. He is concerned as much with allies as with opponents and more about relations in peacetime than in war.

National strategy according to Thomas Schelling is not concerned only "with the efficient application of force but with the exploitation of potential force" (1960). In sum, national security strategy is a planning activity that takes place at the highest levels of government and concerns the conscious co-ordination, integration, and control of ail the instruments of state policy, which is political and economic, open and covert, military and non-military with the aim of attaining specified objectives or goals that serve the national Interest. It pays explicit attention to the objectives they seek. Its success depends largely upon influencing the behaviour of other state governments, whether friends and allies, neutral and non-aligned, or outright adversaries and on doing so under conditions that range from friendship to hostility to outright warfare.

Strategies, Choices and Priorities

In the end, any strategy comes down to the question of how to do something. Once the strategist defines the national interest within the international context, sets his objectives, and surveys the power available to pursue them, the heart of national strategy lies in precisely how resources are to be used to achieve established objectives. The key question is: What mix of policy instruments can be made available to do the job, and how should they be applied? What, in short, is the strategy for getting from here to there? This question has both long-and short-range implications, since it may well lake a considerable period of time to create and marshal the particular policy tool or tools needed to accomplish a given objective. It is here that the choices of national strategy become apparent: there is need to prioritize

interests and objectives, and to choose among policy tools and between short-and long-term objectives, in this regard, three points need to be made.

- First, there are never enough of instruments of policy or national power to accomplish all the goals that might be desirable. Since it does no good to set unattainable objectives that waste resources and priorities must be set.
- Second, goals that seem clearly desirable when measured against the standard of the national interest often seem less so when their cost is considered. Indeed, many desirable objectives become undesirable if they cost too much. Thus, choices must be made.
- Third, many goals that are both in line with the national interest and worth the cost still may not be undesirable if they cost too much. Thus, choices must be made. Simultaneously achievable, either because they conflict with each other a priori or because they conflict when they are projected into the real world. For example, one cannot strenuously oppose nuclear proliferation and at the same time maintain good relations with allies who are adamant about obtaining nuclear weapons. Again, choices must be made.

Trade-offs, Dilemmas and Complexities

The result of these considerations is that the process of thinking about national strategy is itself nonlinear. The strategist does not simply begin with the national interest, assess the international context and the threats from it, set objectives, array policy instruments, and finally arrive at particular strategies. The reasoning process is more akin to Gestalt psychology or field theory in physics, with everything depending on and varying with everything else.

First is the relationship between 'ends' and 'means'**.** Although objectives are justified by the strategist's conception of national interests, they also should be, strongly affected by his view of the available resources. The first difficulty is to avoid allowing means to determine ends rather than the other way around. The second is to determine how leveraged the strategy can be how much power is needed to back a given level of commitment.

Second is an equally delicate relationship between 'interests' and 'threats'. The strategic thinker may either define interests first an independently of threats or, particularly if he is concerned with the grand strategy of a super power, assess threats first and assume that anything threatened is of interest. While threat assessment plays a legitimate role in the prioritization of objectives required to defend the state's interests, the latter procedure can lead to a vastly expanded definition of interests and a strategy that overreaches available resources.

Third and finally, there is the critical strategic trade-off between 'risks' and 'costs'. Given a constant level of threat, the strategist can lower risks only by expanding objectives and committing resources to back them, a costly process. On the other hand, if the national

interest is narrowly defined, s/he will be able to limit objectives and lower costs but will have to endure an increase in risks. Only national values expressed through the state's political processes can determine what balance between cost and risk is tolerable.

Sri Lanka's National Security Concerns

Sri Lanka is one of the most peaceful and stable countries in the world today. Our citizens are enjoying the benefits of peace and have complete freedom and countless opportunities to build better futures for themselves. At the same time, it must be understood that as with any other sovereign nation, Sri Lanka faces potential threats from various sources. Guarding against these threats and ensuring the safety of the nation is the first duty of the Government, because National Security is the foundation of our freedom and our prosperity. As such, the Government needs to be fully aware of all the issues that impact the country in areas such as Defence, Foreign Policy, Economic Affairs and internal Law & Order. It must formulate a comprehensive National Security strategy to deal with them.

A viable National Security strategy must constantly align ends with means, goals with resources, and objectives with the tools required to accomplish them. The strategy needs to be aligned with the aspirations of the people, and it must have public support. Ideally, if comprehensive security is to be ensured, it requires the achievement of national cohesion, political and economic stability, the elimination of terrorism, the countering of extremism, and the formulation of effective responses to external challenges. The Government must make every effort to keep aware of a continually changing situation and take appropriate action in response to new developments and challenges. It is only then that the safety of the nation can be assured.

The Context of National Security in Sri Lanka

In the initial years following the attainment of Independence, National Security was not a main priority for the Government of Ceylon, as the era was relatively quiet and the world was considerably stable, despite being the aftermath of the Second World War. As an autonomous Dominion of Great Britain and a non-aligned nation with strong links both regionally and internationally, the Government faced few significant threats. Consequently, the focus on National Security was negligible, as was the prioritisation of the nation's Defence infrastructure. The military primarily served a ceremonial function. It was required to help the Government only during instances of public sector job stoppages or rioting. To respond to natural calamities, The necessity to bolster law enforcement and the Armed Forces for the protection of the nation against internal or external threats was not regarded as an urgent issue. The attempted coup d'état in 1962 diminished the Government's focus on the Defence apparatus. Concerns that a formidable military might threaten democracy, as shown in several neighbouring nations during this era, led to a significant reduction in budget for the Armed Forces and a decrease in recruitment efforts.

Currently, Sri Lanka is a nation harvesting the complete advantages of peace and is actively pursuing accelerated economic development to enhance the wealth of its population, a situation attributable to the military actions taken at that time against separatism. The nation has considerable progress to make. Three decades of violence resulted in several lost opportunities for growth: both foreign and domestic investment declined owing to war-related apprehensions; tourism was severely impacted, and many of our most talented individuals emigrated in pursuit of improved prospects. Countries like Singapore, who shared a comparable economic status with Sri Lanka at the time of our Independence in 1948, experienced remarkable development throughout this period. This is due to the absence of a significant conflict to address. The conflict significantly diminished Sri Lanka's possibilities. The fundamental task of the Government of Sri Lanka, even in the post-war context, is to guarantee the ongoing security of the nation. Economic progress is contingent upon security and stability. The preservation of National Security is hence paramount.

The National Security of Sri Lanka must be examined in light of the country's historical backdrop, current circumstances, and, most importantly, the various obligations of the state. The state must guarantee the preservation of national sovereignty and territorial integrity, ensuring the safety of the populace is not compromised. Facilitating economic expansion to enhance the populace's standard of living is essential to avert the recurrence of internal issues in the future. Establishing a good international environment for Sri Lanka is equally crucial in mitigating detrimental external influences. Ensuring the protection of our physical assets and preserving the integrity of the nation's democracy are equally vital. In light of this overarching background, it is evident that National Security should be comprehended within a cohesive framework that amalgamates the nation's Defence, Law and Order, Foreign Policy, and Economic Policy. The integration of these four domains is essential for the formulation of a comprehensive National Security Strategy. This is crucial for Sri Lanka to solidify its current peace and stability and realise its potential.

National Security of Sri Lanka at Present

The evidence of interest by the great powers in strategic assets of Sri Lanka shows that there is a risk of nuclear submarines reaching the Hambantota harbour, thereby incurring nuclear and war-related concerns on the island. On the other hand, the apportioning of two strategic harbours; Trincomalee and Hambantota; between two rival camps, Indo-USA and China are not advantageous for Sri Lanka’s future. The Indian strategic analysts have always shown its concerns over the Chinese interest in helping the development in Southern Sri Lanka. Against this backdrop, if Hambantota transforms into a Chinese military base, it will be a perfect target for the enemies of China and if so, Sri Lanka’s security will be in danger. In this backdrop, Sri Lanka never had a constant documented security strategy. The external elements of her security strategy were reflected in her foreign policy documents and speeches delivered at the United Nations. However, internal security was very difficult to strategize, since there was inconsistency in policy among governments of the day. In the

passage of time, there were two insurrections in 1971 and 1989. According to James. C. Davis (as cited by Marcuse 1941, p.11), political instability and lower satisfaction of human needs generate insurgencies, especially among young people. In the case of Sri Lanka, the two insurgencies were the results of brewing frustration of youth unemployment and social inequality.

Present day Sri Lanka's national security involves securing the state and its citizens from both external and internal threats. The capability of a state to face the national security involved the level of political resilience, effectiveness of human resources, smart economic structure and capacity, technological competence and military might. The modern-day state system shows difficulties in maintaining National Security due to social and political issues. As per the documented history, this Island nation has had many setbacks due to the lacunae of sound National Security framework.

A national security framework must address security issues by prioritizing security threats. It should also be important decisions about the security sector. Timely and sound strategies are required to achieve national security. The focus of the study is the regional power competition taking place in the Indian Ocean due to the increasing presence of the USA and China and other emerging powers in the Indo and Pacific regions. During the Cold War era, small and medium powers avoided making direct contact with superpowers by adopting the concept of nonalignment. At present, the situation is much different due to the prevailing globalization, since states are very much dependent and integrated.

Even though Westphalian sovereign rights are based on equality in international relations, despite the fact that the size and power of the nation, the international system has been challenged and realities are based on power relations and alliance behaviour of a country in performing and interacting with the international system. Globalization, open markets, and capitalist systems have shaped the destiny of the countries. No country has been spared without getting influenced and integrated into the world systems. Hence, countries must follow new strategies to survive in this global reality. In this scenario, the alternative is to balance the power between regions particularly between the USA and their allies and China. The USA has reshaped their strategies by redesigning their strategic commands from the Asia Pacific to Indo Pacific. The Aim of this strategic shift is to have sea power projection than land-based strategy to counter existing and potential threats. In that sense, they have the ability to influence the behaviour of states that comes under their interest by using their political, economic, and military and technology might.

Present National Security Concerns of Sri Lanka

There are several potential threats in today's context that Sri Lanka needs to be concerned about. These include:

- The possible re-emergence of terrorism.
- The emergence of other extremist groups.

- The creation of ethnic divisions and communal violence.
- The challenges of maritime security and border control.
- The growth of organized crime.
- Foreign interference in domestic affairs.
- Non-traditional threats through technology driven new media, including social media.
- Natural hazards.
- Influx of refugees.

Conclusion

The previously identified possible problems to the nation will endure and require attention. Furthermore, as an island nation in the Indian Ocean and in close proximity to India, this will impact all decisions and outcomes of the country. This article commemorates the 15th Anniversary of the Department of International Relations and the 40th Anniversary of the Master's program in International Relations at the University of Colombo. My research reveals that most national security decisions were made in reaction to narratives that developed over time, either as perceived dangers or essential for state survival. The publications exhibit a markedly descriptive tone. The corpus of theoretical research publications on national security is markedly constrained. Nevertheless, the establishment of esteemed institutions has offered more comprehensive remedies.

This author must recognise certain scholars and their notable contributions to academia, since I have personally engaged with their work and assimilated their experiences and gained insight. National security, viewed descriptively, has successfully addressed numerous national challenges. However, underestimating the context of the theoretical framework perspectives, particularly realism in international relations, which perceives global politics as a persistent rivalry among self-interested states competing for power and status within an anarchic system lacking centralised authority, should never be practiced despite its noble intentions and idealistic implications for humanity and nature. However, according to constructivism.

In International Relations (IR), Constructivism is a theory that highlights the significance of ideas, norms, identities, and social interactions in influencing the international system, as opposed to Realism and Idealism (or Liberalism), which prioritise material power or institutional collaboration. As an island nation, it is crucial to comprehend the optimal methods for implementing what is most beneficial for its people. Opportunities exist in the modern world if one comprehends the configuration and integration of elements of national power that are infrequently addressed by researchers trained at this esteemed institution.

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Locating Small States in Realism: External Balancing and the Case of Sri Lanka in the South Asian Sub-System

Athulasiri Kumara Samarakoon

Introduction

The balance of power theory has long occupied a central position in realist thought within international politics. As Waltz (1979) notably observed, 'if there is any distinctively political theory of international politics, balance-of-power theory is it' (p.117). Despite its foundational role, the theory has been critiqued for privileging great powers while under-theorizing the agency and strategic choices of small states. This study re-examines the balance of power theory by exploring its applicability to the behavior of small states within the international system and its subsystems. Specifically, it focuses on the viability of external balancing as a survival strategy for small states confronting more powerful regional neighbours. Lacking the material capacity for internal balancing, small states may turn to external alignments and partnerships as rational responses to an 'anarchical' international environment. While the realist concept of anarchy has been challenged as ambiguous, socially constructed, and gendered (Ashley, 1984; Wendt, 1992; Tickner, 1992), it continues to shape the strategic outlook of small states.

Therefore, this study investigates a core question: To what extent is external balancing a viable option for small states? More precisely, can small states attract and maintain the interest of extra-regional powers to balance regional power asymmetries? This question becomes particularly pertinent in regions marked by strong regional hegemons, where the strategic autonomy of smaller actors is frequently constrained. This study perceives that the South-Asian subsystem provides an appropriate case study in this regard. The aim of this qualitative analysis of Sri Lanka's foreign policy alignments within the South Asian sub-system, particularly in relation to India, the region's dominant power, is to examine how small states navigate power asymmetries. Theoretically, it also interrogates the limitations

of Realist theory, particularly its marginalization of small states, and seeks to reposition small state agency within the broader realist paradigm. The article engages key realist concepts including anarchy, balancing and its alternatives, great powers, and hegemony, to better understand the strategic space available to small states.

Realism: A Theory of Great Powers?

Realism in International Relations (IR) is not a theory of small states, rather it is more concerned with larger powers (Simpson, 2018). It fundamentally teaches that the international political system is shaped primarily by a minority of great powers. Morgenthau identifies great powers as 'first-rate powers' (1948/1973, p. 93). Similarly, Waltz emphasizes that the number of consequential states is small, asserting that viewed as the politics of the powerful, international politics can be studied in terms of the logic of small-number systems" (1979, p. 131). Also, Gilpin (1981) notes that those historically known as great powers establish and enforce the basic rules and rights that influence their behaviour and that of the lesser states in the system" (p. 30)-in the American interest identified seven great powers ("real G-7"), ranked by their ability to shape both their immediate environments and the broader world. These rankings reflect their regional and global influence.

Historically, lesser powers have not been system shapers but have instead endured the dynamics of power politics driven by the great powers. This reality was famously captured in The Melian Dialogue, where the Athenians declare: "The standard of justice depends on the equality of power to compel, and that the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept" (Thucydides 1954/1952, Book V, Ch. 89, p. 302). Nevertheless, objective equality of power is practically impossible in international politics. Waltz (1979) states that states are ranked at the top because they excel in areas such as 'population size, territorial extent, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability, and competence'. By these criteria, small states are defined as inferior across multiple dimensions.

Moreover, in IR and world politics, state size has been closely tied to capability and influence. Traditionally, small states have played a marginal role in shaping and maintaining international security (ibid). This marginalization stems from 'capability' inequalities. Nevertheless, as Waltz (1979) notes, there is a degree of 'functional similarity' among all states (p.128), although the structure of international politics is ultimately shaped by the distribution of power in favour of great powers. Hoffman (2002), in his foreword to the 2002 edition of Hedley Bull's The Anarchical Society, underscores the similar perspectives of Bull and Waltz, both of whom accept the 'anarchy framework': IR is the domain of autonomous states, operating without a common superior and governed by self-help. Both stress the significance of power distribution and the fundamental divide between great and lesser powers (p. 25). Viewed as 'a game played by the top dogs,' international politics offers

little choice to lesser powers (Sweijs, 2010, p. 2). Great powers possess both 'constitutive' and 'distributive' power: they set the rules and determine who benefits, often at the expense of smaller states (Sweijs, 2010, p. 2). As such, realism has largely focused on great powers. Structural theory, for instance, has long emphasized American primacy (Buzan, 2002, p. 49). While neo-realism defends the centrality of states (units) in general, it has concentrated particularly on great powers. Security binaries such as 'security seeker' versus 'aggressor' reflect this bias.

Further, the realist narrative presents the international system as inherently pessimistic marked by struggle, mistrust, and insecurity in what is termed "international anarchy," referring to the absence of a central authority to govern state behaviour (Waltz 1979 and 2000; Jervis, 1978; Morgenthau 1948/1973). Under anarchy, the international arena compels states to pursue their own security. Regardless of size, all states must engage in 'self-help', constantly recalculating their position in the shifting balance of power (Waltz, 1979). When a state's internal stability appears weaker than the external threat it faces, it may rationally pursue external strategies for survival. In this sense, while anarchy structurally constrains small states, it also provides room for strategic flexibility through external alignments. Their choices including 'balancing, bandwagoning, or hedging' can be analyzed through the lens of structural realism, especially with its focus on the distribution of capabilities and the logic of survival.

Seemingly, realist explanatory power is largely derived from its conception of anarchy rooted in Hobbes' ideas formed during 17th-century political violence in England (Lechner, 2019; Williams, 2007). Then, it is worth questioning whether this view remains relevant toda. In a liberal world shaped by diplomacy, market economies, globalization, and international institutions, should small states still fear anarchy? Or, as Wendt (1992 and 1999) provocatively asked, is 'anarchy (is) what states make of it'? Next, a discussion on the concept of small states will follow, returning to this question.

Small States in International Politics

Small states have gained increasing significance in recent years in world politics, largely due to the growing recognition of their 'agency in IR and their strategic importance in a transforming global order' (Hey 2003; Neumann & Gstöhl, 2006; Thorhallsson 2012; Cooper & Shaw, 2009). Although the term 'small states' has been defined in varied ways, no single conceptual framework dominates the literature (see Nicklin & Senaratne, 2025). Nonetheless, certain recurring themes allow the identification of shared characteristics and challenges associated with small states.

Keohane (1969), a key early contributor, refers to small states as 'system-ineffectual' actors, namely, those states that lack the capacity to alter systemic outcomes due to their limited material capabilities significantly. Traditionally, such states are viewed as having a minimal influence in international politics, largely responding to the behaviour of more powerful

actors. This view, however, is increasingly contested. Global interdependence, institutional proliferation, and alliance opportunities have enabled small states to enhance their strategic value (Keohane & Nye, 2001). Löwe and Thorhallsson (2013) propose a more functional definition based on limited resources, administrative capacity, and vulnerability to external shocks. Thorhallsson (2012) further argues that small states must compensate for structural disadvantages by engaging in multilateral diplomacy and pursuing niche roles. Similarly, Thorhallsson and Wivel (2006) suggest that small states can "punch above their weight" through strategic alignments and active institutional participation. These developments raise theoretical questions about the applicability of classical and structural realism to small states, particularly when their behaviour deviates from traditional power-maximizing models. Are small states compelled to either balance against or bandwagon with great powers? Can they maneuver among competing alliances for strategic autonomy, or are they destined to pursue reactive foreign policies? Answers to these questions may not lie solely in empirical evidence, but also in theoretical frameworks, and most of them have been developed with a focus on great powers.

Very clearly, literature on small states remains disproportionately focused on the European and Western contexts, often underrepresenting the strategic behaviour of small states in the Global South (Nicklin & Senaratne, 2025). The systemic constraints, normative considerations, and institutional behaviours of non-Western small states, especially those in volatile regions like South Asia, require greater scholarly attention. The following section discusses the role of regional powers, which often shape the existence of small states as buffer zones within their strategic environment.

Regional Hegemony and Small States

Hegemony frequently appears in contemporary realist literature (Prys, 2012). Regional hegemony, however, must be distinguished from its global counterpart. While global hegemony involves overwhelming power concentrated in one pole, encompassing both material (coercive) and non-material (consensual) dimensions, regional hegemony refers to dominance within a geographically bounded subsystem, often exerted by a local great power (Prys, 2012). Some scholars argue that regional hegemons, today, are constituting a multipolar global order by prompting counterbalance efforts (Mearsheimer, 2001). As the post-Cold War unipolar moment waned, emerging regional hegemonies increasingly would challenge U.S. dominance through counter-alliances (Paul et al, 2004; Brooks & Wohlforth, 2016). For small states, identifying the ambitions and behaviour of regional hegemons is crucial when deciding whether to bandwagon or balance. India’s reaction to its neighbours' growing ties with China, particularly in the case of Sri Lanka, offers a pertinent example (Werake 1993; Brewster, 2014; Ganguly & Mastro 2017).

Power transition theory offers another lens, viewing regional hegemonies as potential stabilizers (Nolte, 2010). Yet, when regional hegemons compete to create layered hierarchies

of dominance, international stability can be jeopardized (Nolte, 2010). Such power hierarchies directly affect small states, often forcing them to adapt their strategies to maintain autonomy and survival. Offensive realist John Mearsheimer asserts that "maximizing relative power to the point of hegemony is the ultimate aim of every state" (cited in Toft 2005, p.384). Although global hegemony is deemed unfeasible, for regional hegemony is the principal strategic aim of great powers (Mearshemier 1995, cited in Toft 2005). Understanding regional power rivalries as rooted in national interests is thus vital for analysing the international order and security dynamics. Flemes (2007) identifies four key criteria to distinguish regional powers: a claim to leadership, sufficient power resources, active foreign policy instruments, and regional acceptance. In South Asia, India clearly meets these criteria. The importance of regional powers is further underscored by growing complexity in 'regional security complexes' (Buzan & Waever, 2003), which increasingly shape the strategic options available to smaller neighbours. Stuart-Ingersoll (2012) develops a Regional Powers and Security Framework (RPSF) that connects regional power dynamics to global order, emphasizing how regional actors influence their neighbours while interacting with the broader international system. He draws from Buzan and Waever's argument that regional powers define the polarity of regional security complexes, such as unipolar in Southern Africa, bipolar in South Asia and notes their influence is regionally significant though globally limited (Buzan & Waever ,2003, cited in Stuart-Ingersoll 2012, p.7).

This regional lens enriches our understanding of structural concepts, such as polarity, power distribution, and hegemony. For instance, while Buzan and Waever see South Asia as a bipolar system, others view it as unipolar (Krishna, 2003). This study examines how small states, such as Sri Lanka, navigate the sub-systemic politics of South Asia under the shadow of India's regional dominance. Although systemic IR theories now pay more attention to small states, discussions on capability and power continue to marginalize them. However, this study recommends a non-hegemonic approach, echoing Lee and Smith (2010) call for more attention to the 'overwhelming majority' of small states. Building on Richard Higgott's critique in international political economy, Lee and Smith urge a turn away from hegemon-centered frameworks. This opens space for analyzing how small states resist, accommodate, or strategically engage with regional hegemons, especially in the Global South..Regional power dynamics are particularly relevant for understanding small states in highly asymmetric regions. Regional powers are defined not only by their material capacity but also by their normative leadership, ability to shape regional rules, and influence over neighboring states. Buzan and Waever (2003) argue that international politics is best understood through "regional security complexes," where regional powers dominate strategic agendas. It is clear, then, in South Asia, that India functions as a regional power. Its military interventions, economic initiatives, and diplomatic strategies have significantly shaped the foreign policies of Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives.

These smaller states have often faced a strategic dilemma: accommodate India's preferences or seek alternative alignments to balance its influence. The literature on regional powers and

small state responses documents how hegemonic ambitions produce spheres of influence, prompting reactions such as external balancing, hedging, or alignment. Prys (2010) outlines three regional power roles: stabilizer, leader, and hegemon each shaping the foreign policy space available to neighbouring states. India's historical interventions and strategic partnerships have contributed to its image as a hegemon in South Asia. Flemes and Nolte (2010) further note that regional powers project their influence through a combination of hard and soft power. This compels neighbouring small states to craft nuanced foreign policy strategies. The rise of China and the Belt and Road Initiative have created diplomatic and economic alternatives for small states like Sri Lanka, offering room to maneuver. These shifts underscore the need to reconsider the relevance of regional frameworks in explaining global political change. As the liberal international order faces growing strain, regionally driven multipolarity emerges as a more plausible organizing principle. In this context, the role of small states must be re-evaluated not as passive followers, but as strategic actors with distinct alignments, preferences, and survival strategies. The next section turns to these strategies, particularly external balancing, as a key tool available to small states.

External Balancing and Other Alternatives Available for Small States

External balancing used through alliances is especially crucial for small states that cannot rely solely on internal capacity, and Sri Lanka is a clear example. However, small states often adopt alternative external behaviours such as soft balancing, strategic partnerships, or institutional engagement (Schroeder, 1994). Walt (1995) suggests that states balance in response not to raw power but perceived threats. Mouritzen (2005) similarly notes that any local power may opt for balancing due to threat perception. In this context, alliance formation becomes a key strategy. This dynamic was particularly visible in the bipolar Cold War era, where military and economic alliances proliferated under superpower rivalry.

Neo-realism identifies a range of behaviours beyond the traditional balancing and bandwagoning dichotomy. These include strategies such as binding, buffering, bonding, beleaguering, hiding, transcendence, and specialization, which reflect different forms of strategic adaptation by weaker powers (Ikenberry, 2001; Joffe, 2002; Kagan, 2003). In bandwagoning, states align with the source of threat rather than opposing it. As Dwivedi (2012) observes, when the international system fails to balance an aggressor, weaker states may join the stronger side in exchange for security or other benefits. In such scenarios, survival often entails compromising on full independence or strategic autonomy.Foreign policy literature adds further nuance to these choices, interpreting them as defensive or pragmatic strategies. Additionally, scholars have identified "hedging" as a distinct approach employed by small and middle powers. Kuik (2021) defines hedging as a middle path between balancing and bandwagoning that combines elements of accommodation with selective resistance to dominant powers. This strategy is particularly relevant in the Indo-Pacific, where small and middle powers such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka navigate intensifying strategic competition among China, India, and the United States.

While great powers shape the system, smaller states often resort to 'multilateralism', 'niche diplomacy', or 'quietism' as a means of influence (Hill, 2003). Also, small states may maximize their normative power by leveraging their marginality to influence select international issues often through strong institutional engagement and value-driven diplomacy. Neo-realism, with its emphasis on structural constraints, typically reduces small state behaviour to systemic incentives or disincentives (Waltz 1979; Snyder 1991). This same lens is also offered for analysis by hegemonic stability (Gilpin, 1981) theory of realism. Due to limited capabilities, small states face a narrower margin for error in their external policy postures (Waltz, 1979, pp. 184–185). Jervis (1978) similarly argues that states with weak material bases such as non-defensible borders or small territories are more vulnerable under anarchy. Elman (1995) adds that such states tend to be less constrained by domestic politics and more responsive to external threats.

Neoclassical realism emphasizes that both systemic and domestic (unit-level) variables shape foreign policy (Lobell et al., 2009). These domestic factors such as elite perceptions, leadership choices, and state capacity can either reinforce or mitigate structural pressures. Rose (1998) points out that the relationship between power capabilities and foreign policy is often indirect and complex. Whether a state balances or bandwagons depends on capabilities, strategic culture, and leadership choices. Nevertheless, both balancing and bandwagoning behaviours are ultimately shaped by the distribution of power and the structure of the international system. Polarity, whether unipolar, bipolar, or multipolar, reflects how power is distributed across major actors. Hegemony, in contrast, refers to the exceptional concentration of power in one dominant state (Konrad 2012). Together, these concepts frame the strategic choices available to small states navigating an uncertain global order.

Sri Lanka: Extra-regional powers and External Balancing

Sri Lanka's relations with great powers date back to the colonial era (Dewasiri ,2008; Wickremasinghe 2006; Keerawella, 2021). Its post-independence leadership mindset was shaped by historical experiences of foreign invasions and a continued reliance on the UK for security (Mendis, 1992). In seeking national security, sovereignty, and survival, Sri Lanka has consistently depended on great powers for economic, military, and political assistance (De Silva 1993; Kronstadt, 2009). Described as "a local power whose demands are restricted to its own and adjacent areas" (Indorf 1985: 3, cited in De Silva 1993:372), Sri Lanka has exhibited small power characteristics by bandwagoning with or joining alliances with great powers (De Silva 2017; Gunasekara 2015). Economic liberalization since the 1980s pushed the country closer to extra-regional powers. The protracted ethnic war further intensified this dependence on international partnerships for military, economic, and political support (Goodhand 2005 and 2006; Uyangoda 2007).

Studies on Sri Lanka's early foreign policy, such as Gagameragedara (2011), Kodikara (1980), and Melegoda (2000) highlight the asymmetrical power relations on which Sri Lanka depended. Particular attention is paid to Mrs. Bandaranaike's premiership, with Nissanka (1984) showing a favorable view of her tilt towards socialist countries. Yet, her adept navigation between capitalist and socialist blocs was a distinctive feature of small power strategy under bipolarity, enabling her to manage regional affairs, including relations with India. India's regional hegemony has consistently shaped Sri Lanka's external policy (De Silva 1993; Pardesi 2005; Orland, 2008). The Nehruvian phase reflected consensual hegemony through goodwill, multilateral engagement, and charismatic leadership. Nehru even dismissed fears of Indian domination as "totally unreasonable" (Nehru 2010: 52). Warnapala (2011) highlights the SLFP-led coalitions' post-1956 relations with the USSR. While Soviet aid to Sri Lanka remained modest, relations with China were stronger. After 1977, Sri Lanka's shift to liberal economics created ambivalence in Soviet policy, though the USSR remained diplomatically cautious (Racioppi, 1994).

India's intervention in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict (Kodikara, 1989; De Silva and May, 1991) and Sri Lanka's alignment with the USA in the 1980s and China in later decades reflected Colombo's delicate balancing act. India's military capacity and strategic aspirations, coupled with its perceived insecurity, shaped a suspicious regional neighborhood policy (Gupta, 1990; Devotta, 2003). In the 21st century, Sri Lanka was labeled a 'failed state' due to internal fragmentation and weakened territorial integrity (Rotberg, 2003). Its human rights record, especially during the civil war's final stages, invited scrutiny and constrained autonomy. Increasingly, Sri Lanka turned from Western powers to China, whose rising influence remains underexplored in the literature (Samaranayake, 2011).

Securitizing the Ethnic Conflict: Threat Perceptions and State Response

For many critics, the 1978 Constitution marked an authoritarian shift in Sri Lankan politics, enabling liberal economic reforms to unfold within a politically constrained environment. However, unresolved ethnic tensions contributed to the growing militarization of the regime. The simultaneous need to manage Indian hegemonic expectations, accommodate extra-regional ambitions (notably from the U.S. and China), and maintain political authoritarianism compromised Sri Lanka's non-aligned posture and further limited its foreign policy agency. In this context, De Mel (2007), drawing on Hannah Arendt, observed that violence and authoritarianism in Sri Lanka signaled a deeper legitimacy crisis: "Excesses... draw attention to humanitarian tragedy and disaster... the ground on which peace and human rights movements make their pitch" (De Mel 2007, p.50; Arendt 1970).

India's influence peaked during the outbreak of the ethnic war in the 1980s, while the 1990s witnessed the growing internationalization of the conflict (Bandarage, 2009). Intensified international media coverage increasingly portrayed Sri Lanka as a human rights violator (Sahadevan, 1997; Podder, 2006; DeVotta, 2004; Uyangoda, 2007; Wilson, 1988, 1994;

Balasingham, 2004; Richardson, 2005; Goodhand et al., 2011). India's strategic expansion following 1971 (Krishna, 1999) combined formal diplomacy with covert coercion (Rajagopalan, 2000), further complicating Sri Lanka's external balancing efforts.The 1987 Indo-Lanka Accord introduced provincial councils, reshaping governance (Uyangoda, 1994). India's role constrained military responses to the LTTE (De Silva, 1995), and the IPKF's deployment marked a controversial direct intervention. While Krishna (1999) sees India's behavior as hegemonic, others suggest it introduced Colombo to the idea of power-sharing (Uyangoda, 2007). Rothstein (1977) argues that small states seek to preserve inherited systems but are constrained by limited capabilities. Their survival involves managing internal security, economic viability, and diplomatic alignment. Despite extensive work on Indo-Lanka ties, systemic-level IR analyses remain limited. Realist IR theory especially concepts like power asymmetry, balancing behavior, and dependency offers a suitable analytical lens.

Bipolarity and Non-Alignment

Sri Lanka adopted non-alignment as a survival strategy during bipolarity, shaped by sub-regional pressures particularly India's dominance. Non-alignment has been pragmatically applied by vulnerable states (Karunadasa, 1997). In Sri Lanka, the UNP pursued pragmatic non-alignment; the SLFP adopted a more ideologically committed version. Nissanka (1984) and De Silva (1981) credit S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike for pioneering principled non-alignment. Under Mrs. Bandaranaike, Sri Lanka's diplomacy earned prestige, especially during the 1976 NAM Summit in Colombo. Wendt and Barnett (1993) emphasize that the security concerns of Third World states differ from those of the West. Sri Lanka's post-1983 ethnic conflict and militancy signaled internal weakness and invited external interventions. The Rajapaksa administration later counterbalanced India by strengthening ties with China (Hewage, 2023; De Silva-Ranasinghe 2011; Devotta 2010). Despite economic growth post-1977, structural limitations persisted. Militarization became both a coping mechanism and a symptom of failure. De Mel (2007) sees militarization post-1983 as a failure to accommodate diversity, lending to Sri Lanka's portrayal as a failed state: As Jeganathan argued "The anti-Tamil pogrom of 1983.. [marked] a crisis in Sri Lanka's modernity.. paving the way for the decline of political science analysis and the emergence of an anthropological discourse..." (Jeganathan 1998, cited in Mel 2007: 28–29). From 1983 to 2009, Sri Lanka's identity oscillated between war-torn state and humanitarian violators. It relied on mediation from India and the West, reinforcing its limited status and influence in global affairs.

While structural realism may not fully explain Sri Lanka's domestic ethnic conflict, it offers insight into the state's foreign policy behavior, particularly its response to India's role in the conflict. In the 1980s, Sri Lanka experienced the consequences of resisting Indian regional hegemony. In the post-war period, especially under the Rajapaksa administration, the growing alignment with China was widely interpreted as a strategic balancing move by a small state. Although this study does not extensively address post-war developments, they

warrant further inquiry, particularly considering India's evolving foreign policy and its pursuit of liberal hegemony in the Indian Ocean region prior to the current regime.

Conclusion

This discussion focused on balance of power theory with an emphasis on small states, particularly Sri Lanka within the South Asian sub-region. The concept of 'small states' remains fluid, while dominant IR literature continues to privilege great powers. Realism's emphasis on anarchy often justifies the structural dominance of major powers in both regional and international arenas. While not dismissing the relevance of Realism, this article critiqued its overemphasis on great powers by examining Sri Lanka's survival strategies-especially its responses to Indian regional hegemony. Economic fragility, internal conflict, and a non-aligned foreign policy tradition have shaped Sri Lanka's external alignments. In this context, Sri Lanka's approach reflects a form of external balancing, where strategic engagement with extra-regional powers becomes a means of managing regional asymmetries. Any rethinking of IR theory must take seriously the lived realities of small states, particularly as shifting global power dynamics continue to deepen their strategic uncertainties and survival dilemmas.

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Small States, Big Footprints: Navigating Power Asymmetries through Strategic Agency

Kulani Wijayabahu

Introduction

Sri Lanka's centuries-old seafaring traditions, agricultural innovation, and fight against terrorism constitute formidable resilience-yet these achievements remain absent from both domestic policy frameworks and international norm debates. The author argues that reframing these domestic successes as strategic assets can redefine small-state agency in global affairs. In a system where power asymmetries prevail, "small" states are neither helpless nor peripheral; they are adept architects of their own security and influence. As Robert Keohane reminds us, 'If Lilliputians can tie up Gulliver, we must study them as carefully as we study the giants (Keohane, 1969, p. 310)'.

Small states are not periphery in international relations; through deliberate agency-anchored in policy consistency, broad-based domestic participation, and reciprocal endorsement-they manage structural imbalances to secure autonomy, shape outcomes, and contribute meaningfully to global governance (Wijayabahu, 2024). This central argument challenges the great-power bias that has long dominated IR theory and practice. By reframing asymmetry as a normal condition rather than a temporary imbalance (Womack, 2016,p.7), we open analytical space to recognize how less-powerful actors leverage relational tactics to extract concessions, build coalitions, and institutionalize stability across diverse arenas .For Sri Lanka, this is not merely an academic abstraction but a call to learn from exemplary small-state practices elsewhere. Singapore's mastery of niche diplomacy and economic governance, Bhutan's integration of holistic well-being into foreign policy, New Zealand's deft pandemic diplomacy, and Norway's leadership as a norm entrepreneur all showcase how disciplined agency transforms vulnerability into strategic resilience. By studying these 'Lilliputian' successes, Sri Lanka can adapt proven strategies-whether in infrastructure

negotiation, environmental stewardship, or digital innovation-to enhance its own foreign policy toolkit.

At the disciplinary level, embracing small-state agency corrects a longstanding shortsightedness. It invites us to reconceive core IR concepts-sovereignty becomes relational and negotiated (Wildcat, 2020), power extends to epistemic and procedural domains (Archer, Cawston, Matheson, & Geuskens, 2019), and order arises from shared norms forged by actors both large and small (Morris, Hong, Chiu, & Liu, 2015). Centering the asymmetry–agency argument developed in this article equips us with analytical tools to understand how small states navigate complexity, from Cold War non-alignment to twenty-first-century digital diplomacy. In this article, the argument unfolds in four streamlined steps. First, it critically dismantles traditional great-power paradigms-polarity, hierarchy, and hegemony-to reveal how they systematically sideline small-state initiative. Second, it maps the intellectual shift from viewing small states as passive buffers to recognizing their proactive tactics, charting three waves of small-state scholarship: alliance diplomacy, economic specialization, and norm-driven identity work. Third, it connects these theoretical insights into six actionable strategies for Sri Lanka that turn inherent structural imbalances into diplomatic leverage. Finally, the conclusion weaves these threads into a compelling call: small states are not peripheral actors but central architects of a resilient, twenty-first-century world order.

Asymmetry–Agency from Great-Power Approaches

Traditional IR scholarship locates the nexus of asymmetry and agency squarely within great-power dynamics, treating smaller states as reactive actors whose choices are largely determined by systemic pressures. Three dominant lenses-polarity, hierarchy, and hegemony-exemplify this bias, each offering powerful insights but also significant blind spots when it comes to understanding small-state agency.

Polarity and Agency

Polarity theories in IR define the international system almost entirely by the configuration and behaviour of its leading states, implicitly relegating smaller actors to the sidelines. Early work by Carr (1946) and Morgenthau (1948) framed Europe's multipolar order as a dance of great powers balancing one another, with little attention paid to how lesser states might navigate or influence that structure. Kenneth Waltz (1959) then distilled this into a bipolar model, arguing that stability derived from the predictable rivalry between two superpowers, again leaving the strategic capacities of smaller states largely unexplored.

In the Cold War era, scholarship remained similarly great-power centric. George Kennan and Lukacs (1997) focused on the United States' containment strategy, while Gaddis (2005) charted how United States and Soviet decision-making shaped global outcomes. Charles

Krauthammer's proclamation of the 'unipolar moment' and William Wohlforth's argument that a single hegemon could stabilize world politics, both treat other states primarily as followers or balancers of U.S. dominance (Krauthammer, 1990; Wohlforth, 1999). Even when later scholars critiqued unipolarity's sustainability-such as Ikenberry (2002) and Monteiro (2011)-their analyses still revolved around the hegemon's choices and the counter-hegemonic reactions they provoked, rather than examining how small states might exercise independent agency within or beyond that structure.

Hierarchy and Agency

Hierarchy-based theories in IR foreground how leading states craft and sustain ordering arrangements that subordinate actors accept in exchange for security or economic benefits. David Lake's contract theory of hierarchy, for instance, argues that great powers establish authoritative institutions-such as defence pacts or economic blocs-through bargained agreements that trade subordinate autonomy for collective stability (Lake, 1996). This framing inherently centers on great powers as the principal architects and enforcers of order, treating lesser states as passive beneficiaries whose agency consists largely in choosing whether to opt into or resist these hierarchical bargains.

Critics within the regime school and constructivist camps have noted that such an emphasis on material authority and formal agreements sidelines the social and historical dimensions of hierarchy. Ayşe Zarakol (2017) contends that by focusing narrowly on power asymmetry and legal authority, Lake underestimates how shared norms and cultural understandings shape which hierarchies endure and why subordinate states comply. Likewise, Alexander Wendt's social theory problematizes the notion that hierarchy is reducible to capabilities alone, showing instead that state identities and interests are co-constituted through ongoing interaction within normative frameworks (Wendt, 1999).

Even analyses of the liberal international order-from G. John Ikenberry's portrayal of U.S.-led, consent-based rule-making (Ikenberry, 2011) to Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore's work on the bureaucratic power of international organizations (Barnett & Finnemore, 1999)-presuppose a great-power basis. These studies demonstrate how hegemons institutionalize their preferences via multilateral regimes but rarely explore how smaller states leverage those very institutions to exercise independent influence. As a result, hierarchy theories excel at explaining the strategies of major powers in constructing world orders yet consistently marginalize the adaptive tactics and normative entrepreneurship of less-powerful states.

Hegemony and Agency

Hegemonic theories in IR center on how a single dominant state uses both coercive and consensual power to structure global order. Charles Kindleberger's Hegemonic Stability

Theory argues that a preeminent power is necessary to underwrite international public goods-such as open markets and security guarantees-because only a hegemon can shoulder the costs and enforce compliance (Kindleberger, 1986). Robert Keohane builds on this by showing that a hegemon's leadership fosters robust regimes. Once the dominant state creates precise rules and institutions, others continue to obey them even as the hegemon's relative power wanes (Keohane, 2005).

Neo-Gramscian scholars shift the focus from material capabilities to ideology and culture, seeing hegemony as the manufacturing of consent. Robert Cox describes how a "historical bloc" of state and non-state actors coalesces around a dominant ideology, embedding the hegemon's norms deep within global institutions (Cox, 1983). Antonio Gramsci's original concept of cultural leadership likewise emphasizes that hegemonic power rests on shaping what societies regard as 'common sense' allowing a leading state to maintain dominance through a blend of persuasion and coercion (Bates, 1975).Even liberal analyses-like G. John Ikenberry's study of the U.S.-led postwar order-assume that great-power consent underpins institutional stability. Ikenberry shows that smaller states accept American-sponsored rules because they gain security and economic benefits, yet their role is largely reactive: they join or exit the system rather than craft its foundational norms (Ikenberry, 2011). Across these perspectives, hegemony theories consistently privilege the strategies and interests of major powers, leaving the independent tactics of smaller states largely off the analytical radar.

Gaps and Pathways Forward

Despite their explanatory power, these great-power approaches share common weaknesses:

1. Marginalization of small actors: They depict small states as reactive rather than as co-creators of order.
2. Overemphasis on material capabilities: They underappreciate epistemic, normative, and procedural bases of power.
3. Neglect of relational tactics: They fail to account for how small states deploy consistency, participation, and endorsement to shape outcomes.

These gaps highlight the need for a small-state agency perspective. By foregrounding how less-powerful actors strategically navigate asymmetry, we can better capture the full complexity of world politics. The subsequent section will demonstrate how small states use disciplined, relational tactics to transform structural constraints into opportunities for influence.

Beyond the Shadow of Giants: The Rise of Small-State Studies

Over the past six decades, a growing body of scholarship has systematically challenged the great-power bias, demonstrating that small states are neither hapless victims nor peripheral bystanders, but active architects of their own destinies. To trace how IR came to recognize small-state agency, lets now turn to the evolution of that literature in three waves:

1. Early Foundations (1950s–1980s): breaking out of helplessness through diplomacy and alliance building
2. Economic Turn (1980s–2000s): corporatism and competitiveness in world markets
3. Normative & Identity Tools (2000s–today): soft power, narrative branding, and the "Global IR" corrective

Early Foundations (1950s–1980s)

For much of the early Cold War, small states were cast as "externally helpless and constantly threatened" (Goetschel, 1998). Annette Baker Fox's The Power of Small States (1959) overturned this portrayal by documenting how Sweden, Switzerland, and Portugal used neutrality, skilled negotiation, and geostrategic signaling to extract concessions from both Axis and Allied powers. Fox's work established three enduring insights: small states can (1) carve out niche security roles, (2) demonstrate indispensability to larger partners, and (3) embed stability via formal agreements (Fox, 1959). Building on Fox, Robert Rothstein's Alliances and Small Powers (1968) showed that Iceland's control over North Atlantic air routes and Denmark's naval contributions allowed these minor partners to shape NATO's strategic posture to suit their own defense needs (Rothstein, 1968). Michael Handel's Weak States in the International System (1981) further illustrated how Singapore leveraged ASEAN membership to balance larger neighbours and cultivate a global reputation for reliability and competence (Handel, 1981).

Economic Turn (1980s–2000s)

Beginning in the mid-1980s, scholars turned to the question of how small states could not only survive but thrive economically. Peter Katzenstein's Small States in World Markets (1985) revealed that corporatist coordination among government, labour, and industry enabled Denmark and Austria to attain competitiveness levels on par with-and sometimes exceeding-those of much larger economies. By aligning wage-setting, social welfare, and export promotion, these states achieved high productivity and stable growth (Katzenstein 1985). Subsequent quantitative work by Easterly & Kraay (2000) and Alesina & Spolaore (2003) confirmed that small states frequently enjoy per-capita GDP equal to or higher than larger peers, debunking the long-standing myth that size inherently constrains prosperity. Easterly & Kraay's cross-country regressions found no systematic size penalty once institutional quality and openness were controlled for, while Alesina & Spolaore argued that

the gains from smaller, more homogeneous populations-such as policy consensus and adaptability-often outweigh diseconomies of scale (Easterly & Kraay 2000; Alesina & Spolaore 2003).

Beyond corporatism, studies have highlighted niche specialization as an economic strategy. For instance, Ireland's focus on information technology and pharmaceuticals in the 1990s transformed it into the 'Celtic Tiger,' while Luxembourg's early embrace of financial-services regulation turned it into a leading EU fund-management centre (Barry, 2004). Similarly, Finland leveraged its small domestic market to pioneer mobile communications-ultimately producing global champions like Nokia (Smith, 2001). These examples demonstrate that small states can convert limited size into agility, rapidly pivoting to high-value sectors where they can outcompete larger economies.These economic insights prompted development agencies and international financial institutions to shift away from 'one-size-fits-all' prescriptions. Instead, they began emphasizing institutional adaptability, targeted industrial policy, and regulatory frameworks calibrated to each state's unique strengths (World Bank 2003)

Normative & Identity Tools (2000s–today)

In the 2000s, IR scholars spotlighted how small states deploy normative tools and identity branding to wield influence. Jacqueline Braveboy-Wagner (2010) showed how Trinidad & Tobago combined moral authority with diplomatic coalition-building to shape UN human-rights resolutions. Christopher Browning (2006) demonstrated that Iceland's self-branding as an "Arctic environmental steward" secured it disproportionate influence at the Arctic Council. Meanwhile, Andrew Cooper & Timothy Shaw (2009) contrasted small-state vulnerability with resilience, illustrating how New Zealand's nuclear-free policy and Luxembourg's financial-regulation expertise translate deeply held domestic values into international leverage.

To correct enduring Euro-American biases, Iver B. Neumann & Sieglinde Gstöhl (2006) launched the "Global IR" agenda, urging inclusion of Pacific islanders' climate advocacy, Caribbean OAS diplomacy, and African resource-for-development models. Matthias Maass (2020) extended this global vista by tracing survival strategies of non-European micro-states-such as Gulf emirates and Caribbean financial hubs-highlighting that coalition-building and norm entrepreneurship are universal small-state tools. Together, these three waves underscore that small-state agency is neither accidental nor exceptional but rooted in deliberate, context-sensitive strategies. As Sri Lanka stands at a crossroads of governance transition, integrating diplomatic finesse, institutional adaptability, and normative leadership will be essential to transform structural asymmetries into strategic resilience.

Key Insights for Sri Lanka: Transforming Small-State Agency into Practice

At the time of these anniversary celebrations, Sri Lanka is led by a newly elected, people-oriented government with fresh political ideals and public expectations. As this administration seeks to redefine the country's place in the world, the small-state literature offers six practical, interconnected strategies for converting structural imbalances into strategic strengths.

Institutionalize continuous diplomacy

A dedicated Asymmetry Unit within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should meet regularly to review key negotiations-whether maritime infrastructure, agritech partnerships, or fisheries disputes-and to rehearse alternative bargaining positions. After each major engagement, structured After-Action Reviews involving diplomats, economists, legal advisers, and private-sector experts will capture lessons learned, refine standard operating procedures, and update 'playbooks' for future talks. This mirrors Switzerland's rotating task forces on neutrality issues (Fox 1959) and Iceland's iterative coalition work in NATO (Rothstein, 1968), both of which built enduring negotiation 'muscle memory.'

Embed Whole-of-Society Participation

For every strategic sector, Sri Lanka can convene Multi-Stakeholder Councils-bringing together government ministries, opposition MPs, industry associations, unions,media, academia and civil-society voices. Prior to signing any major treaty, securing formal 'reciprocal endorsements' from each member will signal unified domestic backing to foreign counterparts. Denmark's corporatist tripartite pacts (Katzenstein 1985) and Trinidad & Tobago's NGO-parliamentary coalitions at the UN (Braveboy-Wagner 2010) demonstrate how broad participation multiplies channels for consistent messaging and reinforces bargaining credibility.

Focus on Economic Niche Strategies

Sri Lanka should select three to five high-potential sectors-such as organic tea derivatives, spice extracts, ICT-enabled healthcare, or blue-economy services-and establish Sectoral Export Councils that streamline regulation, set quality benchmarks, and coordinate export-promotion missions. Peer Advisory Visits to Ireland's Industry Development Authority and Israel's Innovation Authority will help Sri Lanka tailor cluster-development and FDI-attraction models. Denmark and Austria matched larger economies through corporatist coordination (Katzenstein, 1985); Ireland and Luxembourg achieved 'Tiger'-level transformation via focused specialization. Sri Lanka's sectoral councils can replicate these successes by aligning public policy with private-sector expertise.

Lead through Norm Entrepreneurship

By sponsoring U.N. resolutions on "Climate-Resilient Small-Farm Agriculture" or "Sustainable Maritime Resource Management," Sri Lanka can turn its agrarian know-how

and maritime heritage into global norms. Hosting a Biennial Colombo Knowledge Forum on small-state solutions in agriculture and fisheries will reinforce Sri Lanka's role as a norm leader and invite co-sponsorship from like-minded states. Norway's Ottawa mine-ban initiative and Costa Rica's human-rights advocacy (Cox 1983; Ingebritsen 2002) illustrate how domestic expertise can translate into international agenda-setting.

Build Strategic Coalitions

Revitalizing SAARC as a South Asian Small-State Caucus, or forming issue-based sub-groups with Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, and Bangladesh, will enable unified positions on debt sustainability, digital governance, and water management. An Indian Ocean Blue Economy Forum involving Seychelles and Mauritius can pool expertise in maritime surveillance, sustainable fisheries, and coastal tourism policy. Pacific islanders have amplified their climate-finance voice through concerted action (Corbett & Connell, 2015); Sri Lanka's own coalitions can similarly multiply its diplomatic leverage.

Harness Innovation and Digital Diplomacy

An e-Sri Lanka Residency Program offering digital visas, remote-work benefits, and investment incentives can attract global talent-much like Estonia's e-residency (Kotka, Vargas Alvarez del Castillo, & Korjus, 2015). Virtual Consular Services, powered by AI chatbots and secure video links, will deepen ties with the diaspora and extend Sri Lanka's soft power. Establishing an Indian Ocean Cyber Norms Lab in Colombo will convene technologists, academics, and diplomats to draft regional guidelines on data privacy and maritime cybersecurity. Estonia's digital platforms and Singapore's e-governance initiatives show how technology can become a reservoir of diplomatic influence (Smart Nation and Digital Government Office, 2021).

Conclusion

In reclaiming asymmetry as structural normalcy rather than a fatal flaw, this chapter has shown that small states possess the strategic tools to turn vulnerability into influence. From Cold War neutrality to modern norm-entrepreneurship, from corporatist competitiveness to digital diplomacy, 'Lilliputian' actors demonstrate that capability deficits can be overcome through consistency, inclusive participation, and reciprocal endorsement. For Sri Lanka-now under a people-driven government-these lessons are not abstract theory but a roadmap for reshaping its global footprint. By institutionalizing rigorous after-action reviews, mobilizing multi-stakeholder consensus, honing niche economic strengths, sponsoring global norms, forging regional coalitions, and leveraging digital platforms, Sri Lanka can navigate its asymmetries with confidence and creativity. Ultimately, small-state agency is no accident; it is the result of deliberate, context-sensitive choices that repurpose imbalance into bargaining power, coalition capital, and agenda-setting influence. As Sri Lanka embraces

this playbook, it will not merely survive within the shadows of giants, it will stand among them as an indispensable architect of the twenty-first-century world order.

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Focusing on the Future:
A Strategized Foreign Policy for Sri Lanka

George I. H. Cooke

Introduction

Uncertainty, irrationality, and confusion are hallmarks of global affairs at the start of the second quarter of the 21st century. It is eight decades since the end of the Second World War, yet the fears of conflict and volatile environments that justify such fears are rampant, and have not dissipated, but rather dominate discourse. Stemming from the tension that prevails owing to existing battles, and the drawing of battle lines, as well as unreasonable action, and the persistent violation of sovereignty, decision formulators and implementors are severely challenged. It is thus amidst this chaos, that opportunity springs, and needs to be embraced in a cogent manner. Herein the rationale for strategizing for a country gathers momentum continuously.

Strategizing is paramount in the sphere of Foreign Policy if a nation state is to survive, but more significantly, if it is to soar. Dean Acheson, former US Secretary of State, in attempting to define the concept of strategizing, noted that it was a process of being able "to look ahead, not into the distant future, but beyond the vision of the operating officers caught in the smoke and crises of current battle; far enough ahead to see the emerging form of things to come and outline what should be done to meet or anticipate them."(Acheson, 1987). Whether it was Acheson, Atlee or Adenauer in the West, or Nehru, Mao or Abe in the East, a consistent and rallying point was the ability to look ahead, comprehend that which was to come, and structure decisions so that failure was avoided, and success was attained.

An attempt is being made through this article to bring the rationale for strategizing, for Sri Lanka, into mainstream discourse. All states, and those tasked with leading them, chart a course in Foreign Policy that they deem suitable at that juncture, and which is, in their opinion, in the best interest of their countries. Dwelling solely on the present, or stuck primarily in the past, does not suffice. If the present is uncertain, irrational and consuming, the future promises to be that much more incomprehensible. Yet it is imperative for the future to be the focus, as the present is steered through, with clear understanding of the past.

Foreign Policy Formulation and Implementation

The Foreign Policy of a country is formulated by the executive branch of the state, and brings together a relatively small group to strategize. The implementation is undertaken by the executive, with a larger community, which are the implementing agencies. Of equal importance is the review of that which is formulated and implemented, on a periodic basis, as it enables finetuning and/or changing the policy to best suit the changing times and situations. Thus, the formulation and implementation of a strategic Foreign Policy are key for the success of ensuring a secure and successful country. While factors within the country can be controlled in varied ways, that which happens beyond the borders of a country are often out of its control. Hence a country's Foreign Policy, or its *modus operandi* with the outside world, must be strategic in outlook, and effective in implementation, if much is to be derived from it.

Formulation by the pinnacle of leadership, is due to the need to protect and promote the national interest of the nation state. Globally the leader, as sovereign, sitting in their capacity as Emperor or Emperess, King or Queen, and latterly as Prime Minister or President, remained the font from whom power emanated, and thus decision-making was entrusted. This, then flowed through the state structure, with implementation required by varied agencies. While monarchs ruled in their absolute capacity, the establishment of republics saw sovereignty residing in the people, and their elected leaders being given the task of leading the nation on behalf of the people.

Therefore, of abiding relevance is the notion that the leader remains paramount, and even if a decision is not directly made at the helm, consultation is mandatory prior to action being taken. This would occur in situations in which a minister has been appointed to lead the respective ministry. This practice remains the norm. The leader as chief diplomat, remains at the heart of decision-making, functioning as the key implementor, and also on most occasions, having to bear the sole responsibility for their action and the resulting impact. If a decision resulted in a positive outcome, it reflected well on the leader. Similarly, if there was a fallout from the decision, it would be accordingly blamed on the leader who would bear the brunt of their action.

Sri Lanka's International Engagement

The first foray of the island nation of Sri Lanka into the world of diplomacy and international presence can be traced back to ancient times. Kings of bygone eras, who ruled in different parts of the island, engaged with royal courts overseas, shared religious beliefs, and even welcomed and traded with business entities. Archival material and research publications contain numerous references to these encounters, which indicate awareness of the island globally in periods when many other countries were not in existence. Known by various names, the island nation in the Indian Ocean attracted much attention mainly due to its location, and for the gregarious nature of its people, who were keen to expand their spheres of engagement. This desire to reach out has had its own impact with much change taking place, especially from a cultural perspective as those who invaded or visited, left an indelible mark.

In the colonial period, when the island nation was ruled to varying degrees by the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British, the depth of foreign engagement was dictated by the colonial authority. The Governors, especially those appointed by the British, held sway, were the sole deciding factor, and ruled with absolute authority, even resulting in controversial decisions which were challenged by Ceylonese in representations made to London. It was only with independence in 1948, after four and a half centuries of colonialism, that leaders of the country received the opportunity to govern, and hence formulated and implemented foreign policy, and thus engaged in diplomacy, in all its forms and manifestations.The first Prime Minister, Don Stephen Senanayake was constitutionally required to head the Ministry of External Affairs and Defence, with Article 46 (4) of the 1947 Constitution of the Dominion of Ceylon noting that: 'The Prime Minister shall be in charge of the Ministry of Defence and External Affairs and shall administer the matters relating to that Ministry in addition to such other matters as he may determine to retain in his charge.' (Ceylon (Constitution) Order in Council, n.d.). Thereafter, the first Republican Constitution of 1972, did not expressly require the Prime Minister to continue as Minister of Defence and External Affairs, but the incumbent at the time, Sirimavo Ratwatte Dias Bandaranaike, chose to serve in this position. After the 1977 General Election when Junius Richard Jayewardene formed his first Cabinet, the island nation received its first non-Prime Ministerial Foreign Minister in Abdul Cader Shahul Hameed, who continued even after the second Republican Constitution was promulgated in February 1978. The bifurcation of the Ministry, and delegation of authority, thus resulted in a Member of Parliament being appointed to this position, with no leader thereafter, opting to retain Foreign Affairs during their tenures.

Therefore, the leadership of the country, also identified as those in decision-making positions, would include Ministers of Foreign Affairs whose task it has been to engage at home, travel extensively and project a positive image of the island nation. This was especially possible after the appointment of a Member of Parliament to the portfolio, rather than expecting the Prime Minister to carry the entire responsibility. However, with the

exception of a very few, the others have not been held in high esteem, or were completely overshadowed by the higher authority during their terms in office.

Herein, diplomacy constitutes the means through which the state's structure is utilized for the implementation of Foreign Policy, with the global community. As the peaceful recourse for international engagement, it has been used from time immemorial, although the official nature of the sphere would be accepted in later periods, and its study would occur only after the passage of even more centuries. Irrespective of its origin, and its study, it is significant that the field has been relied upon in times of peace, has been used to promote cooperation, has taken on relevance across the world, and is not restricted to some countries or regions alone. The institutionalisation of diplomacy has seen the Office of the leader, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the network of Embassies, and the diplomatic service of a country, among others, being operationalized for the purpose of achieving that which was envisaged for the country. This was expanded further to include other ministries and departments, which contribute immensely to the wellbeing of the state in its international relations.

Diplomats have played a critical role in Sri Lanka's foreign policy arena. Whilst both career diplomats and political appointees have shone over the years through their work, a majority have not. Given the disparity in number of leaders and diplomats it is also evident the leaders tend to retain the limelight a lot longer than the diplomats. The diplomats of the 21st century vastly differ from their predecessors in the century gone by. Today the task of negotiating extremely delicate issues, possessing the ability to analyse and advise when and where required, to communicate effectively with all state and non-state actors, and to remain resolutely professional in the conduct of matters both within the ministry and missions, and with the outside world, are not additional qualities that enrich the role, but instead are fundamental to the task at hand. Awareness of Sri Lanka's history and diplomacy, and astuteness of international relations, are core ingredients for a strategized foreign policy. If through a comprehensive review, it is found that either is lacking, short to long term measures are paramount to address the shortfall and raise the standard, not just to acceptable levels, but to the highest achievable. While key segments are involved in the formulation and implementation of Foreign Policy, the most crucial aspects are undoubtedly the prioritizing of national interest and patriotism, which must resonate at every level. These needs to be infused at all opportunities to ensure that the Policy is successfully formulated and implemented, and the country is secure and successful.

Prioritizing National Interest

For any state, its diplomatic apparatus while playing a crucial role at the heart of international relations, needs to be viewed as the essential conduit through which national priorities are achieved. At differing times, be it during upheavals and slumps, or periods of prosperity and

growth, it is national priorities that are the light guiding the formulators and implementors towards national goals, which either aid in extricating the country from its dilemma or bolstering the country towards greater success. The identification of such goals would vary occasionally, but would not remain in a state of constant flux. They need to be relatively static, given that they are identified for the long term, and should be changed only at times of review, and not at opportunistic moments for short term gain.

National priorities are determined according to national interest, which is the overarching objective of any state, and must remain at the core of all decision making. Failure to do so results in a breakdown and even collapse of administrations, causing much damage to a state and its future prospects. Such incidents mar the trajectory of a country, and the process of repair takes years if not decades, when the state would be seen returning to a path of normalcy before embarking on one of prosperity.

The identification of national priorities would also vary according to that which is unfolding within a state. When facing internal strife and conflict, priorities are to contain and thwart, while at times of positive peace, it is to strategize and build. Such priorities would be determined by exploring options, and comprehending the best decision for action which would have a positive impact on as many as possible. Thus, efficiency remains central and needs to be the ultimate goal. Lomborg (2017) argues that 'unlike debates over ideology or religion, debates over efficiency can actually get somewhere, because there is a straightforward mechanism for resolving them; compare the predictable costs and benefits of different courses of action and see which yields more bang for the buck.'The attempt that Lomborg makes is to highlight the notion of efficiency which should be paramount, but he further notes that although this would be termed common sense, and the right thing to do, it is often neglected because, as he states, 'this analysis involves a lot of work, but mostly because the results can be inconvenient, showing that a preferred policy is inefficient or even that elements of existing government bureaucracy may be unnecessary' (Lomborg, 2017). This dilemma is faced across the world and results in the sacrifice of the best options for easy options, which is a failure of statecraft, and a hindrance to progress and development of a state.

While the setting of national priorities based on national interest would be hailed as a prerequisite for progress, it is evident that too often states have not arrived at a master Plan of Action that is based on a National Strategy. Many policies would already exist, having been drawn up at differing times to suit varied administrations, and to resolve pressing problems of the day, and would be implemented in an ad hoc manner. However, what is needed is a National Strategy which is all-encompassing in nature and spirit. It is this key attribute that makes its national. It is only when all aspects have been explored, and all areas covered, that realistic opportunities can be expected, over mere proclamations and wishes.

Strategizing Foreign Policy

Foreign Policy, when examined under two main areas - bilateral and multilateral relations – generates the bedrock upon which ties are established, strengthened and diversified. Through these three aspects it is possible to achieve much, wherein it is possible:

1. To promote a positive image of the country:
   a country's international image is paramount, as it enables the promotion of the country, making it attractive and relevant, and hence every effort must be made to ensure that the image is positive and project it accordingly, with due corrective measures where necessary;
2. to meaningfully contribute on the world stage:
   a meaningful contribution to consolidate bilateral relations and play a significant role in multilateral organisations ensures the country's place on the power ladder in the world, and generates reciprocity and recognition;
3. to benefit the country and its people:
   benefitting the country as a whole, highlights the significance of Foreign Policy, as the positive returns that can be accrued are diverse, and remains the *raison d'etre* of a state, and must always be the key objective.

A strategized policy ensures that Foreign Policy stems from the National Policy of the state, as it is vital that a plethora of goals, ranging from security to trade, and finance to tourism, among many others, are achieved through the country's Foreign Policy. It can be implemented through a concerted bilateral and multilateral policy that ensures the overarching security and success of the country.

Herein it is essential that when strategizing the following steps are adopted:

Clarity of goal – What is it that is to be achieved?
In connecting Foreign Policy to National Policy, it is necessary to ensure clarity of what it is that will be achieved through the Foreign Policy of the state, and how it will contribute to the overarching National Policy. Herein specificity remains critical so that goal setting is effective and pragmatic. All sectors of the state have a foreign component, and identification of same is crucial, so that goals can be formulated accordingly.

Comprehension of policy options – What are the options that are available?
All possible options must be on the table, so that the decision-maker is well-equipped and would make a well-informed decision, that would benefit the state. When considering such options, the short, medium and long returns, are included, so that those deciding are aware of the consequences of each option, and understand the potential and durability of each policy option.

Choice of appropriate policy option – Why is it the best policy option?
In deciding on the best policy option, intense consultation is mandatory, so that one of the policy options can be identified as the most suitable, and hence the best policy for implementation. Justification for its adoption is essential, as the opportunity cost has to be weighed prior to implementation.

Clarity of policy and measures among stakeholders – How will it be implemented?
The clarity of policy and measures among stakeholders ensures that all concerned, from the Head of State to the diplomat serving at a mission overseas, understand the task at hand, the goal that is to be achieved, and the measures that are required to achieve it. Expectations are laid out, thereby removing ambiguity and guaranteeing an inclusive approach, with all stakeholders possessing ownership and hence obligation to ensure its effective implementation.

Consistent review of effectiveness – Are the desired results being achieved?
A specific period to review effectiveness generates a space for success or failure to be measured. While the consistency would depend and vary from one policy to another, the degree of effectiveness would be chiefly dependent on the goals that were first envisaged.

Continuation of policy/ Revisiting the policy
The assessment of the policy is done through the consistent review process that enables the particular policy to be continually implemented if developments are positive, or to return to the drawing board and recommence the process of strategizing if failure or partial failure have been recorded.

Given the uncertainty, irrationality and confusion that dominates global affairs, the path ahead needs to be embarked upon with information, knowledge and expertise, to avoid pitfalls and failures. Preparedness is critical, and at this juncture strategy becomes the means through which such obstacles are overcome.

Strategized Path Ahead

Irrespective of whether these challenges are faced by all countries or some, or the degree and depth of the problem it is evident that challenges abound and leaders need to be prepared to guide their states through times of turbulence which are increasingly frequent in modern times. The impact of not tackling these challenges have far reaching implications for the entirety of the planet, and need to be responded to urgently and comprehensibly. Given the interconnected nature of the challenges, and since the government is the common denominator in addressing them, it is sensible that policies are aligned one to another, in an attempt to find solutions and means of overcoming the challenges. Domestic challenges can be resolved through international support and cooperation, and foreign policy, which is

widely understood to be an extension of domestic policy, can be the conduit through which many of the challenges are addressed. Thus, diplomacy can and will be the vehicle for future collaboration as states look for complete answers.

While diplomacy evolved from the old to the new, and chief reliance of bilateral negotiation, secrecy, exclusiveness of actors and 'high politics' gave way to multilateralism, openness, and the infusion of non-state actors, the modern period too is seeing the creation of opportunity for further evolution. Compartmentalizing diplomacy was seen to be relevant at one stage, but the need of hour is for an overarching approach that brings all these components together, as threats mount and evolve and responses have to do so too.

Geopolitical Importance

Sri Lanka sits at an important intersection in the world, with the Indian Ocean growing in significance and attracting much attention from large powers. Furthermore, the geopolitical importance of location has been articulated for centuries, however it is important to utilise the location rather than merely talk about it. Many of these powers have specific strategies vis-à-vis the Indian Ocean, and have groupings that encompass the region. They also implement these strategies to their advantage. Ensuring that Sri Lanka's location at the heart of the Indian Ocean is leveraged to the country's benefit is paramount, whilst avoiding the taking of sides and getting embroiled in others' dilemmas and disputes.

Geoeconomic Importance

Sri Lanka is rich in resources, potential and opportunity on land and in the country's territorial waters. Strategizing for the future has been a key requirement in the years gone by, and is undoubtedly the burning need of the hour. Herein lies the importance of a country's Foreign Policy through which Sri Lanka must identify areas requiring development within the country; draw up a clear national plan of action; seek investment to suit the Sri Lankan plan; engage with technically advanced countries and seek technology transfers especially in the energy sector; ensure value addition within the country prior to natural resources being exported; and most importantly guarantee that Sri Lanka comes first in policy formulation and implementation.

Geostrategic Importance

Looking ahead, a robust, well strategized Foreign Policy is the key to enable the country to rise from the current predicament. Foreign Policy can be implemented in the short, medium and long terms, through concerted action. This would yield positive returns to salvage and grow the economy, it would boost investment, open new markets, strengthen and diversify trade with existing ones, consolidate bilateral relations with those considered as key countries, but also include key players in diverse regions, which would serve as 'windows',

improve Sri Lanka's international image, and very importantly such a Foreign Policy will ensure that the people of Sri Lanka see the realisation of the policies, position and potential of this island nation. (Cooke, 2020) The geopolitical, geoeconomic and geostrategic importance of the island must be harnessed for the benefit of the country and its people, through clarity of national interest, attention to large power concerns, well-crafted policy, sufficient resource allocation, well-trained personnel, and patriotism of the highest caliber.

When looking ahead it is important to look back, and review that which has been, restructure that which is, reach out in an energetic manner, and be ready for all eventualities. Such an approach augurs well for any country determined to do well, prosper and co-exist in the international system. Yet for all of this to happen, the core understanding of the significance of a strategized Foreign Policy is essential. Lest it is forgotten, 'A proper understanding of that which has been, and that which is, is critical to determine where a country is heading. That understanding can only be derived through effective research, clear analysis and pragmatic strategizing. The sooner Sri Lanka does it, the faster the country will prosper (Cooke, 2018). It is Sri Lanka, her people and generations to come that must be the true beneficiaries of a strategic Foreign Policy that secures a sound future for all citizens, and ensures the country's position on the world stage.

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