

Decrypting Sri Lanka's 'black box' amidst an Indo-China 'great game'

Shakthi De Silva

To cite this article: Shakthi De Silva (2019): Decrypting Sri Lanka's 'black box' amidst an Indo-China 'great game', Journal of the Indian Ocean Region

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19480881.2019.1640575>



Published online: 11 Aug 2019.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Decrypting Sri Lanka's 'black box' amidst an Indo–China 'great game'

Shakthi De Silva

Department of International Relations, University of Colombo, Colombo, Sri Lanka

ABSTRACT

Competition is a natural byproduct of major powers navigating an anarchic world. Small states operating in such a milieu however, face a dilemma when strategizing their foreign policy. At present, two regional behemoths – India and China – remain locked in a *Realpolitik* affray as they vie for influence by enticing and attracting South Asian states through economic, security and diplomatic initiatives. How do these structural dynamics impact Sri Lanka's policymaking process? Moreover, has the island been able to mount a timely and appropriate response to structural dictates? In what way has domestic variables influenced and channeled policy preferences in Sri Lanka since 2015? By adopting a Neoclassical Realist frame of analysis, this paper appraises the impact made by the external environment and domestic intervening variables on the island's foreign policy trajectory. It concludes that domestic intervening variables drew the island away from optimal choices in its relations with India and China.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 14 February 2019
Accepted 24 May 2019

KEYWORDS

Sri Lanka; India; China;
foreign policy

Introduction

Realist International Relations narratives, for the most part, assert that states are conditioned and circumscribed by the structure of the international system (Glaser, 1996, p. 127; Singer, 1961, pp. 77–92; Snyder, 1991, pp. 21–23). Neo Realists for example 'explain international events in terms of the system structure (power distribution) rather than the internal makeup of individual states' (Goldstein, 1994, p. 76). Small states feature less in academic analysis but when they do, the prevailing assumption is that they bandwagon with a threatening power to guarantee their survival in an anarchical international setting (Levy, 1989, p. 231; Walt, 1996). It needs to be remembered however, that foreign policy decisions characterized by high stakes, significant uncertainty, and substantial risk are usually a product of the government in power (Renshon & Renshon, 2008, p. 509). Therefore, in order to make sense of foreign policy decisions, an incorporation of variables stretching across different levels of analysis becomes indispensable. The complex causal interaction of system and unit-level variables and the degree to which this impinges on governments, determines a country's foreign policy direction.

Sri Lanka, an island sitting in the epicenter of the arc connecting the Persian Gulf to the Strait of Malacca, is separated from India by a narrow strip of water known as the Palk Strait. As a result of China's increasing footprint in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), academics have begun to focus on how Beijing exerts influence into small South Asian states and the degree to which these influences successfully alter their economic and foreign policy behavior (Lim & Mukherjee, 2017). Sri Lanka serves as an important case study not only because it has captured international attention as a key battleground in the tussle for influence in South Asia between Beijing and New Delhi, but also because the island lies across vital Sea Lanes of Communication in the Indian Ocean; the lifeblood of modern day commercial activity. Recent reports suggest that the island, which 'falls within India's defense perimeter' (Colombage, 2019), is a personification of China's 'debt trap diplomacy' (Parker & Cheftitz, 2018). Indeed, rhetoric of this nature has garnered significant traction following the unveiling of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the lease of the island's Hambantota Port in 2017 for 99 years (*U.S Indo-Pacific Command Posture, 2019, p. 35*).

Sri Lanka also serves as a vital node in China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI). This is because the island, as depicted in the image below, lies at a focal point in the MSRI. Whilst any other node across the MSRI can be negotiated, it is clear that China has no better option than Sri Lanka (as it lies at the center of the Indian Ocean straddling key oil shipping lanes) and is consequently a linchpin for the project's success [Figure 1](#).

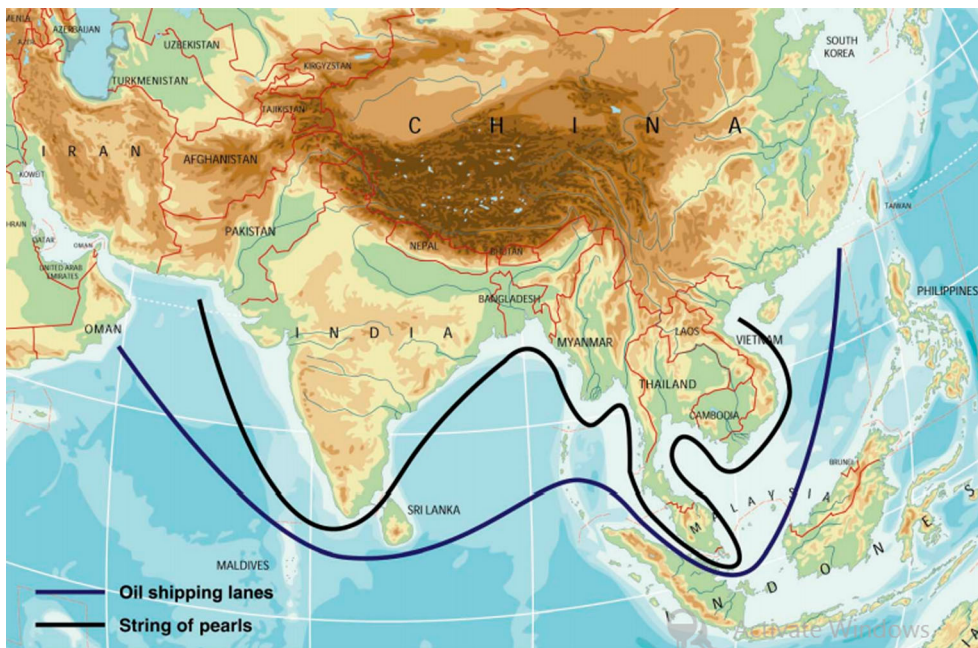


Figure 1. Sea Lines of communication and 'String of Pearls' Reproduced with permission from *Asia Briefing Ltd.*

However, structural conditions are not the only variable impacting a state's foreign policy trajectory. When devising a foreign policy, the system-level pressures a state encounters (which set the broad parameters within which states concoct their foreign policies) must be translated through domestic intervening variables (or unit-level variables) such as the foreign policy perspectives of a state leader and influences from social groups on the policymaking process. This article is grounded on a Neoclassical Realist analytical framework which incorporates structural conditions and domestic variables to delineate the foreign policy of Sri Lanka. It also advances the Neoclassical Realism research agenda by engaging in an in-depth analysis of a small state's foreign policy since 2015. It draws from diverse sources of literature and employs a triangulation of quantifiable evidence, interviews and primary as well as secondary qualitative data. Moreover, by adopting a case study approach to derive a more authentic and contextualized interpretation of Sri Lanka's foreign policy towards India and China since 2015, the author highlights the range of application available to scholars who wish to apply a Neoclassical Realist frame of analysis in their work.

The article unfolds as follows; firstly, the author distinguishes between an optimal and suboptimal foreign policy stratagem and then provides an explanation of Neoclassical Realism and the 3 domestic intervening variables that have been selected for this study. Next, the paper surveys the nature of the major power competition between India and China with particular attention to their behavior in Sri Lanka. This is followed by a stock-taking of the Sri Lankan National Unity Government's foreign policy towards India and China since 2015. A caveat however, is that this analysis reviews Sri Lanka's foreign policy until October 2018. This delimitation was necessary for two reasons: (1) the incumbent government is still in power¹ and (2) on 26th October 2018 President Sirisena removed his Party from the National Unity Government and appointed former President Mahinda Rajapakse as his Prime Minister, effectively (albeit temporarily) dissolving the government which had existed since 2015. This section also contributes towards an understanding of the current dynamics in the policymaking process of Sri Lanka by explaining why the island was unable to translate an advantageous regional setting into an optimal foreign policy strategy. The paper concludes by underscoring how domestic intervening variables played a significant role in drawing the island away from optimal or utilitarian choices in its relations with India and China.

Utilitarian vs satisficing

It is important at this juncture to distinguish between an optimal and suboptimal foreign policy. A utilitarian foreign policy can be understood as a strategy which confers optimal benefits for a country. A utilitarian foreign policy entails a clear comprehension of core national interests followed by a careful consideration of all feasible alternatives available to the state, and a prudent examination and selection of the best option after assessing the costs and benefits associated with each alternative. In sum, government decision-makers adopting a rational utilitarian foreign policy would select an approach which is stable, grounded on objectivity and which maximizes utility.

A Suboptimal foreign policy however, stands in contradistinction to this. A suboptimal policy directs a state away from the advancement or maximization of its core national interests. Satisficing can be defined as a suboptimal strategy of settling for a less-than-perfect

solution. In such situations, decision-makers no longer look for optimal solutions when dealing with issues but instead adopt initiatives without adequate consideration of long term implications and devoid of rational and objective reasoning (Simon, 1955, p. 108).²

Neoclassical Realism

Realists assume that the primary interest of any state is to ensure its security in an anarchic international setting. States are said to adopt optimal foreign policies which safeguard their sovereignty and autonomy in decision-making (Haksar, 1989, p. 68). Classical Realists assert that human nature holds the key to understanding international relations. In other words, Classical Realists use 'human nature' to describe statecraft in an anarchic international system (O'Callaghan & Griffiths, 2002, p. 3). Realist *Realpolitik* is said to compel states to secure their 'own country's interests on the assumption that other countries will not help you unless it is in their own interest' (Rouke & Boyer, 1998, p. 17). Conversely, Neo Realists attempt to abstract from internal attributes of states except for their capability vis-à-vis other states in the system. In their point of view, differences in the distribution of capabilities demarcates states as 'small' and 'major' powers which, correspondingly determines and constrains the latitude of their behavior in the international system. As Ripsman notes,

For Structural Realists (Neo Realists), states are compelled to select foreign policies that are most appropriate responses to systemic circumstances. Domestic politics and leader characteristics play no significant role in determining policy, given the great dangers of interfering with systemic imperatives in an anarchic realm. (2018)

In part, responding to what were perceived as the reductionist 'excesses of neorealism, Neoclassical Realism suggests that what states do depends in large part on domestically derived preferences' (Elman, 2007, p. 16). According to Schweller 'states assess and adapt to changes in their external environment partly as a result of their peculiar domestic structures and political situations' (2006, p. 6). As Hansbury explains, 'although the international system is privileged as the factor that establishes the boundaries of what agency is possible, domestic-level variables shape how that agency is exercised' (2017, pp. 44–45). Consequently, this research argues that the interplay of system-level and domestic/unit-level factors best explains Sri Lanka's foreign policy behavior.

For the purpose of this research the author adopts 3 domestic intervening variables which are discussed in detail by Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell. The 3 variables include leader images, state-society relations and domestic institutions (Ripsman, Taliaferro, & Lobell, 2016, p. 9), each of which helps decode why the country's post 2015 foreign policy was not in line with structural incentives.

Leader images

Neoclassical Realists identify that policy choices can no longer be 'conceived of as a direct product of systemic stimuli; instead, they (must) pass through the prism of the state, which perceives them and responds to them within the institutional constraints of its unique domestic circumstances' (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 31). One of these 'unique domestic circumstances' is the domestic intervening variable of 'leader image.' Leader image translates

to the images held by the Foreign Policy Executive (FPE) of the country. A FPE includes the President and the Prime Minister; individuals who are generally charged with the responsibility of conducting the state's external policy. In their seminal work on Neoclassical Realism, Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell argue that the FPE:

possess a set of core values, beliefs, and images that guide their interaction with the outside world and their understanding of it. These 'images' are highly personalized, as they are informed by the individual's prior experiences and values ... (2016, p. 62)

State – society relations

The second cluster of intervening variables is the 'character of interactions between the central institutions of the state and various economic and or societal groups' (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 71). As far as policy implementation is concerned, if social groups are suspicious or oppose a government's foreign policy posture they are able to bear significant pressure on the administration to alter the country's foreign policy. For example, even today some Sri Lankans have a tendency to be ambivalent (and at times distrustful) of India as a result of India's attitude towards the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (during the 1970s–1980s), the resulting interference into the country through the 13th amendment of the Constitution, the dropping of 'humanitarian aid' in violation of the territorial airspace of Sri Lanka and the sending of Indian Peace Keeping Forces to the island in the latter part of the 1980s.³ Due to these and other reasons, bilateral agreements with India are watched warily by some locals. One can even posit that this legacy of Indian involvement in the island continues to cast a dark shadow over their views of New Delhi. In light of these developments, it is easy to identify why the proposed Economic Technical Cooperation Agreement (ETCA) with India, although encompassing positive corollaries on the domestic economy, was temporarily stonewalled owing to strong public opposition from certain sections of society.⁴

Political institutions

Structural impediments such as division of power as well as institutional checks and balances may impede or constrain the implementation of foreign policy decisions, particularly those of import relating to the declaration of war and peace. Similarly, the intrinsic nature of domestic political institutions may also exert considerable influence on the external relations of a country. For the purpose of this research, the author examined the nature of the 2015 Grand Coalition/Alliance which ousted the Rajapakse regime and brought President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe to power. As one news agency reported: 'ජනාධිපති මෙමුණිපාල සිරිසේන ජනාධිපති ධුරයට පත්වීමෙන් පසු ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ ප්‍රථම සාම්ප්‍රදායික දේශපාලන සතුරන් වන එක්සත් ජාතික පක්ෂය සහ එක්සත් ජනතා නිදහස් සන්ධානය එක්ව රජයක් පිහිටුවනු ලැබීය' [After Maithripala Sirisena's inauguration as President, the United National Party and the United People's Freedom Alliance (spearheaded by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party),⁵ which were traditional political enemies, formed a Government for the first time in history] (BBC, 2018). The ensuing Grand Coalition, chiefly comprising of the United National Party (UNP) headed by the Prime Minister and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) of the President, was characterized as a National Unity Government (Keethapocalan, 2019, p. xii; Sultana, 2017, p. 1).

Political Scientists are generally of the view that coalitions or alliances of small parties built around a larger party tends to have more stability and longevity with less internal confrontations than Grand Coalitions (Keman, 2011; Lees, 2010; Sturm, 2013). This is because smaller parties' desire to exert influence on foreign policy issues are tempered by their need to collaborate with the larger political party to safeguard their political power. Grand Coalition constituents (such as the SLFP and the UNP alliance) however, 'remain fierce competitors from the start and openly seek the option to defect' from the Coalition (Lees, 2010, p. 312).

Polarization and partisan differences within a government raises serious questions on its ability to reach consensus and/or compromise on politically sensitive issues. This problem is even more acute in the case of a Grand Coalition because an ideological gulf between constituent parties, together with a long-established party rivalry, undermines the likelihood for objective, utilitarian policy formulation. This article argues that the dynamics which characterized relations between the two parties created significant dissonance within the National Unity Government which in turn, impacted the country's foreign policy making calculus.

To sum up, Neoclassical Realists postulate that a state's foreign policy is principally shaped by the international context it finds itself in. Domestic variables may however, impede a state's ability to mount a timely and appropriate response to structural dictates. It is the hypothesis of this paper that the influence made by 3 domestic factors explains why the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe National Unity Government was unable to adopt an objective and utilitarian foreign policy in its relations with India and China.

Indo-China relations in the twenty-first century

Chinese advances into South Asia are looked on by India, 'the significant other Asian power, with suspicion in a region considered its natural sphere of influence' (Indraguptha, 2011, p. 1). Several analysts assert that China intends to encircle India through a *string of pearls* strategy under the guise of the BRI's MSRI (Pattanaik, 2016; Roy-Chaudhury, 2018; Wagner, 2016). Singh, in a recent study notes that 'a sustained maritime presence in the IOR will not only allow Beijing to strategically dominate the region, it will also take the regional security initiative away from India' (2015, p. 297). Jacques contends that

as China becomes a global power, and ultimately a superpower, probably in time the dominant superpower, then it, like every other previous major power, will view the world through the prism of its own history and will seek, subject to the prevailing constraints, to reshape that world in its own image. (2009, p. 227)

More than two-thirds of the world's crude oil, more than half of the container trade and one-third of bulk cargo traverse the Indian Ocean Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) (Cordner, 2018, pp. 5–71). Consequently, the security of the Indian Ocean SLOCs is a strategic priority for both India and China. Estimates suggest that 70–90% of China's oil imports which comes from the Middle East and Africa have to cross the Indian Ocean (Hornat, 2016; Hu, 2017, p. 116; Ramadhani, 2015, p. 159). Therefore, sustaining its rapid economic growth, as well as guaranteeing energy transportation security (by monitoring SLOC) features prominently among the reasons vindicating China's presence in the IOR [Figure 2](#).

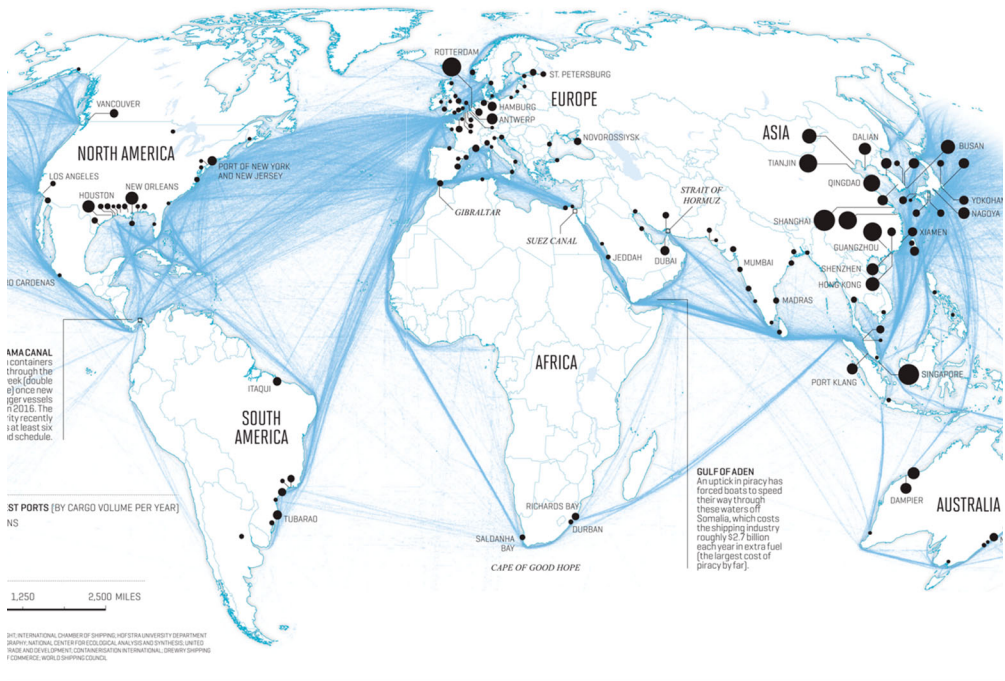


Figure 2. World shipping routes and world’s largest ports Reproduced with permission from *Nicholas Rapp Design Studio*.

Table 1. Chinese bases in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea.

Year	Region	Host state	Port	Lease period
2015	Indian Ocean	Pakistan	Gwadar	40 years
2015	Indian Ocean	Myanmar	Kyaukpyu	50 years
2015	South China Sea	Malaysia	Kuantan	60 years
2016	Indian Ocean	Djibouti	Obock	10 years
2016	South China Sea	Malaysia	Melaka Gateway	99 years
2017	Indian Ocean	Sri Lanka	Hambantota	99 years
2017	South China Sea	Brunei	Muara	60 years
2017	Indian Ocean	Maldives	Feydhoo Finolhu	50 years

Source: Adapted from Ghiasy, Su, and Saalman (2018, p. 6).

Between 2000 and 2014, China’s defense budget increased from approximately 110 billion Yuan to just over 800 billion Yuan (Cole, 2016, p. 56). In November 2015, the Landbridge Group from Shandong Province obtained operating rights of Darwin Port in Australia (Garrick, 2018). The port was leased for 99 years, and was obtained for US\$ 506 million (Aoyama, 2016, p. 19; Clifford, 2017, p. 13). Two years later, China officially opened its first overseas military base at Doraleh, Djibouti. China’s growing footprint in the IOR and the Pacific Ocean through port acquisitions has, in recent years, become overtly visible for observers Table 1.

These leased ports could act as transport corridors as well as extended military bases through which Chinese People’s Liberation Army Navy blue-water activities can be operationalized. The prospect of an enhanced Chinese military presence in the Indian Ocean as

well as the fear of IOR states falling into a dependency trap to China owing to their mounting debt, has spurred Indian policymakers to adopt a more proactive stance with the intention of preventing IOR states from becoming strategically dependent 'economic enclaves' to China (Shepard, 2016).

India's national interests and primary security challenges are chiefly linked to the security situation in South Asia. Indeed, India's reticence to play a larger and more robust role in regional security in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, has been replaced by a bold if not bullish policy stance under Prime Minister Modi to counter the supposedly ongoing Chinese 'attempt at encirclement' (Junxian & Yan, 2016, p. 112; Wagner, 2018, p. 15). India's reaction encompasses enticing regional IOR states through a Neighborhood First Policy, Act East Policy, adopting a Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) policy, operationalizing naval exercises with regional and extra-regional powers (Bhatt, 2018, p. 68) and securing access to ports in the IOR; notably in Iran (Chabahar Port), in Oman (port of Duqm) and in the Seychelles archipelago. Sino-Indian ties have also been characterized by occasional bouts of conflict; from the 1962 border war to the more recent crisis in Doklam.⁶

Thus, this cursory examination of the security dynamics in Asia clearly exposes the geopolitical competition underway between India and China. Even so, the structural conditions in Asia continues to remain permissive for small states, due to two main reasons: (1) both India and China have demonstrated a reticence to escalate military confrontation beyond a border conflict (2) the significant economic interdependence between the two states, demands a quick ending of hostile military engagements in the event of a clash.⁷ This enables small states like Sri Lanka to harness resources from both Beijing and New Delhi without substantially alienating or coalescing around either. As one scholar noted, 'the absence of an intense security and economic rivalry enables smaller powers not to join either side in a military alliance, but at the same time extract resources and infrastructure development funds using asymmetrical strategies' (Paul, 2019, pp. 57–58). The Sino-Indian 'cooperation-competition' dynamic provides sufficient flexibility for Sri Lanka to desist from swaying too much towards either power. Because the relationship is not characterized by continuous and open hostilities, South Asian states are granted sufficient leeway to attract investments from and expand trade and economic relations with both whilst remaining 'strategically nonaligned' (Palihakkara, 2018). As a result, structural conditions impel Sri Lanka to adopt a utilitarian foreign policy which balances between India and China, enabling the island to obtain short and long term economic and diplomatic benefits whilst preserving its core national interests. But has Sri Lanka since 2015, enacted a utilitarian foreign policy with regard to India and China?

Strategizing Sri Lanka's post 2015 foreign policy

Small economically developing states such as Sri Lanka ground their external policy on a 'friends with all' principle in the expectation that financial support from major powers will boost its domestic economy. Distancing itself from Beijing or New Delhi carries significant downsides as Sri Lanka's 'largest portion of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in 2017 is from China followed closely by India. Conversely, Chinese tourist arrivals account for 13% of total tourist arrivals to the island. This is second only to India' (De Silva, 2018a).

Upon gaining power in 2015, Prime Minister (PM) Wickremesinghe announced to the international community: 'we will improve relations with India. But that doesn't mean

we will be hostile to China' (as quoted in Rao Sundarji, 2015). A Sri Lankan economic affairs spokesperson, also went on record declaring that the new Government intends to have 'a balanced approach between India and China, unlike the (previous) regime, which was antagonizing India almost by its closeness to China' (as quoted in Ellen, 2015). Political rhetoric suggested that structural dictates would be adhered to when executing Sri Lanka's foreign policy post 2015.

Sri Lanka's 'enormous foreign debt-servicing requirement of approximately \$15 billion between 2019 and 2022' (Hewage, 2018), coupled with President Sirisena's desire to court China for more loans and aid – having met high ranking Chinese officials several times over the last three years, ensures the continuance of a robust relationship with Beijing. From 2005 to 2014 China had spent US\$ 870.4 billion in worldwide investments and contracts, out of which US\$ 8.9 billion was invested in Sri Lanka. By 2014 China had become the largest source of FDI to Sri Lanka (Kahandawaarachchi, 2017) and in 2017, 'the Government of China and its lending agencies' were the island's main financiers, injecting 21.5% of the island's total Official Development Assistance commitments (Department of External Resources, 2017, p. 2). A variety of projects including the Norochcholai Coal Power Plant, Mattala International Airport, Katunayake Airport Expressway, Matara-Katragama Railway Line, Moragahakanda Irrigation Development Project, Mahinda Rajapakse International Cricket Stadium in Hambantota, the Southern Expressway, Hambantota Port, the Lotus Pond (Nelum Pokuna) Performing Arts Theatre, Colombo Lotus Tower (Nelum Kuluna) and the Colombo Port City (renamed later as the Colombo International Financial City) were initiated through Chinese funding. Some reports suggest that, as a consequence of the loans taken to finance these and other projects, Sri Lanka's outstanding external debt ballooned to US\$ 25.61 billion out of which US\$ 8 billion was owed to China (Mitra, 2017; Wijayasiri & Senaratne, 2018). The *Council of Foreign Relations* 'Index of Debt to China' records Sri Lanka's 2017 stock of external debt to China as 9.5% of its GDP (Steil & Rocca, 2019), whilst *Verite Research*, a Colombo-based think tank, 'estimates that China accounts for nearly 15% of Sri Lanka's external debt, which was estimated to be around \$53.1 billion at the end of 2018' (Chaudhury, 2019).

As of 2017, India was Sri Lanka's main source of imports whilst China remained a close second (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2018, p. 160). Following a visit by the Chinese Minister of National Defense in 2017, China and Sri Lanka signed an agreement whereby the former agreed to provide the island with 'military assistance gratis' to the value of a hundred million RMB (Ministry of Defense, 2018, p. 45). According to Cheng Xueyuan (China's Ambassador to Sri Lanka), by the end of 2017 Chinese companies had already completed infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka worth US\$ 15 billion (NewsIn.Asia, 2018). Between 2005 and 2014 Chinese investments and contracts in Sri Lanka's transportation sector alone, stood at US\$ 5.75 billion (American Enterprise Institute, 2019). Raneey Jayamaha, the Lead Consultant for South Asia at *The World Bank Group* also underscores how BRI investments had a positive impact on Sri Lanka's gross official reserves, which rose from US\$ 5 billion in April 2017 to US\$ 6.9 billion by June 2017, nearing the IMF's 2017 target of US\$ 7.4 billion (Wijeyarathna, 2017). By virtue of these facts it is easy to see why President Sirisena pronounced Chinese support as 'indispensable' for Sri Lanka's development (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Sri Lanka, 2018).⁸

From 2015 leading up to mid-2018, the island's relations with India was also improving; symbolized by the fact that Sirisena's first foreign visit as President was to India. This was

reciprocated by Modi in his March 2015 visit to Colombo, the first by an Indian Prime Minister in 28 years. India also maintained its lead as the prime tourist source to the island with 384,628 arrivals in 2017, closely followed by China and accounts for approximately 80% of Colombo's trans-shipment business (Sirilal & Aneez, 2018). The intention of the United National Party (one of the two key stakeholder's in the National Unity Government) to finalize an Economic and Technological Cooperation Agreement (ETCA) with India and in so doing tap the Indian market, indicated its cognizance of utilizing Sri Lanka's geographic position to reap economic benefits. April 2017 also saw India agree to refurbish and use oil storage tanks in the Trincomalee Harbor as a Joint Venture between the Lanka Indian Oil Corporation and the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (Balachandran, 2017). A US\$ 2.6 billion pledge for development projects in Sri Lanka in 2016 as well as naval exercises with New Delhi⁹ evinces the close relationship between the two countries (*Tamil Guardian*, 2016).

Thus, expanding stable economic and diplomatic ties with New Delhi and Beijing whilst safeguarding the island's independence and autonomy are core national interest objectives of Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is able to eschew from choosing between India and China as a result of the absence of a sustained hostile military confrontation between the two powers. Consequently, structural conditions have allowed the island significant room for maneuver. In addition, by dint of their competition to economically induce South Asian states to more closely align with them, South Asian states have a window of opportunity to maximize their returns from the two without substantially upsetting their relationship with either. Moreover, Sri Lanka's strong economic ties with India and China compel the National Unity Government to maintain equitable and utilitarian relations with both Asian powers. The next section unpacks Sri Lanka's 'black-box' and explains how domestic intervening variables detracted the National Unity Government from adopting a utilitarian foreign policy trajectory in its relations with India and China.

The influence of domestic intervening variables on the foreign policymaking process

In 2015, President Sirisena's and Prime Minister Wickremesinghe's 'leader images' appeared to configure Sri Lanka's foreign policy towards a more centrist position between New Delhi and Beijing. Grounded on a desire to invite more investment and economic engagement with the Asian powerhouses, a number of high-level diplomatic meetings were arranged with Indian PM Modi and Chinese President Xi. Sirisena's and Wickremesinghe's first official visits were to India. The Sri Lankan President undertook a State visit to India in February 2015 just a month after assuming power. This was followed up by a March 2015 state visit to China where he held talks with the Chinese leader Xi Jinping. On the invitation of Indian PM Narendra Modi, PM Wickremesinghe undertook an official visit to India in September 2015. At the invitation of Li Keqiang, the Premier of the State Council of China, Wickremesinghe, also paid an official visit to the People's Republic of China from 6th to 9th April 2016.

Moreover, in a bid to demonstrate their eagerness to shift away from Rajapakse's Pro-China foreign policy (Abi-Habib & Bastians, 2018; Fernholz, 2018), Indian security interests were acquiescently accommodated by the National Unity Government. The decision to disallow a 2017 Chinese submarine visit as well as the intention of stationing the naval

command in the port of Hambantota illustrated the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government's desire to attune ties with Beijing without shifting towards a Pro-China policy which could antagonize India. Analysts however, are hesitant to accept the notion that both leaders were on the same wavelength (DeVotta, 2018; Dissanayake, 2019). They contend that whilst the two leaders were able to agree on the broad contours of a 'balanced foreign policy,' they were unable to see eye to eye on the substance or content of this policy. One can reasonably infer that the existence of two 'leader images' which

- (1) aligned with one another and
- (2) agreed on the substance of balanced relations through compromise and consensus

could have enabled the island to adopt a stable, coherent and utilitarian foreign policy strategy. Examining the 2015–2018 context clearly demonstrates how 'leader images' of the President and Prime Minister did not harmonize. The 16th October (2018) Cabinet discussion for instance, saw a clash between the two, as the President strongly reproached the Prime Minister for attempting to lease out the East Terminal of the Colombo Port to India (*The Morning*, 2018). Days before the Prime Minister was scheduled to visit India, President Sirisena accused the Indian Research and Analysis Wing of plotting to murder him, sparking strong condemnation by Indian policy circles and damaging the Prime Minister's chances of obtaining concessions from Modi during his visit. After the Wickremesinghe – Modi meeting, the Prime Minister's secretariat issued a press release bluntly describing Modi's dissatisfaction on the pace of Indian projects in Sri Lanka and directing blame on the President (Gupta, 2018). These cases validate how polarizing 'leader images' and personality rifts between the President and Prime Minister since 2015, damaged the National Unity Government's ability to compose a stable and utilitarian foreign policy. Because the island's foreign policy was subject to antithetical 'leader images,' the government was unable to adopt a purposeful and objective foreign policy.

China and India are the island's major import partners as well as significant sources of tourists. Moreover, in recent years Sri Lanka has substantially depended on the two Asian powerhouses for investment and loans. As the island transitioned to a 'lower-middle income status' it is no longer entitled to receive concessional loans from traditional donor agencies (Fernando, 2018). Consequently, policymakers turned to alternative sources of credit such as international financial markets and credit lines from foreign governments. In this backdrop, the Research Director of *Verite Research* argues that 'the Chinese loan share percentage in Sri Lankan loans which was 2% in 2008 increased to 9% in 2018. In the same period, the debt to international financial markets which was 4% in 2008 increased to 54% in 2018' (Auwards, 2018).

Given the substantial debt obligations and the need to spur economic growth by increasing FDI; the National Unity Government sought to ease the pressure of debt repayments by

- (1) engaging in a 99-year lease of the Hambantota Port to the China Merchants Port Holdings Company for US\$ 1.12 billion (Hillman, 2018; Samaranayake, 2019)
- (2) attempting to lease other critical infrastructure – e.g. the Mattala International Airport to India (*The Hindu*, 2018)

and coupled such endeavors with Economic Agreements envisaged with India (Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement – ETCA) and China (Sri Lanka – China Free Trade Agreement).

In order to stabilize the economy and manage the debt burden, a stable bipartisan economic policy needed to be actualized. In contrast to this policy dictum, a former Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka exposes the divisions and policy gridlock within the National Unity Government in relation to its economic strategy.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, to his credit, presented an economic policy statement to Parliament in November 2015 ... that statement had been well-crafted taking into account the prevailing economic situation in the country. He had very correctly identified the long-term need for Sri Lanka to cut down its consumption, divert resources for investment, boost export of goods and services by concentrating on high tech products, linking Sri Lanka to external markets through bilateral trade agreements and changing the budget structure by increasing the direct tax base and reducing the reliance on indirect taxes.

There was the necessity for the two coalition partners of the Government, the UNP and the SLFP, to jointly sign off the strategy outlined in the statement. This was not done and as a result the ownership of the new economic policy strategy fell exclusively on the UNP side of the Government. This was the reason for the subsequent conflict between the President and the Prime Minister with regard to the type of economic policies to be adopted by the country. (Wijewardena, 2019)

These comments lay bare the estrangement within the National Unity Government. This disunity gave rise to a situation where the Coalition partners failed to endorse a long term, utilitarian economic strategy for Sri Lanka. Moreover, the inability of the constituent elements of the government to credibly commit to a stable and long term policy framework undoubtedly dented investor confidence in the political stability of the island.

Another variable which played a critical role in the National Unity Government's foreign policymaking was state-society relations. Because public opinion is often led or manipulated by interest groups, governments have tended to take their opinions and positions into account when engaging in policymaking. Indeed, civil society interest groups can derail government action and even shift public support against the government (Roskin, Cord, Medeiros, & Jones, 2012, p. 192). In that sense, 'civil society is not simply a sphere apart from the state; it is or can be seen as an "agent" that interacts with and indeed opposes the state' (Chambers & Kopstein, 2006, p. 367).

One of the most notable instances where public protests resulted in a shift of government position was over the draft ETCA agreement with India ("Protest rally against ETCA", 2016; "Protest against proposed ETCA", 2016). Public demonstrations, spearheaded by interest groups, dampened the progress of negotiations, forcing the government to backtrack on some of the clauses and conditions in the draft. Thus, interest groups were able to mount a serious challenge against the government's policy with India even though negotiation rounds are still underway.

The proposed leasing of the Mattala Airport also drew substantial opposition and raised claims that vital strategic assets are being bartered out by the National Unity Government (Jayasekera, 2017; Mushtaq, 2017). As the agreement has yet to be hammered out, it remains to be seen whether the President would hesitate to finalize a deal as elections draw near in 2019. Taken together, these examples clearly validate how societal interest

groups played a substantial role in reorienting the National Unity Government's position in its bilateral relations with major powers. Therefore, it can be averred that since 2015, interest group opposition considerably swayed the National Unity Government's external policy. Policies and strategies which may have been beneficial in the long run, stalled owing to such 'distractions' (Dissanayake, 2019) whilst the optics of the government suffered a significant dent due to interest group assertions such as

- (1) President 'Sirisena is forced to give in to the Chinese' in order to pay off its debt and continue Chinese investment flows (Padma, 2018)
- (2) Sri Lanka has allowed itself to be divided up into 'spheres of influence' (Saravanamuttu, 2018)/Sri Lankan assets are being 'parceled out' to Asian powerhouses (Dissanayake, 2019)

– Most of which only elicited etiolated responses from the government.

Presidential and parliamentary elections held in January and August 2015 allowed the Sri Lankan electorate to oust the Rajapakse regime and bring President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe to power. Since their genesis, the UNP and SLFP were traditional rivals in Sri Lankan politics. Indeed, the two political behemoths had hitherto, obtained power at the expense of the other. Fonseka, Ganesathasan and Daniel testify that the first few months of this new political dynamic was

... fraught with many internal and intra party battles, facilitating the re-emergence of particular partisan interests and politics, testing the new president on many fronts including his grip over government, the coalition, the SLFP as well as his own popularity, legitimacy and potential legacy. (2017, pp. 5–6)

An erstwhile attempt at 'co-habitation' between President Chandrika Kumaratunga and the UNP's Ranil Wickremesinghe floundered owing to 'basic differences of policy, behavior and styles of management between the two ... [Instead of] collaboration there was opposition, competition and alienation' (Weerakoon, 2006, p. 368). This case clearly evinces why alliances consisting of major political parties, underscored by party and personality discords may result in policy dysfunction.

At the 2018 *Sri Lanka Economic Summit* a Member of Parliament bluntly exposed the inherent difficulties in formulating bipartisan policies within a Grand Coalition. Responding to a question posed by the host on the inability of the government to deliver an integrated policy he stated: 'Running a company is difficult, running a coalition government is extremely difficult' (as quoted in Economylk, 2018). Frictions between the leaders of both parties for example, were visible on many occasions. The latest dispute between the two included a tussle over the leasing out of the East Terminal of the Colombo Port to India and Sirisena's public allegation that some UNP parliamentarians engaged in corrupt activities during the Government's tenure.

In this regard, the President's speech after the dismissal of Wickremesinghe from the post of Prime Minister was significantly revealing. Sirisena proclaimed that

Once in the government, Mr. Wickremesinghe [of the UNP] arrogantly and stubbornly avoided collective decisions and tended to take individual decisions. This behaviour led to many conflicts. Due to his lack of collective decision making through discussion, our country had

to face harsh consequences when he used to take decisions with a group of his very close associates. I must state that, there was also a policy conflict between Hon. Ranil Wickremesinghe and me, during the last three and half years. Apart from policy differences, I noted that there were also differences of culture between Mr. Wickremesinghe and me. I believe that all those differences in policy, culture, personality and conduct aggravated this political and economic crisis. (Sirisena, 2018)

Investigating the influence made by political institutions – i.e. the nature of the National Unity Government/Grand Coalition – exemplifies how political wrangling within the government instilled disharmony into the policymaking process of Sri Lanka (De Silva, 2018b). The Government's foreign policy was unclear on strategy chiefly owing to the presence of dissonant power centers. The resulting 'tug of war' between the constituent elements of the National Unity Government created an impression that it was unstable, 'weak and inefficient' (Peiris, 2018).

For example, moves by the UNP to consolidate mutually beneficial ties with India (through the proposed ETCA and by developing the Colombo Port's East Terminal through a Public Private Partnership) was firmly discouraged by some elements in the SLFP, nullifying incentives for cooperation and making policy gridlock inevitable even when it was imperative for the government to act decisively (Abeyratne, 2018; Fernando, 2019). Such bones of contention served to intensify the estrangement between alliance members of the Grand Coalition; severing the fragile bonds of the National Unity Government. The National Unity Government was therefore, unable to implement a consensual bipartisan foreign policy or even 'speak as one voice' according to a defense and strategic studies analyst (Senaratne, 2019). Furthermore, on account of the schism within the Grand Coalition, SLFP members – including the President – were easily swayed by interest group protests. As a result, the President went to the extent of demarcating certain programs pushed by the UNP as unrepresentative of the 'pulse of the people' (Sirisena, 2018).

While a broadly agreed on equidistant external policy was laid out between India and China; the Government was unable to agree on the dynamics of its implementation. The lack of a stable working relationship between the UNP and SLFP and the absence of any efficacious accord between the President and Prime Minister over the substance of a 'balanced foreign policy' were the main reasons why Sri Lanka was unable to adopt a stable and utilitarian foreign policy. This led to a policy of satisficing, best visible through the claims made by the Cabinet spokesperson regarding the government's act of 'balancing' New Delhi and Beijing. He argued: 'We are trying to balance when we have given one [Trincomalee Harbor] to India and the other [Hambantota Harbor] to China' (as quoted in Dissanayake, 2018). As one analyst pointed out

The lease of the Hambantota port to a Chinese company [by the Sirisena- Wickremesinghe administration] may increase pressure on Sri Lanka's government to grant long-term interests in other strategic assets on the island (e.g. in Trincomalee or Colombo) to China's competitors - particularly to India and the US - as part of the pursuit of a 'balanced' foreign policy. The lease therefore carries some risk of yielding more strategic assets to external powers. As a related matter, aside from the economic question of whether Sri Lanka is negotiating and gaining maximum benefit in the price and other terms of these deals, these deals might also carry security risks. (Panditaratne, 2019)

Accordingly, the foreign policy of the Government reflected a case of uncoordinated satisficing, which was wholly inadequate to further Sri Lanka's core national interests.

The absence of a coherent and utilitarian foreign policy as well as the prevailing schism within the National Unity Government (owing to leader images and the Grand Coalition nature of the alliance), allowed societal actors to detract the government from optimal policy options. Moreover, the lack of consensus and bipartisan agreement within the Government continues to deviate the administration away from objective rational decision making and instead towards subjective parochial posturing.

Conclusion

Structural dynamics impelled the National Unity Government to adopt a balanced foreign policy. The National Unity Government, having extricated Sri Lanka from Rajapakse's biased posture towards China, attempted to forge a utilitarian foreign policy but, it was unable to actualize this owing to the impact of domestic intervening variables. Dissonant 'leader images' (post 2015) as well as an absence of elite cohesion within the Grand Coalition substantially beleaguered the National Unity Government's ability to execute a consistent and utilitarian foreign policy. By harnessing the discord within the Government, interest groups were able to stall and reverse a number of government initiatives.

Thus, from 2015 to 2018, bifurcating 'leader images,' a disintegrating Grand Coalition and societal interest groups drew the island away from an objective utilitarian position in its dealings with New Delhi and Beijing. Although a balance was manifest between India and China, the National Unity Government was not tethered to an objective and utilitarian foreign policy trajectory and as a result, satisficing became the distinct feature in its policy formulation.

Notes

1. The National Unity Government faced a significant political crisis in October 2018. On 26th October 2018, President Sirisena removed Prime Minister Wickremesinghe and swore in former President Rajapakse as the new Prime Minister. The President's party also withdrew from the ruling coalition that had been in existence since 2015. On 13th December 2018 Rajapakse resigned from the position of Prime Minister and on 16th December Ranil Wickremesinghe was sworn in as Prime Minister ending a 51 day political turmoil. These developments displayed the political unpredictability and the mounting economic challenges in Sri Lanka, resulting in a worsened perception of the country's risk profile. The country was also downgraded by three rating agencies - Fitch, Moody's, and S&P. In order to avoid delving too deeply into this crisis the author examined Sri Lanka's foreign policy before the said crisis, i.e. from the inception of the National Unity Government in 2015 until October 2018.
2. Satisficing is a term found mostly in literature related to decision making and psychology. The term is best understood as the antithesis of an objective and utilitarian strategy. While a utilitarian strategy involves a fastidious evaluation of all options on offer and the selection of the best, a satisficing one settles on an option which is inadequate to further a country's national interest, particularly in the long run. This is because satisficing leads to suboptimal decisions which are not objectively and adequately thought through.
3. For more detailed explanations on the 13th Amendment and the arrival of the Indian Peace Keeping Forces to Sri Lanka refer Bhasin (2004), Dixit (2001), and Ghosh (1999).
4. For example, it was expected through the ETCA, that Sri Lankan exports could more easily penetrate the Indian market 'of over 1.2 billion.' Vasantha Senanayake, Parliamentary Debates Hanzard (25 November 2017) Vol. 257 - No. 8, Column 1683.

5. Prior to the 2015 elections, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), from which both Sirisena and Rajapakse hail was part of the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA). The SLFP however, was the vanguard of the UPFA.
6. June 2017 saw a military standoff in a strategically important territory claimed by both China and Bhutan - a close ally of India. Reports suggest that China's incursions into Dokhlam prompted the arrival of Indian troops who blocked Chinese road building efforts. By the end of August both countries accepted an 'expeditious disengagement' of troops from the region.
7. The India-China bilateral trade reached \$84.44 billion in 2017. According to Ministry of Commerce of China, Chinese investments in India between January-December 2017 were to the tune of US\$289.98 million and cumulative Chinese investment in India till the end of December 2017 amount to US\$4.747 billion. Cumulative Indian investment in China till September 2017 is US\$ 851.91 million (Embassy of India in China, 2019).
8. A Gallup World Poll reflects an upsurge in Sri Lanka's approval of China's leadership from 24% in 2013 to 41% in 2018. 'Approval of China's Leadership.' *Gallup Analytics* retrieved from <https://analyticscampus.gallup.com/Charts?linkid=17282>.
9. These include the bilateral 'Sri Lanka and India Naval Exercises (SLINEX)' as well as the 'DOSTI Exercises' (which includes the Coast Guard of India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives).

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank Former Ambassador Mr H. M. G. S. Palihakkara, Dr Dinusha Panditaratne, Dr Jayanath Colombage, Dr Neil DeVotta, Dr Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, Dr Sree Padma Holt, Mr Shiran Fernando, Mr Vijaya Dissanayake and Ms Bhagya Senaratne, for their valuable insights and time. Acknowledgments are also due to two anonymous reviewers and the editor for their constructive comments which helped improve this manuscript. Any mistakes are mine alone.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Mr Shakthi De Silva is an Assistant Lecturer at the Department of International Relations, University of Colombo (Sri Lanka). He also serves as a Visiting Lecturer at the Bandaranaike International Diplomatic Training Institute. He has published widely including in the *South Asian Survey*, *Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences*, *South Asia Journal*, *Global –E* journal of the University of California, *Synergy: Journal of Contemporary Asian Studies* hosted by the University of Toronto, *The Diplomat Magazine* and the *London School of Economics South Asia Blog*.

References

- Abeyratne, D. S. (2018, October 19). No privatisation of Colombo Port Eastern Terminal-Minister. *Daily News*. Retrieved from <http://www.dailynews.lk/2018/10/19/local/165989/no-privatisation-colombo-port-eastern-terminal-minister>
- Abi-Habib, M., & Bastians, B. (2018, October 26). Sri Lanka faces constitutional crisis as President Unseats Prime Minister. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/26/world/asia/sri-lanka-political-crisis.html>
- American Enterprise Institute. (2019). *China global investment tracker*. Retrieved from <http://www.aei.org/china-global-investment-tracker/>
- Aoyama, R. (2016). One belt, one road': China's new global strategy. *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, 5(2), 3–22.

- Auwards, V. (2018, December 2). Belt and road initiative spurs Sri Lanka's growth. *Verite Research*. Retrieved from <https://www.veriteresearch.org/2018/12/03/belt-and-road-initiative-spurs-sri-lankas-growth/>
- Balachandran, P. K. (2017, April 27). India and Sri Lanka Reach mutually beneficial compromise on problematic issue of Trincomalee oil tanks. *DBSJeyaraj.com*. Retrieved from <http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/52696>
- Bhasin, A. S. (2004). *India in Sri Lanka: Between Lion and the Tigers*. New Delhi: Manas Publications.
- Bhatt, P. (2018). Evolving dynamics in the Indo-Pacific: Deliberating India's position. *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, 1(1), 53–78.
- Central Bank of Sri Lanka. (2018). *Annual report*. Colombo: Central Bank of Sri Lanka.
- Chambers, S., & Kopstein, J. (2006). Civil society and the state. In J. Dryzek, B. Honig, & A. Phillips (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political theory* (pp. 362–382). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chaudhury, D. R. (2019, February 02). Sri Lanka to put in place national govt next week to address foreign debt. *The Economic Times*. Retrieved from <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/sri-lanka-to-put-in-place-national-govt-next-week-to-address-foreign-debt/articleshow/67803824.cms>
- China's Support Indispensable for Sri Lanka's National Development: President Sirisena. (2018, May 12). *Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Sri Lanka*. Retrieved from <http://lk.china-embassy.org/eng/xwdt/t1558817.htm>
- Clifford, R. (2017). *Drivers behind the PRC's port investments: Cases in Darwin and Sri Lanka* (Unpublished Master's Thesis) Naval Postgraduate School.
- Cole, B. (2016). *China's quest for great power*. Maryland: Naval Institute Press.
- Colombage, J. (2019, January 8). Interview by Shakthi De Silva. Personal interview, Sri Lanka.
- Cordner, L. (2018). *Maritime security risks, Vulnerabilities and cooperation*. Switzerland: Macmillan.
- Department of External Resources. (2017). *Performance report 2017*. Colombo: Ministry of National Policies and Economic Affairs.
- De Silva, S. (2018a, January 19). Will Sri Lanka manage to perform the balancing act between China and India? *London School of Economics - South Asia Blog*. Retrieved from <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2018/01/19/will-sri-lanka-manage-to-perform-the-balancing-act-between-china-and-india/>
- De Silva, S. (2018b, February 1). Cosmetic plastering: No bona fide unity in Sri Lanka's unity government? *Counter Currents*. Retrieved from <https://countercurrents.org/2018/02/01/cosmetic-plastering-no-bona-fide-unity-sri-lankas-unity-government/>
- DeVotta, N. (2018, November 10). Interview by Shakthi De Silva. *Viber interview*.
- Dissanayake, C. (2018, July 26). Mattala, Hambantota balancing acts between India and China: Rajitha. *Daily FT*. Retrieved from <http://www.ft.lk/news/Mattala-Hambantota-balancing-acts-between-India-and-China-Rajitha/56-659779>
- Dissanayake, V. (2019, January 3). Interview by Shakthi De Silva. *Personal interview, Sri Lanka*.
- Dixit, J. N. (2001). *Assignment Colombo*. Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Bookshop.
- Economy.lk (@economylk). (2018, September 12). Peter D'Almeida questions Hon. @HarshadeSilvaMP on the inability of the government to deliver an integrated policy to which the Minister states "Running a company is difficult, running a coalition government is extremely difficult". SLES2018 lka. [Twitter] Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/economylk/status/1040130110290984961>
- Ellen, B. (2015, January 9). New President in Sri Lanka puts China's plans in check. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from www.nytimes.com/2015/01/10/world/asia/new-president-in-sri-lanka-puts-chinas-plans-in-check.html?ref=collection/timestopic/Rajapaksa,Mahinda
- Elman, C. (2007). Realism. In M. Griffiths (Ed.), *International relations theory for the twenty-first century* (pp. 11–20). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Embassy of India in China. (2019, January 7). *India-China trade and economic relations*. Retrieved from <http://indianembassybeijing.in/economic-and-trade-relation.php>
- Fernando, N. (2019, March 18). East container terminal delayed by Prez-PM cold war. *Daily Mirror*. Retrieved from http://www.dailymirror.lk/business__main/East-Container-Terminal-delayed-by-Prez-PM-cold-war/245-164097

- Fernando, S. (2018, November 23). Interview by Shakthi De Silva. *Personal interview, Sri Lanka*.
- Fernholz, T. (2018, June 29). China's "debt trap" is even worse than we thought. *Quartz*. Retrieved from <https://qz.com/1317234/chinas-debt-trap-in-sri-lanka-is-even-worse-than-we-thought/>
- Fonseka, B., Ganeshathasan, L., & Daniel, S. (2017). *Two years in government: A review of the pledges made in 2015 through the lens of constitutional reform, governance and transitional justice*. Colombo 5: Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- Garrick, J. (2018, December 7). Darwin port's sale is a blueprint for China's future economic expansion. *The Conversation*. Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/darwin-ports-sale-is-a-blueprint-for-chinas-future-economic-expansion-108254>
- Ghiassy, R., Su, F., & Saalman, L. (2018). *The twenty-first century maritime silk road*. Stockholm: SIPRI.
- Ghosh, P. A. (1999). *Ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and role of Indian peace keeping force*. New Delhi: APH Publishing.
- Glaser, C. L. (1996). Realists as optimists: Cooperation as self-help. In B. Frankel (Ed.), *Realism: Restatements and renewals* (pp. 122–163). London: Frank Cass.
- Goldstein, J. (1994). *International relations*. New York: Harper Collins College Publishers.
- Gupta, A. (2018, December 28). Were local politics or geopolitical rivalries behind Sri Lanka's recent coup crisis? *World Political Review*. Retrieved from <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/27073/were-local-politics-or-geopolitical-rivalries-behind-sri-lanka-s-recent-coup-crisis>
- Haksar, P. N. (1989). *India's foreign policy and its problems*. New Delhi: Patriot Publishers.
- Hansbury, P. (2017). *The agency of smaller powers: Belarus in international relations*. (Doctoral dissertation). University of Oxford.
- Hewage, K. (2018, January 3). 2017 in review: Sri Lanka. *South Asian Voices*. Retrieved from <https://southasianvoices.org/2017-review-sri-lanka/>
- Hillman, J. (2018). Game of loans: How China bought Hambantota. In N. Szechenyi (Ed.), *China's maritime silk road strategic and economic implications for the Indo-Pacific region* (pp. 7–10). Washington, DC: Center for Strategic & International Studies.
- Hornat, J. (2016). The power triangle in the Indian Ocean: China, India and the United States. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 29(2), 425–443.
- Hu, R. (2017). China's 'one belt one road' strategy: Opportunity or challenge for India? *China Report*, 53(2), 107–124.
- India commits over \$2.6 billion in aid to Sri Lanka. (2016, October 7). *Tamil Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/india-commits-over-26-billion-aid-sri-lanka>
- India to gain control of Mattala airport in Sri Lanka. (2018, July 6). *The Hindu*. Retrieved from <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/logistics/india-to-operate-mattala-airport-in-sri-lanka/article24347909.ece>
- Indraguptha, G. (2011). *China's South Asia policy through a domestic sovereignty perspective*. (Unpublished master's thesis). University of British Columbia.
- Jacques, M. (2009). *When China rules the world: The rise of the middle kingdom and the end of the Western world*. London: Allen Lane.
- Jayasekera, N. (2017, October 17). Protest against lease of Mattala Airport: Eight released on bail, 32 re-remanded till Oct 30. *Daily News*. Retrieved from <http://www.dailynews.lk/2017/10/17/local/131549/protest-against-lease-mattala-airport-eight-released-bail-32-re-remanded?page=21>
- Junxian, G., & Yan, M. (2016). China's new silk road: Where does it lead? *Asian Perspective*, 40, 105–130.
- Kahandawaarachchi, T. (2017, August 23). Why did Sri Lanka seek Chinese investments in ports? *Ceylon Today*. Retrieved from <http://www.ceylontoday.lk/print20170401CT20170630.php?id=28273>
- Keethaponcalan, S. I. (2019). *Post-war dilemmas of Sri Lanka: Democracy and reconciliation*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Keman, H. (2011). Patterns of multi-party government: Viability and compatibility of coalitions. *Political Science*, 63(1), 10–28.
- Lees, C. (2010). The grand coalition and the party system. *German Politics*, 19(3–4), 312–331.
- Levy, J. S. (1989). The causes of war: A review of theories and evidence. In P. E. Tetlock (Ed.), *Behavior, society and nuclear war* (pp. 209–333). New York: Oxford University Press.

- Lim, D., & Mukherjee, R. (2017). What money can't buy: The security externalities of Chinese economic statecraft in post-war Sri Lanka. *Asian Security*, 1, 1–20.
- මෙම ත්‍රී පාලනයක් ස්ථාවර රටක්: මෙම ත්‍රීපාල සිරිසේන ජනාධිපති ධුරයේ සිටි වසරක් ගත කළ හැටි. (2018, January 8). *BBC sinhala service*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/sinhala/sri-lanka-46791736>
- Ministry of Defense. (2018). *Annual performance report*. Colombo: Ministry of Defense. Retrieved from: <https://www.parliament.lk/uploads/documents/paperspresented/performance-report-ministry-of-defence-2017.pdf>
- Mitra, D. (2017, July 20). Despite security assurances, Chinese consolidation of Sri Lankan ports remains a worry for India. *The Wire*. Retrieved from <https://thewire.in/163052/hambantota-china-sri-lanka-ports/>
- MS and RW clash on Colombo Port East Terminal. (2018, October 17). *The Morning*. Retrieved from <http://www.themorning.lk/ms-and-rw-clash-on-colombo-port-east-terminal/>
- Mushtaq, M. (2017, November 16). Sri Lankan hub dealings pit China against India. *Nikkei Asian Review*. Retrieved from <https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/Sri-Lankan-hub-dealings-pit-China-against-India>
- O'Callaghan, T., & Griffiths, M. (2002). *International relations: The key concepts*. London: Routledge.
- Padma, S. (2018, December 21). Interview by Shakthi De Silva. *Email-interview*.
- Paliakkara, H. M. G. S. (2018, October 16). Interview by Shakthi De Silva. *Personal interview, Sri Lanka*.
- Panditaratne, D. (2019, January 26). Interview by Shakthi De Silva. *Email-interview*.
- Parker, S., & Chefitz, G. (2018). *Debtbook diplomacy*. Harvard Kennedy School: Cambridge.
- Pattanaik, S. (2016). Indian Ocean in the emerging geo-strategic context: examining India's relations with its maritime South Asian neighbors. *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*, 12(2), 126–142.
- Paul, T. V. (2019). When balance of power meets globalization: China, India and the small states of South Asia. *Politics*, 39(1), 50–63.
- Peiris, P. (2018, March 10). Beginning of the end for Sri Lanka's coalition government. *EastAsiaForum*. Retrieved from <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2018/03/10/beginning-of-the-end-for-sri-lankas-coalition-government/>
- Protest against proposed ETCA between Sri Lanka and India. (2016, March 25). *Lanka business online*. Retrieved from <http://www.lankabusinessonline.com/protest-against-proposed-etca-between-sri-lanka-and-india/>
- Protest rally against ETCA. (2016, November 2). *Daily mirror*. Retrieved from <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/Protest-rally-against-ETCA-105326.html>
- Ramadhani, E. (2015). China in the Indian Ocean region: The confined 'far-seas operations'. *India Quarterly*, 71(2), 146–159.
- Rao Sundarji, P. R. (2015, January 9). We can't have a president with unlimited powers: Wickremesinghe. *Hindustan Times*. Retrieved from www.hindustantimes.com/world/we-cant-have-a-president-with-unlimited-powers-wickremesinghe/story-0rlrWq8pSngEV9sUrlhJlM.html
- Renshon, J., & Renshon, S. (2008). The theory and practice of foreign policy decision making. *Political Psychology*, 29(4), 509–536.
- Ripsman, M. N., Taliaferro, J. W., & Lobell, S. E. (2016). *Neoclassical realist theory of international politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ripsman, N. (2018). Neoclassical Realism. In *Oxford research encyclopedia of international studies* [Online]. Retrieved from <http://oxfordre.com/internationalstudies/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.001.0001/acrefore-9780190846626-e-36>
- Roskin, M., Cord, R., Medeiros, J., & Jones, W. (2012). *Political science: An introduction*. New York: Longman.
- Rourke, J., & Boyer, M. (1998). *International politics on the world stage*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Roy-Chaudhury, R. (2018). India's perspective towards China in their shared South Asian neighbourhood: Cooperation versus competition. *Contemporary Politics*, 24(1), 98–112.
- Samaranayake, N. (2019, January 01). Hambantota: Critical node in the Asia–Africa growth corridor? *Observer Research Foundation*. Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/hambantota-critical-node-asia-africa-growth-corridor-46942/>
- Saravanamuttu, P. (2018, December 29). Interview by Shakthi De Silva. *Personal interview, Sri Lanka*.

- Schweller, R. (2006). *Unanswered threats: Political constraints on the balance of power*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Senaratne, B. (2019, January 07). Interview by Shakthi De Silva. *Personal interview, Sri Lanka*.
- Shepard, W. (2016, October 28). Sri Lanka's Hambantota port and the world's emptiest airport go to the Chinese. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/wadeshepard/2016/10/28/sold-sri-lankas-hambantota-portand-the-worlds-emptiest-airport-go-to-the-Chinese>
- Simon, H. (1955). A behavioral model of rational choice. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 69(1), 99–118.
- Singer, J. D. (1961). The level of analysis problem in international relations. *World Politics*, 14(3), 77–92.
- Singh, A. (2015). China's 'maritime bases' in the IOR: A chronicle of dominance foretold. *Strategic Analysis*, 39(3), 293–297.
- Sirilal, R., & Aneez, S. (2018, July 22). China's Xi offers fresh \$295 million grant to Sri Lanka. *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sri-lanka-china-grant/chinas-xi-offers-fresh-295-million-grant>
- Sirisena, M. (2018, October 28). President Maithripala Sirisena's address to the nation – full text. *Colombo Telegraph*. Retrieved from <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/president-maithripala-sirisenas-address-to-the-nation-full-text/>
- Snyder, J. (1991). *Myths of empire: Domestic politics and international ambitions*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Sri Lanka President drops assassination bombshell, accuses India. (2018, October 17). *Newsin.Asia*. Retrieved from <https://newsin.asia/sri-lanka-president-drops-assassination-bombshell-accuses-india/>
- Steil, B., & Rocca, B. (2019, May 8). Belt and road tracker. *Council of Foreign Affairs*. Retrieved from <https://www.cfr.org/article/belt-and-road-tracker>
- Sturm, R. (2013). Unruly divorces? Why do coalitions in the German länder end prematurely? *Regional & Federal Studies*, 23(4), 445–459.
- Sultana, G. (2017). *National unity government in Sri Lanka: An assessment*. New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses.
- U.S Indo-Pacific Command Posture*. Hearings before the Senate Armed Services Committee, (2019, February 12). (Testimony of Admiral Philips Davidson).
- Wagner, C. (2016). The role of India and China in South Asia. *Strategic Analysis*, 40(4), 307–320.
- Wagner, C. (2018). India's bilateral security relationship in South Asia. *Strategic Analysis*, 42(1), 15–28.
- Walt, S. M. (1996). Alliances: Balancing and bandwagoning. In R. J. Art & R. Jervis (Eds.), *International politics: Enduring concepts and contemporary issues* (pp. 127–134). London: Harper Collins Publication.
- Weerakoon, B. (2006). *Rendering unto caesar*. New Delhi: New Dawn Press.
- Wijayasiri, J., & Senaratne, N. (2018). China's belt and road initiative (BRI): A sustainable partnership for Sri Lanka? *IPS Policy Insights*. Retrieved from <http://www.ips.lk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/7-Chinas-Belt-and-Road-Initiative-BRI-A-Sustainable-Partnership-for-Sri-Lanka.pdf>
- Wijewardena, W. A. (2019, January 7). Sri Lanka's deep economic crisis: Wasted four years and a wasting election year. *DailyFT*. Retrieved from <http://www.ft.lk/columns/Sri-Lanka-s-deep-economic-crisis-Wasted-four-years-and-a-wasting-election-year>
- Wijeyarathna, N. (2017). Takeaways – Dr Ranee Jayamaha on the belt and road initiative and potential economic benefits to Sri Lanka. *Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute of International Relations and Strategic Studies*. Retrieved from <https://www.lki.lk/publication/dr-ranee-jayamaha-on-the-belt-and-road-initiative-and-potential-economic-benefits-to-sri-lanka/>