ARE SRI LANKA'S GROWING MILITARY, DIPLOMATIC AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS WITH CHINA A CONCERN OF REGIONAL AND GLOBAL POWER?

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INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka, formally called Ceylon, is an island in the Indian Ocean, located in southern Asia, southeast of India, in a strategic location near major Indian Ocean sea lanes. It has a total area of 65,610 km², with 64,740 km² of land and 870 km² of water. Its coastline is 1,340 km long.

It is an economically booming region mainly due to the rapid development of two giants: India and China. For imperialism, our part of the Indian Ocean is not merely a market to be conquered or a source of raw materials to be pillaged. It is the gateway to the control of resources and markets in the Near East, Middle East, Africa and Asia.

CHINA SRI LANKA RELATIONS

China, Ceylon (Sri Lanka after 1972) relations date back to many thousands years. Both Sri Lanka and China have many things in commons including the principle of friendship towards all, enmity towards none in its diplomacy. Both countries have a recorded and proven history of adhering to the principles of peaceful co-existence, non aggression, maintaining world peace and believing in a harmonious world.

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MILITARY RELATIONS

Arms Trade. In 1971, during insurrection in Ceylon, China provided much needed arms and ammunitions and undoubtedly had been the most constant and sincere friend of Sri Lanka.[2]

An analysis of SIPRI's data for arms exported to Sri Lanka by China reveals a substantial increase in weapons flow in 2008. Sri Lanka received US$75 million worth of Chinese arms shipments in 2008, which is significantly more than the US$10 million value in 2006. By contrast, SIPRI data for the United States, India, and Pakistan in recent years shows mostly empty data cells or declining arms exports to Sri Lanka. Going forward, however, one can likely expect to see a reduction in Sri Lankan weapon imports from China following the victory over the LTTE in May 2009. Signaling this possibility was the cash-strapped Sri Lankan Government's postwar cancellation of a US$200 million weapons order from China.[3]

Port Calls and Military Interaction. Concerning port calls, Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka, was among one of three ports visited by China's PLA navy on its first foreign visit in 1985.[4] More than 20 years later, two Jiangwei II–class frigates refueled in Colombo on their way to Pakistan in March 2007 during the PLA navy's first multilateral exercise.[5]

Two years later, the Guangzhou refueled in Colombo on its way to Pakistan in March 2009. Less than a year later, the Chinese Wenzhou warship paid a port call to Colombo in January 2010 for three days before returning to the Gulf of Aden and Somali coast for patrol duties.[6]

However, Military Interactions appears to be limited in the past. A review of the PRC's Defense White Papers from 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, and 2008 reveal no major bilateral military Interactions during the past decade, with the exception of one 2005 visit by Sri Lankan President Kumaratunga

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2 WM Karunadasa, Sri Lanka and Non Alignment, A Study of Foreign Policy from 1945-1982, Dehiwala Sri Lanka, 1997, P118 12 SIPRI, "Arms Transfers Database".

3 "Sri Lanka Stops Arms Deal with China: Official", Agence France-Press, July 15, 2009.

4 "Chinese Navy Sails onto World Stage", China Military Online[English ed.] , April 21, 2009. Available at http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/special-reports/2009-04/22/content_1736016. htm Khurana, "China's String of Pearls", p26.

5 Daniel J. Kostecka, "Places and Bases: The Chinese Navy's Emerging Support Network in the Indian Ocean", Naval War College Review Vol64, No1 (2011), p72.

6 Xu Yeqing and Wu Guilin, "Sri Lanka Navy Commander Visits 'Wenzhou' Warship", PLA Daily, January11, 2010.

and her Minister of Defense to China.[7]

DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

Sri Lanka has enjoyed consistently positive relations with China in more than 50 years of diplomatic recognition. Since China and Sri Lanka attended the 1955 Bandung Conference of Asian and African nations, China has repeatedly stated that bilateral relations are based on the FPPC, two of which are mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs and mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity.[8] For instance, during Sri Lanka's war against terrorism, President Hu affirmed China's support for Sri Lanka's sovereignty and territorial integrity.[9] Returning to the FPPC sentiment, President Rajapaksa characterized Sri Lanka's relations with China a year later: "the two countries are tested friends" and "Sri Lanka has always firmly stood by and will never change its stance on One-China policy. "[10]

On its web site, the Sri Lankan Ministry of Defense, Public Security, Law and Order announced China's opposition to a motion to discuss the humanitarian situation in the north of Sri Lanka. China informed the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) not to interfere in Sri Lanka's internal affairs. China has reiterated that Sri Lankan military operations have no effect on international peace and security.[11]

In June 2009, Sri Lanka was awarded "dialogue partner"[12] status in the mostly Central Asian organization during its annual summit. "Dialogue Partner is a state or an organization which shares the goals and principles of the SCO and wishes to establish relations of equal, mutually beneficial partnership with the organization. "[13] In 2001, SCO members signed the Shanghai Convention

7 State Council Information Office of the PRC, China's National Defense in 2006, Appendix II: Major International Exchanges of the Chinese Military 2005–2006 (Beijing: Author, 2006).

8 Xinhua Online, "Backgrounder: Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence", June14, 2004. Available at http://news.xinhuanet. com/ english/2005-04/08/content_2803638. htm.

9 Embassy of Sri Lanka in Beijing, "President Mahinda Rajapaksa Holds Bilateral Talks with President Hu Jintao" (news release, August 2008). Available at http://www.priu.gov.lk/news_update/Current_Affairs/ca200808/2008135sl_china_relations.htm.

10 Xinhua, "Sri Lanka, China Are Tested Friends: Sri Lankan President", September 4, 2009.

11 Sri Lanka Ministry of Defense, Public Security, Law, and Order, China Informs the UNSC Again Not to Interfere in Sri Lanka's Internal Affairs, March 21, 2009.

12 Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), "Joint Communiqué of Meeting of the Council of the Heads of the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization", June16, 2009. Available at http://sectsco.org/EN/show.asp?id=88.

13 Sri Lanka Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "FM Hails Admission of Sri Lanka as Dialogue Partner of SCO" (news release, June 17, 2009).

on Combating Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism,[14] which stipulated the need to fight against these "three evils. "[15]

Furthermore, joint communiqués signed between Sri Lanka and China for years have noted their common determination to "relentlessly fight against the three evils of terrorism, separatism and extremism. "

In its war against terrorism, Sri Lanka clearly set the goal of defeating separatism and terrorism as China has done in its restive regions of Tibet and Xinjiang.[16]

This 2009 SCO invitation to Sri Lanka is so recent and information released from the SCO is so sparse that its significance cannot yet be fully assessed. Nevertheless, the accession of Sri Lanka to "dialogue partner" status appears to reflect the country's growing importance to China.

ECONOMIC RELATIONS

Sri Lanka's economic relations with China date back centuries when the island's harbors were central in east-west sea trade. In the twenty-first century, both countries are growing closer economically through trade and investment projects.

Trade. In terms of the overall volume of bilateral trade, Sri Lanka is not a major exporting or importing partner for China. But, China became Sri Lanka's second-largest importing country in 2008-up from third place in 2007, according to The World Fact book of the US Central Intelligence Agency.[17]

Although, India continues to be the top source of imports to Sri Lanka, trade between China and Sri Lanka has become more robust in recent years. This can be seen by looking at data from both the Sri Lankan and Chinese governments. First, bilateral trade data from the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL)[18] shows a significant expansion of commercial relations with China during the past decade.

It is worth noting that despite the recent growth of Sri Lanka's trade with China, Sri Lanka's trade with its northern neighbor, India, has been rising at an even faster rate. Whereas in 1990, Sri Lanka's trade with both India and

14 SCO, "The Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism", May 7, 2009. Available at http://www.sectsco.org/EN/show.asp?id=68.

15 "SCO: War on Terror to Continue", Shenzhen Daily, June 16, 2006.

16 Embassy of the PRC in Sri Lanka, "China–Sri Lanka Joint Communiqué".

17 Central Intelligence Agency, The World Fact book (Washington, DC: Author, 2008).

18 (In US$ million) Sources: Central Bank of Sri Lanka.

China totaled approximately the same amount, India's trade with Sri Lanka ballooned to about US$3.9 billion in 2008. In comparison, Sri Lanka's trade with China grew to roughly US$1.1 billion in 2008, while its trade with India was more than three times greater. Keeping in perspective Sri Lanka's overall trade with both China and India could be vital in weighing the low likelihood of Sri Lanka bandwagoning with China.

GLOBAL AND REGIONAL POWER'S POINT OF VIEW

The geo-strategic importance of Sri Lankan has been noted throughout history. Sri Lanka is an ideal location for a naval base to oversee the Indian Ocean and its increasingly busy shipping lanes.[19] No other nation in the South Asian region can claim the importance Sri Lanka has in terms of its geography.[20] Places such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Maldives, all have their own geographic and strategic value, but from a naval strategic point of view, Sri Lanka brings more advantages in terms of distances to strategic points along the littoral and protection of fleets and sea-lanes.[21]

Therefore, it can be argued that Sri Lanka plays an extremely important role in the spheres of geo-strategical, economical, political and also military interests of both regional and global powers.

CONCERN OF UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Sri Lanka is a great communication center for the Indian Ocean, which is why the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in South Asia chose it to locate his Headquarters during World War II.[22]

The Indian Ocean also has several nuclear powered states and a number of states with nuclear ambition along its littoral. The region is also home to some of the world's most volatile failed and failing states. Poverty, terrorism, fundamentalism and piracy are also glaring issues of concern in the region, which is also a great concern of US national security.

Sri Lanka's geographic location in the Indian Ocean positions it to play

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19 P. VinojKumar, "The Dragons Newest Pearl", Tehelka Magazine 6, No 20, http://www.tehelka.com/story_main41.asp?filename=Ne230509the_dragon.asp (accessed 11 May 2011).

20 [2] P. A. Ghosh, Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka and Role of Indian peace Keeping Force (New Delhi: A. P. H. Publishing Corporation, 1999).

21 Ibid, 47.

22 P. K. Balachandran, "Sri Lanka's Strategic Location", http://www.tamilnation. org/intframe/indian_ocean/050530sri_lanka_strategic_importance.htm (accessed 12 April 2009).

a very important part in any maritime movement between the West and the East. The distance from Sri Lanka to the Strait of Homuz and the Strait of Malacca is approximately 2,000 miles; this means Sri Lanka is located in the most central maritime route between the Persian Gulf and Indonesia.[23] It is also the most central location to reach troubled spots throughout the Indian Ocean's littoral.[24] It can also readily support operations in the Middle East, Afghanistan or South East Asia. Positioning a naval force in Sri Lanka would also eliminate the need to shift military assets from other geographic areas as was done during the Gulf war of 1991 and during the Iran and Afghanistan crises of 1980.[25]

For US policy makers and military planners, Sri Lanka has now become a top geopolitical priority. A sense of urgency is driving the grand brains in the White House and Pentagon to figure out how not to lose Sri Lanka? " In short, that means an answer to the question, "How can we use Sri Lanka to further US national security interests in the Indian Ocean? " This shows the significant importance of Sri Lanka to the United States in terms of their national security.

CONCERN OF INDIA

One of the primary tasks of Naval Forces of the Indian Ocean is to seek even greater maritime presence in the region to protect its national security and economic interests.[26] As India's ambitions grow, so grows the economic and military convergence of interests between India and the US within the region.[27] In fact, India is now working with the US to maintain security of Indian Ocean sea-lanes. The US believes that its relationship with India could enlarge India's security perimeter to achieve a position of greater influence in the region.[28] The important factor here is the growing geo-strategic relationship between India and the US.

India's emergence as a regional power and a key global player depends largely on her image and standing in the South Asian neighborhood. If India

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23 Dupinder Singh, Indian Ocean and Regional Security (India: B.C. Publications, 1994), 84-85.

24 P. K. Vinoj Kumar, "Winning a war Without Witness", http://www.tehelka.com/story_main40.asp?filename=Ne222108the_liberators.asp (accessed 21 September 2009).

25 Robert E.Harkarvy, Bases Abroad (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 34.

26 Proquest, "US Experts on India and South Asia", US Newswire, 22 September 2008, http://proquest.umi.com (accessed 10 April 2009).

27 Ibid.

28 Donald L. Berlin, "India in the Indian Ocean", http://findarticles.com/p/articles/ mi_m0JIW/is_2_59/ai_n16689838/pg_2/? Tag=content; col1, 2006 (accessed 6 June 2009).

cannot effectively generate and ensure her key status in South Asia, how can the world be convinced that it can carve influence afield?

This proposition entails once again the forging of mutual national interests' convergence of India and the United States. Sri Lanka is an important component of United States India Ocean strategy and it is felt that United States-India convergences exist already. From the Indian point of view, Joint USA-India strategies and foreign policies towards Sri Lanka would be helpful in counter-acting China and Pakistan's overtures to wean away Sri Lanka from India's influence.

Some of India's security analysts have interpreted these moves as further evidence of Sri Lanka's determination to counter balance India, worrying that Pakistan could be used as "China's Force Multiplier" in south and central Asia.[29] A retired senior Indian diplomat said Pakistan is a time tested tool and a low cost low risk way for China to keep India in check.[30]

The security community in India sees China as posing the most formidable constraint to its influence in Sri Lanka. There are many factors that lead to this conclusion. China's vast resources, its desire to guarantee itself access to the world's principle oil shipping lanes,[31] its veto power on the security council, its professed emphasis on non-interference, and its aversion to holding others to account on human rights and governance issues.

From an Indian point of view she feels that China is not part of South Asia, but through systematic efforts, Beijing has made its presence felt in a big way in India's neighborhood in Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles and in Sri Lanka. In this context, Sri Lanka plays an extremely important role in terms of Indian national security and India prefers that Sri Lanka will forever be in India's shadow.

ANALYSIS

This research paper has made critical analysis the Sri Lanka's ties with China during the past few years. After analyzing this data, it is clear that Sri Lanka's relations with China have been deepening on the basis of increased economic, military, and diplomatic interactions.

Regarding economic ties, official data from both governments show

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29 B Raman, "Pakistan as china's force multiplier against India", South Asia analysis group, paper no3918, 11 July 2010.

30 Crisis group interview, November 2010.

31 Crisis group Asia report no 153, China's thirst for oil, 9 Jun 2008.

bilateral trade is steadily rising.Chinese investment in Sri Lanka is clearly increasing, as seen in high-profile infrastructure development projects throughout the country. While calculating a precise figure for overall Chinese investment in Sri Lanka is not without problems, the direction of inflows is clearly upward. Accelerating trade and investment ties represents the strongest economic case for structural realists arguing that Sri Lanka is bandwagoning with China, especially due to fears of Chinese presence in the potentially strategic location of the port in Hambantota. Yet, Hambantota represents one of many infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka, including the development of new roads and power plants not only by Chinese firms but also by Japanese, Iranian, Indian, and Saudi Arabian companies. Furthermore, it is hard to imagine Sri Lanka turning down US investment, if offered.

With respect to military ties, growth in military cooperation through port calls and officer training remains limited. The jump in Chinese arms exports to Sri Lanka in 2008—the year before the humanitarian war's conclusion—offers the best proof in the military realm that Sri Lanka has been bandwagoning with China. However, the Sri Lankan government's cancellation of US$200 million Chinese ammunition shipment soon after its victory does not lend support to this assumption.

Concerning diplomatic relations, the Sri Lankan Government welcomed China's support during dire moments of confrontation with Western countries over its handling of the final phase of the war against the LTTE. Sri Lanka's recent decision to boycott the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony honoring a Chinese dissident, provide the best evidence for a structural realist argument that Sri Lanka is bandwagoning with China in the diplomatic dimension. Yet, this behavior can be explained as Sri Lanka sharing FPPC values with China, as neither country wants to be scrutinized for its internal political processes or adherence to rule of law.

Although it is clear that Sri Lanka's relationship with China has been tightening on the basis of increased economic, military, and diplomatic interactions, no evidence exists that Sri Lanka will be obligated to China strategically due to these stronger ties. Sri Lanka has economic debts to pay China due to infrastructure development loans and weapons used in its humanitarian war, but there is no proof at this point that these will translate to Chinese strategic sway over major Sri Lankan foreign policy decisions such as bandwagoning with China against India and the United States.

On a map, a Chinese-funded naval base in Sri Lanka looks like a dagger pointed directly at India. In reality, its very proximity to India would make

such a base a liability in any serious conflict without substantial air defenses, command and control facilities, and hardened infrastructure, which Sri Lanka certainly cannot afford to provide.

Conversely, it is not in the interest of a small, developing country such as Sri Lanka to risk alienating countries—especially its northern neighbor by bandwagoning with China. Not even considering the importance of its strategic proximity, size, and historical relations, India remains the top exporting country to Sri Lanka, and bilateral trade is more than three times greater than Sri Lanka's trade with China.

Though experts are unable to rule out that Sri Lanka might someday bandwagon with China, at this point, Colombo appears to be seeking assistance from any country willing to provide it because Sri Lanka is a developing nation. Structural realism cannot explain this openness and the fact that Sri Lanka is neither balancing against China, nor is it balancing against India or the United States, but it instead seeks good relations with all of its more powerful neighbors.

However, it can be argued that USA presence and power shift to the Asia pacific will not be consistence. Their interest keeps on changing from time to time and USA was in Asia pacific and has come back again. But China's presence in the Asia pacific is consistence because they need the energy route through Indian Ocean region and finds no alternatives. Therefore Indian Ocean region will be critical to her economy and security interests in the future.

Presently, Sri Lanka's national interest is focused more on economy having defeated the terrorism which brought misery to Sri Lanka for nearly three decades. Sri Lanka will not play a dual act to create an unnecessary and tense situation between two Asian giants as Sri Lanka is matured enough to understand that if the China-India rivalry heats up, Sri Lanka well find itself caught in the middle.

CONCLUSION

In one hand India has displayed constant efforts to keep the smaller neighboring countries such as Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh under conditions of either servitude or patronage. This objective could be a residue of grand India "design for greater India" (Maha Bharat). In the other hand, China will have to view America as a greatest potential enemy which has committed herself to contain and finally destroy the communist rule in China. This was thought by China to be obvious from the US involvement in Taiwan, her military presence in South Korea, Japan and her naval presence in the Pacific Ocean and also recent deployment of 2500 marines in Australia. Latest

example is the US interference in the South China sea in maritime dispute between Philippine and China.

Although, China is outside the South Asian region, she has common boundaries with Bhutan, Nepal, India and Pakistan. Mainly because of Chinese geographical proximity to the region and links between her national interest and South Asian region,[32] Indian fears to the Chinese threat are considered very real and some political leaders expressed the view that India should build up her military power on par with that of China.

In this backdrop, Sri Lanka's relations with China have clearly been rising along economic, military, and diplomatic lines; however, whether stronger ties will result in a fundamental reorganization of IOR politics as feared by some China watchers is far from decided. In the absence of concrete evidence, however, analysts should guard against jumping to the conclusion that this is happening. Given that we have witnessed the Sri Lankan Government cancel a US$200 million Chinese ammunitions shipment after the civil war, invite companies from various countries (other than China) to set up businesses in Hambantota Port, and offer to sell fuel to non-Chinese ships sailing along the main east-west shipping routes, Colombo does not appear to be bandwagoning with China in the IOR. Being a developing nation, Sri Lanka takes what China offers, while also accepting what is offered by India, the United States, multilateral organizations, and any other donor to ensure its survival as a small state. Consequently, we have seen Sri Lanka be a willing recipient of economic investment for infrastructure development, military assistance to win a civil war, and diplomatic support in international forums from any country, not only China.

Chinese commitment for the third world cause thus was very attractive to make Sri Lankan more and more linked with China. Constant friendship with China was not possible without Sri Lanka's Non-Aligned approach. Chinese connections had helped Sri Lanka greatly not only solving domestic problems but also problems with India.

In the conclusion, this research paper having systematically compiled and analyzed all publicly available data to document, it is suggested that Sri Lanka's relations with China have been deepening on the basis of increase economic, military and diplomatic interactions but not banwagoning with nor balancing China as predicted by some westerners but is paving its own path to national development, growth and mutual benefits for both the countries.

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32 HSS Nissanka, International relations and geopolitics, Colombo,1997, p15.