



National Security Think Tank Enters Global Think Tank Rankings



Vision

To improve policy and decision making through high quality research and analysis with excellence.

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About Us

Institute of National Security Studies Sri Lanka (INSSSL) is the premiere national security think tank of Sri Lanka under the Ministry of Defence.

The Institute of National Security Studies Sri Lanka (INSSSL) is ranked among the top security think tanks in the region by a leading research program.

The Think Tanks and Civil Societies Programme (TTCSP) of the Lauder Institute at the University of Pennsylvania is annually ranking the world's leading think tanks in a variety of categories. TTCSP has documented think tanks for more than 27 years. The latest index is based on evaluations by more than 1,796 peer institutions and experts from all over the world.

In 2018, Institute of National Security Studies Sri Lanka, think tank under Ministry of Defence, ranked 101st in the Asia Pacific category.

To mark the release of the "Global Think Tank Report 2018", a series of discussions titled "Why Facts and Think Tanks Matter in 2019," was held around the world including Paris, Beijing, Washington DC, New York, and 150 other cities. Representing Sri Lanka, INSSSL held a panel discussion on 31st January 2019 with the participation of scholars and representatives of other think tanks.

Director General Asanga Abeyagoonasekera of INSSSL chaired the discussion. Panelists Professor Chandra Embuldeniya; distinguished fellow of INSSSL, Dr Ranga Jayasuriya; journalist and a senior fellow, Ms Kasuni Ranasinghe; Research Analyst and Ms Natasha Fernando; Research Assistant highlighted the importance of the role of think tanks in the decision making process around the world.

In the introductory remarks **Director General Abeyagoonasekera** mentioned that the value of think tanks has been appreciated by many societies in today's volatile geopolitical environment. Think tanks could assist to design better policy for predicting future trends. As such, he stressed the importance of think tanks in providing reliable, well-researched information to make appropriate decisions on complex and challenging issues. To this effect, he highlighted how Sri Lanka's think tanks are underfunded; primarily through lack of attractive wages to researchers which is a key challenge. The Director General compared Sri Lanka to countries like India and Singapore, whose policymakers both invest and consult more extensively with think tanks. He said that with his experience working at a foreign policy think tank and security think tank, Sri Lankan government has miserably failed to recognize and invest in research think tanks.

Ms. Fernando emphasized that think tanks should act as a bridge between academic and policymaking
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communities, serving in public interest as independent voices and disseminating knowledge to wide audiences. To enhance the quality of research outcomes, Ms Fernando accentuated the importance of facts and the fact tank approach for more informed decision making.



Ms Ranasinghe highlighted the importance of factual based evidence in decision making and the role of think tanks as shadow leaders providing guidance to

the political leaders. Leaders should utilize think tanks to identify the priority needs of a country and then to convince the public about the priorities.

Ms Ranasinghe emphasized that think tank should come out from its traditional role of “researcher” to the position of “Strategic advisers”, having potentials to predate future circumstances. To achieve these objectives, she explained that think tanks needed to be depoliticized and provided more autonomy.

Dr Jayasuriya spoke about the vital role think tanks could play in providing the expertise, coherence and clarity for government and bureaucratic leaders as they confront wide range of subject areas, of which they have little specialized knowledge. In the Sri Lankan context, he spoke of how think tanks could have played a role in helping the government come up with an effective strategy to counter allegations of war crimes levelled against the Sri Lankan military. To achieve these objectives, he explained that think tanks needed to be depoliticized and provided more autonomy. Dr Jayasuriya argued that this would increase the possibilities of policymakers receiving objective, high quality - advice.



Prof. Embuldeniya spoke about how think tanks can help solve problems and serve as an asset to state resources. Addressing the issue of think tank proposals largely not being adopted by policymakers, Prof. Embuldeniya suggested

establishing a committee that can convey the proposals presented by think tanks to policymakers who can then implement it. He introduced a performance evaluation framework for think tanks and requested INSSSL to work with other local think tanks to develop the proposed framework.

Director General of INSSSL Attended the Foresight Workshop "The Future of Digitalization"



A workshop “The Future of Digitalization” was organized by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Regional Programme from 4-6 March 2019 in Cambodia. It was conducted by Cheryl Chung, Co-Director of the Executive Education Department at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore.

Delegation - Delegation-Unit Command Course of Officer Career Development Centre Buttala

The Institute of National Security Studies Sri Lanka facilitated the study visit of student officers of Unit Command Course No 3 at the Officer Career Development Centre Buttala at INSSSL Board Room on 14th March 2019.

As part of a study visit to the Ministry of Defence 32 officers which comprised of Head of the Training Team, Directing Staff and Student Officers visited the INSSSL. **Major Suranga Witharana psc**, Military Research Officer conducted a lecture on National Security Strategy and Present Challenges and officials representing the Directorate of Military Intelligence conducted a lecture on Current Security Situation in Sri Lanka.

Public Lecture on the Afghan Peace Process



Dr. Omar Sadr, a Senior Researcher at the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS), delivered a public lecture on the 'Fallacy of the Afghan Peace Process,' based on his publication with the AISS on 16 January. The attendees included members of the military and distinguished academics.

Dr. Sadr provided a brief history of the Taliban in Afghanistan and proceeded to analyze the security and political dynamics of the Central Asian after the US invasion. He noted that the US and Afghan Governments had opted to different strategies in dealing with the enemy: The Bush administration resorted to a hardline militaristic approach while the Karzai administration took a decidedly softer approach by calling the Taliban "disadvantaged," and forged secret contacts with the military group.

By 2007 fighting reached a stalemate and that the US and Afghan Government looked to negotiate with the Taliban.

Eventually, the United States set three pre-conditions or negotiations: insurgents should accept constitutional order as framework; renounce violence and renounce affiliation with international terrorist groups.

A multi-track approach

He observed that there had been different types of 'talks' with the Taliban in order to achieve peace and deescalation. First was the high-level talks, mainly the negotiations between the Afghan/ US governments and the Taliban. The second was 'talks for talks' which was mandated to High Consul of Peace. The purpose of these talks had been to serve as a precursor to more formal negotiations. A third approach was known as the reintegration of low-level Taliban rank and file. This entailed economic incentives for low Taliban operatives to defect. The speaker mentioned that all these three approaches had failed because the Taliban rank and file had largely maintained a very hardline ideology.

A fourth approach has been the track 2 efforts by research think tanks. These talks had been more effective in ascertaining the nature, stance and demands of the Taliban. Fifth, talks were held with individual Taliban units at regional levels in order to reduce violence. These talks had not led to

a tangible outcome since the rank and file of the Taliban have largely refused to compromise.

Different proposals

The speaker also outlined the different proposals offered to the Taliban during the course of the talks.

These include Ashraf Gani's peace proposal in 2017 for the Taliban to renounce violence and establish a new political party and Hamid Karzai's offer for the Taliban to join the Afghan government at an executive level.

Other offers included settlement with the Taliban in exchange for rights and democracy. However, all these proposals were rejected by the Taliban.

What the Taliban wants

The Taliban rejected the peace overtures by the Afghan Government because its demands were incompatible with the interests of the US and Afghan Governments. The speaker mentioned that the Taliban wanted the withdrawal of international troops, which the US may have been willing to accommodate.

The speaker opined that the Taliban wanted to transform Afghanistan's existing constitutional system in order to reflect its own ideology and interests. At present, they do not negotiate with the Afghan Government. This indicates that the goal of peace is a "fallacy" because the Taliban is unwilling to give up extremism and adhere to a constitution that is accepting of democracy and pluralism.

Perception of attitudes of people

The speaker also referred to a survey of over 2,000 people on the public attitude towards the peace process.

Regarding cognitive orientation (knowledge of different aspects of the peace process,) Afghans do not know much about the peace process, such as the stance of the Taliban or the stance of the US. When it comes to governance of Afghanistan, awareness is slightly higher.

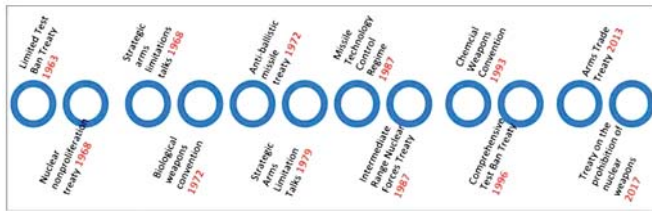
Regarding effective orientation (how they feel about the process), most Afghans have negative views of the Taliban and believe that they are associated with Al Qaeda and ISIS. Besides, very few people hold the Taliban to be legitimate due to ties with Al Qaeda and ISIS.

Notably, over 60% of the population feel that the peace process has failed due to a combination of weak governance, negative influences by neighbouring countries, lack of transparency in institutions, and the unwillingness of the Taliban to give up their extremist terrorist ideology. Consequently, many people have become resigned to the failure of the peace process.

The speaker concluded that the majority of the Afghan people want peace, and are willing to compromise in terms of providing amnesty or power-sharing. However, they are not willing to live under the Taliban ideology and amend the Constitution to that effect. Another important detail is that the Pashtun ethnic group is more likely to hold favourable views about the Taliban compared to other ethnic groups.

National Security Think Tank Explainer on Ballistic Missile Proliferation

By Natasha Fernando and Sanoj Jayakody



The Institute of National Security Studies Sri Lanka jointly conducted South Asia regional seminar 'Dealing with the missile threat in South Asia' with Foundation for Strategic Research, France and European Union External Action Service on 15 January. This explainer on ballistic missile proliferation explains a few key aspects of the Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation (HCOC) in relation to small states with special reference to Sri Lanka

Ballistic missiles are rocket-propelled weapons systems capable of carrying high explosives and also chemical, biological and nuclear munitions.

What Should Be the Role of a Small State?

Ballistic missiles fall into several categories such as strategic missiles (capable of being launched by land or sea), submarine-based fleet ballistic missiles, and intercontinental ballistic missiles, etc.

Currently there are several states that have developed nuclear weapons: United States, Russia, United Kingdom, China, France, India, North Korea, Israel, and Pakistan. The ballistic arms race could be traced back to the Cold War period between former Soviet Union and USA. Most other countries have not developed missile capability to the extent of these two States.

However, the technology of manufacturing these weapons has transferred to less developed countries. Ballistic missiles with chemical warheads are now a danger to third world countries. Hence the Hague Code of Conduct becomes an important instrument to create transparency on issues pertaining to ballistic missile proliferation.

The Hague Code of Conduct and Politically Binding Commitments

The Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation (HCOC) was established in 2002 to create

politically binding commitments on the conduct of trade in missiles.

The commitments encompass: pre-launch notification of missiles and test flights, annual declarations of country's policies on ballistic missiles launched during the preceding year, number and generic class of ballistic missiles and space launch vehicles etc. As of today, there are 139 signatories to the HCOC. The graphic demonstrates that reaching a consensus on curbing proliferation of weapons of mass destruction has taken many years. The development of ballistic missiles began during the Second World War but the first agreement (even at interim level) occurred in the 1960s with the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT) on limiting the development of inter-continental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM) and modern ballistic missile submarines. This was amidst the backdrop of the Cold War.

Independent of multilateral agreements, bilateral agreements occurred between Russia and USA [referring to Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty 1972]. However, the proliferation was serious with countries outside Soviet and US allies gaining access to missile development technology and increasing military capabilities due to threat perceptions of adversary states. This was the case with India and Pakistan; neither country is reluctant to enter legal commitments on nuclear weapons including ballistics.

The code is also manifestly different from a legal agreement since violation of this could only result in political repercussions. The code is practical in the sense it includes a wide range of commitments such as compliance to international arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation norms in broad language.



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Threat Lens on “Small Arms Proliferation Case Study of Sri Lanka”

The discussion held at the Ministry of Defence came up with a range of recommendations.

Embarking on a legislative review and reform including:

- Increasing penalties for offences resulting from arms proliferation and the illegal use of weapons.
- Introducing tougher laws to curb underworld criminal operations and political patronage.
- Developing small arms policy and practice by introducing effective stockpile management and record-keeping systems
- Introducing stricter controls on the use of weapons by the police and military officials
- Establishing regular monitoring of the use of weapons in possession of politicians and their security personnel

- Strengthening controls on the trafficking of small arms at national and international levels
- Reclaiming weapons issued to politicians and disallowing the use of armed private security guards for politicians
- Putting in place mechanisms to protect the identities of informants who provide information in relation to the illegal proliferation of small arms

Conducting more research including:

- A study on small arms issues and the humanitarian impact
- Providing information to divisional secretariats on issuing of weapons to civilians, including politicians
- Maintain a registry of firearm licenses issued

INSSSL Partners with the Millennium Project to Discuss 'Foresight' on World Future Day



The Institute of National Security Studies Sri Lanka (INSSSL) and the Millennium Project partnered to host a round table discussion on long-range strategies to address issues in education, investment and demographics. The discussion was held mark the World Future Day which falls on March 1st.

The discussion, chaired by Director General Asanga Abeyagoonasekera, was attended by distinguished guests Dr. Chandra Embuldeniya, former Vice-Chancellor of Uva Wellassa University; Mr. Rathindra Kuruwita, Deputy News Editor of The Island; Dr. Ranga Jayasuriya, Senior Fellow of INSSSL; academics; and members of the Sri Lankan military.

Ms. Ruwanthi Jayasekara, Research Assistant opened the discussion: “If we are getting ready to make a decision with far-reaching, strategic implications, the results of our course of work will affect the scope of outcome... This will indeed affect the whole country... Yet unfortunately, many national governments often find it much harder to use foresight as a tool for strategic planning and risk assessment...” Foresight analysis is a tool for understanding the risks, challenges and issues that may arise from future planning in an array of fields. In the Government, foresight analysis is of particular importance in order to combat the threat of a growing population, climate change and transnational organized crime, amongst others. As the world is increasingly becoming receptive of this field, more and more states are adopting measures to implement foresight analysis such as Finland’s Committee for the

Future and Singapore’s foresight officers. Foresight should underpin all decisions made in the public and private sectors; without, planning becomes guesswork and does not compliment real-life scenarios.

Ms. Jayasekara’s comments were followed by remarks from **Mr. Asanga Abeyagoonasekera** who welcomed guests, stating foresight analysis is a priority for most nations bar Sri Lanka, who has a serious limitation on a strategically planed policy. He mentioned 15 challenges the world and Sri Lanka will face in the coming decades, ranging from sustainable development to global ethics. Each of these challenges requires foresight to address, and Mr. Abeyagoonasekera questioned why Sri Lanka lacked designated foresight analysts or studies, suggesting a ‘Futures Ministry’ to tackle these issues.

Dr. Embuldeniya pointed to the lacuna in the education system, which fails to use foresight to understand the importance of breaking down barriers and integrating STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics). As the number of STEAM-related jobs increases globally, children need to keep up with this demand by learning them at a young age, however, schools and universities often fail to do this.

Dr. Jayasuriya followed up the discussion with a commentary on foresight in investment, describing the plausible future of the Port City project as debt pressure and Chinese strategic leverage in Sri Lanka. He followed by emphasizing that to attain the preferred future (Port City to represent a global financial hub on par with Dubai) the Government must ensure policy reforms occur with increased strategic cooperation with other countries to lessen Sri Lanka’s dependency on China. However, as Dr. Jayasuriya stated, “we (Sri Lanka) are not good at reforming”, therefore this may prove difficult.

Mr. Rathindra Kuruwita concluded discussions by stating “the population has a huge impact on the future” by underpinning all strategic and policy planning. Sri Lanka has a rich body of demographics to draw from, however, they are severely under-

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"Discussion, Debate and Dissent are Salient Features for a Democracy" - Dr. Geeta Madhavan



Dr. Geeta Madhavan, Advocate, President and Founder of Chennai-based think tank International Law and Strategic Analysis Institute (ILSAI) spoke on 'Election 2019 and the Role of Dravidian Parties on the National Policies and the Impact on Sri Lanka Relations' at Institute of National Security Studies Sri Lanka on 7th February.

She presented her analysis to an audience of distinguished academics, researchers, members of the diplomatic corps, officials from the Foreign Ministry, and representatives from the tri forces of Sri Lanka: Army, Navy and Air Force. Dr. Geeta Madhavan delivered her lecture on the invitation extended to her by the Director General Prof. Asanga Abeyagoonasekera.

Dr. Madhavan set the context for her lecture by explaining the fall of the Congress party during its second term in politics by failing to deliver executive action due to poorly constructed decisions.

She then spoke of the change in government to Modi led Barathiya Janatha Party (BJP) of India. She recalled the expected change was that BJP would bring in an era of BJP governance as the one that was under Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Dr. Madhavan described Vajpayee as an erudite and gentleman politician.

Unfortunately, Modi-led BJP government failed to deliver due to the disastrous decision of de-monetisation that was supposed to address three main issues that had plagued India: black money, terrorism and corruption. When nothing changed, and the government enthused with a strong sense of Hindu nationalism, it eroded the established constitutional structures and threatened the secular values of India.

The above issues have presented a frightening image to the minority population of India (around 25% of the population) which is a sizeable constituency in a country of nearly 1.7 billion people. She spoke about Tamil Nadu in particular which is a federal-state with a proud Dravidian Culture and heritage. The people of Tamil Nadu feel ignored and threatened by the strong Hindu nationalist rhetoric and are unhappy that issues pertaining to Tamil Nadu are not addressed by the BJ government at the Centre.

India's elections and the formation of the government at the Centre, according to Geeta Madhavan are a numbers game. Dr Madhavan noted that five Southern States and the Union Territory namely: Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry have indicated they would most likely vote out the BJP-led alliance which is reinforced by the anti-Modi "save India" campaign of Mamta Banerjee of West Bengal.

Tamil Nadu is currently in crisis owing to several highly contentious matters such as a constitution Amendment Bill to provide 10% reservation to economically backward, centralised education and

national eligibility entrance exams (NEET) for medical and engineering schools, environmental poisoning by the Sterlite Copper plant in Thoothukudi, Neduvasal protest on hydrocarbon extractions, and devastation of crops after the Gaja Cyclone.

Geeta Madhavan explained "economically backward is a condition but socially backward is a terrible anathema, to equate the two is a dangerous thing". She highlighted how this negatively impacted on social upliftment. Advocating for issues would help the DMK win instead of the AIDMK which is currently allied with the BJP; mainly because the BJP is seen by the voters of Tamil Nadu as an anti-Tamil party.

The crux of her argument is the issues in Tamil Nadu and the Centre-periphery disconnect is so problematic, therefore, the DMK alliance would rather concentrate on issues concerning Tamil Nadu at the Centre and would not be inclined to bring up Indo-Lanka issues for discussion. At least in the short term, this alliance would not make a direct impact on Indo-Lanka relations.

While fringe parties such as that of Vaiko's would make noise, irrespective of their concerns on Sri Lankan issues the Dravidians "have no time to shed tears for others"; when their issues are of greater immediate concern.

The participants at the discussion raised questions on the fishermen issue of the Palk Strait, that has soured Indo-Lanka relations but Geeta Madhavan opined this would not strain the bilateral relations as long as there are resilient and practical solutions and initiatives from both sides.



Another question was on the citizenship issue for Sri Lanka Tamils that have sought refuge in India, which Geeta Madhavan points out, is not as grave as the current Rohingya Crisis or the Afghan refugee crisis. She highlighted the only Indian Parliamentarian to have raised the need for a Refugee Bill to deal with the constant refugee inflow into India was Shashi Tharoor, to no avail. She warns in the future, the government will need a coherent law on refugee management in the likely event of spread of Rohingya refugees all over India and the dangers of them being infested with radical ideology.

Her final remarks were on the idea that India is misconceived as a regional hegemon. She observed that Indian military modernisation and expansion of the Navy is to protect India's interests in the Indian Ocean and India's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and not for a showdown with China.

India according to Geeta Madhavan remains a cooperative state and future elections in India would not bring in a drastic change in Indo-Sri Lanka relations. The Indian establishment is a democracy with no hegemonic designs.

National Security Think Tank Explainer

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The Code is voluntary and open to all states since countries are reluctant to enter legally binding agreements. It seeks to promote security through political and diplomatic measures. If this agreement was legal in character such as the Arms Trade Treaty, countries would be less reluctant to sign it; this was the case with both India and Sri Lanka rejecting the treaty as containing intrusive provisions.

The code expects states to implement a voluntary basis access to ballistic test launch sites to international observers. Countries are not forced to comply with these requirements but to rather “consider” the implementation. This is both clever but the effectiveness of the Code on actual non-proliferation of ballistic missiles is yet to be seen.

The Role of a Small State in Non-proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction

Small states should ideally support international efforts to bolster ballistic missile proliferation in line with the Hague Code of Conduct. This is because of the unregulated spread of ballistic missiles and the lack of coordination between ballistic missile states have the potential of causing regional instability.

The Hague Code of Conduct addresses both. It is therefore vital for small states to encourage non-proliferation as a means of realising a regional environment based on transparency and dialogue.

Sri Lanka, as a small state, has traditionally maintained an anti-proliferation stance. One main reason as to why this policy is prudent is because continued proliferation between nuclear-armed regional heavyweights India and Pakistan have increased regional tensions. There has been a long-standing conventional military imbalance favouring India.

Consequently, a study by Kapur found that nuclear proliferation encouraged increased Pakistani aggression over Kashmir due to the stability-instability paradox. The stability- instability paradox is where mutual deterrence and the threat of nuclear war create a window for states to pursue their actions through coercion.

Being a founding member of the Non-Alignment movement, Sri Lanka has historically looked to stay away from and minimise rivalries between larger countries. Thus, it makes sense for a small regional country like Sri Lanka, whose

INSSSL Partners with the Millennium Project to Discuss 'Foresight' on World Future Day...

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utilised, a serious oversight. Mr. Kuruwita mentioned the ageing population combined with the predicted increase of young males. Having a young population isn't necessarily a bad thing, stated Mr. Kuruwita, but Sri Lanka needs to plan for this by having a purpose and role for them, as the country cannot afford “unhappy, angry kids” once again.

Talks were concluded with an open discussion on these issues, and it was found that guests agreed Sri Lanka must begin using foresight analysis now to strategically and successfully plan for the future.

interest lies in maintaining stability and dialogue in the region, to be one of the original sponsors of the Hague Code of Conduct in 2004. Moreover, in addition to promoting an atmosphere of regional cooperation, Sri Lanka has interests in maintaining good relations with both nations.

Finally, small states like Sri Lanka are against ballistic proliferation due to the devastating possibility that such delivery systems together with nuclear material will fall into the hands of non-state actors and terrorist groups. There are numerous jihadist groups operating across the porous borders of Afghanistan and Pakistan who have carried out a number of major attacks, including the Mumbai terror attacks of 2010.

Sri Lanka itself has no active terrorist groups operating, but has experienced a civil war of over 30 years and therefore understands the threats these groups can pose. This leads to an increased resolve against non-proliferation. Small countries lack the economic and military prowess of larger countries, which gives them less bargaining power. This makes them more reliant and supportive of multilateral institutions in order to achieve objectives like non-proliferation.

The Dearth of Foresight Analysis in Sri Lanka

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comparative analysis, two main issues are visible in the context of Sri Lanka. First and foremost availability of resources lies a key variable for the successful implementation of foresight. Secondly, the capacity of the government either to gear up projects or cooperate with the private sector to bridge the gap. For example, in order to execute a precise waste management system, refraining from collecting polythene would not be a solution. Eco-friendly industry should be incentivized and the state should partner up with the private sector to innovate supportive technology to achieve the ultimate goal of finding a solid answer to the question of waste management. Foresight tools could be utilized to analyze the current trends of polythene usage, available alternatives, affordable technology to go eco-friendly, the process of partnership with the private sector, action plan from domestic level to state level in order to go 100% polythene free in 10 years.

In this sense, out of different categories of foresight, participatory foresight suits Sri Lanka the best. Because it is “based upon the originally ideological (100% polythene free and no extremism etc) but a progressively practical argument that whoever has a stake and a role in the realization of a particular future”⁶

It is suggested for Sri Lanka to have a de-centralized foresight model, maximizing the benefits with the cooperation with potential institutions. It's never too late, even if Sri Lanka initialize participatory foresight today, to reduce the existing and upcoming threats. It's never too late to take examples from Singapore and learn the strategic importance of foresight which could prevail in many upcoming national security threats. It'll forever be late if foresight analysis is ignored today.

The writer is a Research Assistant of the Institute of National Security Studies Sri Lanka (INSSSL), National Security Think Tank under the Ministry of Defence. The opinion expressed in this article are her own and not necessarily reflective of the INSSSL.

⁶ U. N. D. P.. Foresight The Manual. Foresight The Manual. Global Centre for Public Service Excellence

The Dearth of Foresight Analysis in Sri Lanka



Ruwanthi Jayasekara
Research Assistant- INSSSL
Secretary - The Millennium
Project (Sri Lanka)

Foresight analysis dates back to World War II when the US military first developed analytics to anticipate possible futures. The initial emphasis was on possible scenarios that could influence/affect the military domain.

The field of foresight has received increasing prominence by the developed and advanced economies since the 2000s as the states face off a set of new and old, and traditional and non-traditional threats. As a result, states have mobilized tools for foresight analysis. It is identified as an emerging academic field with the development of science and technology that have impacted in complex relations of every state.

Foresight analysis is not about what the future will be. It's rather a strategic tool in planning possible alternatives for the future and visualizing their outcomes.¹

According to Nyiri, foresight analysis is "an effective policymaking tool aimed at developing a collective learning platform with permanent communication among business, academic, governmental and other social actors."²

It is through foresight that we look at 10 years, 20 years from now. It helps us to detect extremist threats to our country, the impact of climate change, sustaining democracy for another 10 years, waste management and all the domestic and international issues we are to face. By visualizing the outcomes, we are aware of possible alternatives to the future and thereby implement the solutions in order to minimize the possible future chaos. All these issues, if ignored, are possible national security threats. Extremism proved to us the gravity of it and therefore it is time to implement foresight and address the issues of climate change, illegal drugs and waste management before they reach the climax and become national security threats.

Unfortunately, the government has not been implementing strategic foresight analysis. Even though foresight analysis has already been introduced to Sri Lanka, it is little known. The reason behind this is, it is utilized only by the private sector. By framing the domain, scanning the current trends, envisioning the future, the private sector has implemented their action plans. Unfortunately, however, there has not been a recognizable implementation of strategic foresight by the state. Collaboration and knowledge have not been transferred to the public sector. Foresight cannot be limited to simple 5-year plans. It is more volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous.³ It underlies the idea that foresight is expertise

¹ Fuerth, L. (2009). Foresight and anticipatory governance. Foresight. doi: DOI 10.1108/14636680910982412

² Lajos Nyiri, "Foresight as a policy-making tool," in Technology Foresight for Organizers (Brazil: Center for Strategic Studies and Management, 2003), A10.

³ ICSU (2011). ICSU Foresight Analysis Report 1: International science in 2031 – exploratory scenarios. International Council for Science, Paris

which will need to face unprecedented events, contradict existing values if needed, validate hypotheses, rely on public-private partnership and vision alternatives for future etc. Therefore, strategic foresight depends on individuals, policymakers, organizations, industry and government. However, at least one of these actors should be engaging in it in a way that Sri Lanka will accelerate towards better goals in foresight. Successful foresight in government can empower the citizens.

Taking a case study from Singapore, successful foresight analysis has been implemented by the state. This could be one reason for Singapore emerging as an economic giant. Singapore has been engaging in foresight analysis since the 1980s within the Ministry of Defence by "generating narratives of the future to imagine how the world may evolve and what problems, challenges and opportunities could occur."⁴ Later it was transferred to the Prime Minister's Office, where foresight was reformed. Since then, Public Service for the 21st Century (PS21) Movement and the Risk Assessment and Horizon Scanning (RAHS) programme were established and especially centres, units for foresight analysis were opened up within government departments. Centre for Strategic Futures; a strategy group in Prime Minister's office conducts foresight conferences, round table discussion on possible futures in different domains such as political, economic, social and cultural, facilitates meeting from scholars from other countries, nurture public servants in the field of foresight, publish research papers and many more. This implies the fact that Singapore is financially stable and therefore has the potential to invest in foresight. At the same time, they have utilized the potential to maximize their benefits. These actions of the government have been a stepping stone in implementing the plans for possible future, developing in domains of politics, economy, culture and society and ultimately empowering citizens. These have further made Singapore strengthen its stance as a hub.

In the case of Sri Lanka, all this time we have been blind to foresight analysis, with or without purpose. As Fuerth says, we belong to the government that has been unaware of "the longer-term implications of its decisions, slow to detect the onset of major defects in policy and inattentive to its best options until they have been allowed to slide by."⁵ In a

⁴ Singapore, Public Service Division (PSD), Conversations for the Future (Singapore: Public Services Division, 2011), p. 10.

⁵ Fuerth, L. (2009). Foresight and anticipatory governance. Foresight. doi: DOI 10.1108/14636680910982412

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