

The Indo-Pacific : Security, Geopolitics & Connectivity



Institute of National Security Studies Sri Lanka (INSSSL)

The Indo-Pacific: Security, Geopolitics & Connectivity

EDITORS

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This publication includes reports by five guest panellists at the INSSSL Round Table Discussion on ‘The Indo-Pacific: Security, Geopolitics and Connectivity’, presented in June 2019. The views expressed herein do not represent a consensus of views amongst the worldwide membership of the Institute as a whole.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Indo-Pacific is a highly contentious and diverse region spanning across much of the Asian continent and beyond. Home to over half of the world's population, the Indo-Pacific is currently, and will likely to continue to be, the area of primary strategic concern for states in political, economic, environmental and social realms. As more states continue to set their sights on the Indo-Pacific, it is important that nations in the region are well prepared to address a range of challenges *and* opportunities that may emerge.

On the 21st of June 2019, the Institute of National Security Studies Sri Lanka hosted a range of scholars, military personnel and government officials for a Round Table Discussion on the topic of 'Indo-Pacific: Security, Geopolitics and Connectivity'. Presented by five panellists including Professor Asanga Abeyagoonasekera, Rear Admiral Noel Kalubowila, Dr Satoru Nagao, Ms Ruwanthi Jayasekara, and Ms Lucy Stronach, this event offered a unique insight into these threats and opportunities.

The following document includes research papers from each of the panellists, presenting deeper analysis into the aforementioned discussion. Each paper tackles a different yet interconnected issue under the broad topic of the Indo-Pacific, spanning a great many areas including maritime security, climate change, transnational crime and growing economies.

THE US- CHINA CONFRONTATION: HOW SHOULD JAPAN, INDIA AND SRI LANKA RESPOND?

Dr. Satoru Nagao

Abstract

Recently, The United States (US) has stepped up pressure on China. The latest National Security Strategy, published by the US in December 2017, stated explicitly that “China and Russia challenge American power.”¹ In January 2018, the US imposed tariffs on China which began a back-and-forth tariff imposition between the two states. In October of 2018, when Vice President Mike Pence spoke at Hudson Institute, he stated, “Beijing is employing a whole-of-government approach, using political, economic, and military tools, as well as propaganda, to advance its influence and benefit its interests in the United States,” and that “the United States of America has adopted a new approach to China”², citing specifically the National Security Strategy. US-Chinese relations are becoming increasingly tense, and countries, including Japan, India, and Sri Lanka, must adapt to these new circumstances. This climate raises three questions: Firstly, what changes should the three countries expect from the new US policy? Secondly, what problems will the three countries face as a result of this new policy? And finally, how should they respond?

¹ United States White House, 2017.

² Hudson Institute, 2018.

What changes should the three countries expect from new US policy? —————

a. Long-term changes

New US policy will involve both long-term and short-term changes. For Japan, India, and Sri Lanka, the most important question influencing long-term planning is, which side is likely to win, China or the US? The United States is now the world's only superpower, a status it acquired by defeating Germany, Japan, and then the Soviet Union. This raises questions on what states can learn from history.

Japan has an unfortunate and tragic history of war with the US. However, for that reason, the Japanese can confidently tell the world not to underestimate the seriousness of the US' strong stance on China. Before WWII, the US had two war plans for its confrontation with Japan: The War Plan Orange and the Rainbow plans. They were not precisely executed but indicated a general strategic direction. Similarly, the US had war plans prior to its confrontation with Germany in WWII (the "War Plan Black"). When these plans were declassified in 1974, it also became apparent that prior to WWII the US had a war plan to confront the British and Canada (the "War Plan Red"). With military culture in mind, these plans were justifiable, and hence the Japanese take seriously the explicit views expressed by the National Security Strategy, and believe it indicates that the US currently has a plan for confronting China.

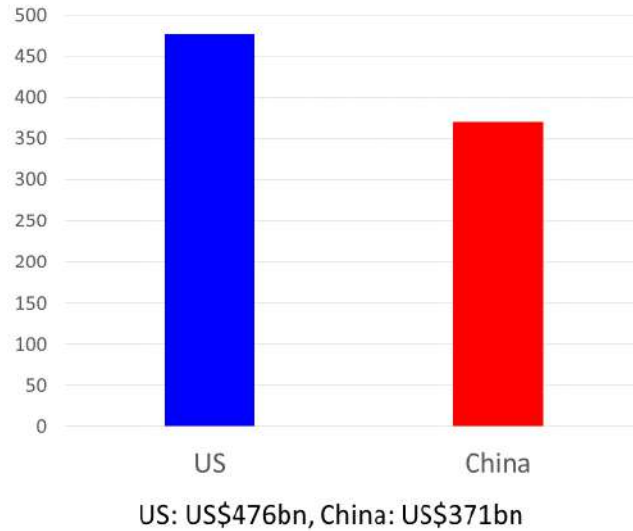
Additional evidence suggests that recent US actions are part of a long-term strategy. For example, the high-tech war between the US and China and subsequent US ban on products made by Huawei and ZTE. This process started several years ago, with reports dating back to the Obama administration, when in 2012, the Government published a report entitled, 'Investigative Report on the U.S. National Security Issues Posed by Chinese Telecommunications Companies Huawei and ZTE.'³ After publishing the document, the US government began to exclude Huawei and ZTE, and since Republicans and Democrats have a similar view of China, recent events are clearly part of long-term strategy.

However, this raises a significant question; why has the US recently stepped up its effort? Firstly, China's activities are too challenging to US regional hegemony. And secondly, now is the best chance the US has to win this 'war'. Certain simple facts confirm that if the US is to prove dominant, now is the best time to pressure China. For example, according to figures published by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics in July 2018, the United States spends \$476 billion for research and development, compared with China's \$371 billion (Figure 1). This means that the US still has an advantage in developing new technology.

³ U.S. House of Representatives, 2012.

Figure 1

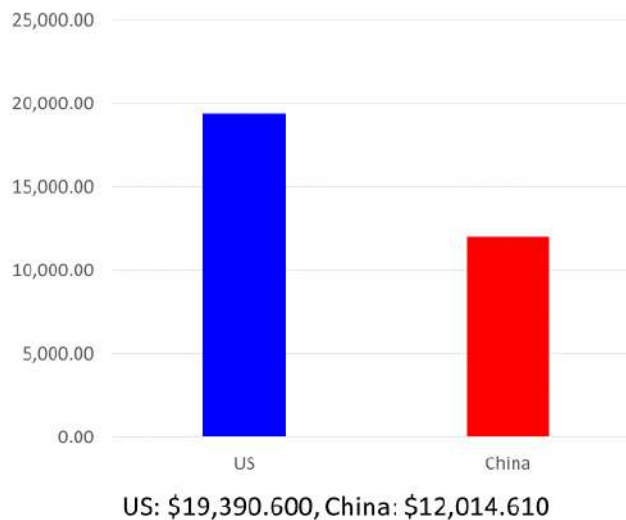
Investment in research & development of US and China (USD in billion)⁴



Similarly, the International Monetary Fund’s World Economic Outlook Database for January 2018 shows that US GDP sits at \$19,390.60, compared with China’s \$12,014.61, and thus the US economy is somewhat larger than China’s (Figure 2).

Figure 2

GDP of US and China (USD in billions)⁵



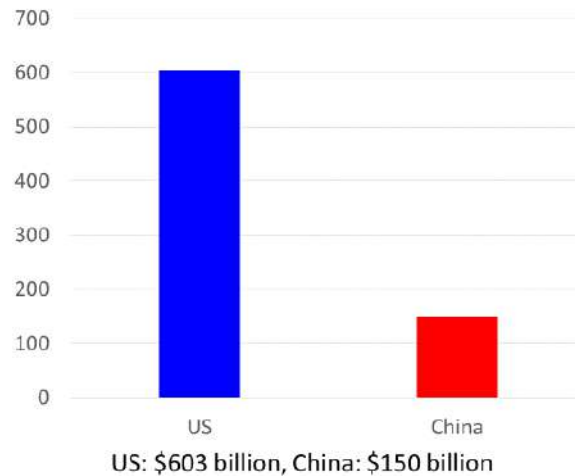
As for military power, according to the International Institute of Strategic Studies in London, the US defence budget at 2018 was \$603 billion, compared with China’s \$150 billion (Figure 3).

⁴ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018.

⁵ World Economic Outlook Database, 2018.

Figure 3

Defence budget of US and China⁶



Thus, based on current technology, economic strength, and military expenditure, the US would be likely to win a competition with China in any of these areas. This means that the US should be able to increase pressure on China first, technologically, second, economically, and last, militarily, until China stops challenging US interests. This analysis reflects the need for Japan, India, and Sri Lanka to remember the US's advantages as they plan for the future.

b. Short-term changes

In the short term, what the US will ask of Japan, India, and Sri Lanka is another matter entirely. This depends largely on what strategy the US will choose. In recent decades, the US decided on a balancing strategy due to China's pattern of expansion in the South China Sea. This is another area that must be considered with particular focus on the recent history of the region and subsequent conflict.

China's maritime expansion has traditionally been based on military balance. When France, the US and the Soviet Union withdrew from the South China Sea, it emboldened China. Following each countries' withdrawal from the region, China expanded its presence and occupied islands and reefs which the Philippines and Vietnam claimed. Japan's Ministry of Defence stated, "China has made advances into the SCS by exploiting power vacuums (to the Paracel Islands in 50s-70s and to the Spratly Islands since 80s)".⁷ It is therefore of uttermost importance that states prioritise maintaining military balance with China.

However, the US cannot maintain this position alone. As the shifting balance since the end of the Cold War indicates, the US needs the support of allies and other friendly countries. From 2000 to 2017, the US acquired only 15 submarines while China acquired at least 44. Therefore, as China's hard power grows, the US has encouraged allies to take on more of this hard power burden in order to maintain a military balance. In the short term, the US has requested that allies increase their defence spending, purchase American-made weapons, and to avoid high-tech products made in China (such as equipment

⁶ International Institute of Strategic Studies, 2018.

⁷ Ministry of Defence, Government of Japan, 2016.

produced by Huawei and ZTE). Some NATO countries have already begun this process; Australia,⁸ New Zealand,⁹ Japan¹⁰ have all agreed to the US' requests in this regard.

What problems will the three countries face as a result of this new policy?

In the case of Japan, India and Sri Lanka, the situation is relatively similar. As an ally, Japan must respond to all of the US' requests, or at least the US encourages this. Furthermore, the US wishes India to provide security in the Indian Ocean region so the US may divert forces away from the Indian Ocean and toward the Pacific. Washington is also concerned about China's economic influence in Sri Lanka and other ways in which China may attempt to demonstrate its ability to influence the nation.

Unfortunately, certain obstacles prevent Japan, India and Sri Lanka from responding to the US' demands. Opposition from China, South Korea, and domestic pacifists have made Japan hesitant to expand its security role in the Indo-Pacific. India wants to cooperate with the US but faces a dilemma. On one hand, greater cooperation with the US will improve India's ability to counter China in the Indo-China border area. On the other, greater cooperation is likely to cause China to deploy more forces to this same region.¹¹ As India wants an independent foreign policy, it is hesitant to accept the constraints of a US-led security system.

As for Sri Lanka, the state has already accepted a great deal of investment from China. A report from the Centre for Global Development indicates that Sri Lanka ranks 22nd on a list of the most indebted countries to China.¹² It will therefore be incredibly difficult for Sri Lanka to satisfy the US' request to cut ties with the superpower, especially with upcoming mega-projects such as the Port City development.

Conclusion: How should they respond?

In the short run, Japan, India and Sri Lanka must adapt to this new emerging reality. There are three key things that the states should do: First, they must improve their own defence capabilities. Japan is acquiring limited offensive capabilities, however, is importing 100 F-35s from the US. India can also increase its defence capabilities in the Indo-China border area by using American-made equipment. The Indian Army 17 Corp and Supported Air Force is prime example. And Sri Lanka has a chance to improve its defence capabilities with the support of the US and its allies, including Japan and India.

Second, these states should not depend on China. Japan, India and Sri Lanka can maintain their cooperation with China, but only short-term. In the long run, they must reduce their economic dependence on Beijing if they wish to avoid becoming 'passengers on a sinking ship'. Japan has already started to reduce its dependence- in 2018, Japan ended Official Development Assistance to China. Many Japanese companies have relocated their factories in China to Southeast Asia or South Asia, and the number of Japanese citizens living in China decreases every year (Figure 4).

⁸ "Huawei and ZTE handed 5G network ban in Australia", 2018.

⁹ McDuling, 2018.

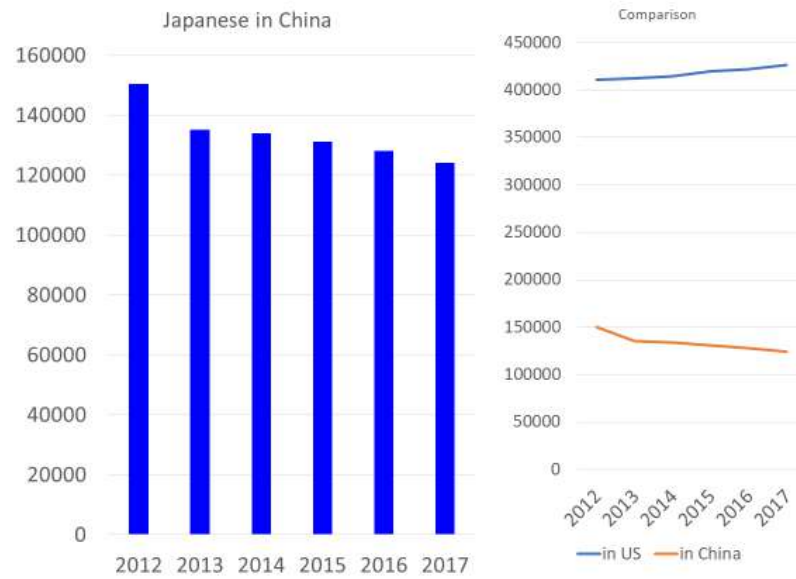
¹⁰ "Japan to ban Huawei, ZTE from govt contracts", 2018.

¹¹ Nagao, 2018.

¹² Hurley, Morris, & Portelance, 2018.

Figure 4

The number of Japanese in China¹³



Third, Japan, India, and Sri Lanka should cooperate with the US on building security infrastructure. The strategic location of Sri Lanka affects the geopolitical dynamics of the entire Indo-Pacific. There is an opportunity for Japan, India and the US to build a collaborative maritime communication-network in Sri Lanka that can serve the entire Indian Ocean. The four countries could stay informed and communicate with ease about Indian Ocean events, and there is an opportunity to tighten long term relations based on shared defence interests. Therefore, in the long run, all three countries will need to cooperate with the US as it is incredibly likely that the US will win the confrontation with China.

¹³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017.

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AUSTRALIA'S INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY: REALIZING SRI LANKA'S POTENTIAL AS AN EMERGING STATE

Lucy Stronach *Nishtha Chadha*

Abstract

As the Indo-Pacific (IP) continues to evolve, it is of increasing importance that states clearly define their role in the region. Australia, a leader in promoting prosperity and harmony in the IP, has worked for decades to forge a clear identity through four main pillars: the economy and trade, the environment, educational and cultural exchange, and security. This paper seeks to explore these pillars and how Australia has and will continue to operate in each sphere. Particular reference is made to Sri Lanka, identified as a key emerging state in the region. Through review of relevant literature, it was found that whilst Australia has attempted to strengthen its strategy in each of the four pillars, much more should be done. While Australia does excel at educational and cultural exchange, more attention must be paid to the spheres of economy, security and the environment to bolster the nation's partnership with Sri Lanka and presence in the broader region. Promoting soft power in the IP is a key strength of the nation, but this strength is subject to change if Australia fails to address the weaknesses found in the other three pillars. It was concluded that Australia has so far failed to recognise the strategic influence Sri Lanka is likely to have in the coming years, and it is recommended the nation invests more heavily in all the four defining pillars.

Introduction

Although first examined academically in 2007, the Indo-Pacific (IP) is a term that was adopted by the Australian Government and scholars many years before. The IP is not an exclusively defined region, but rather a loose description of a geopolitical area spanning from the Indian to Pacific Oceans, encompassing many of the Asian continent's waters and states.¹ For decades, Australia has recognised that this region is an area of strategic priority. The 1976 'Defence White Paper' cited *only* states within the Indo Pacific region (bar New Zealand) as 'areas of Australia's primary strategic concern'.² This flows neatly into Australia's most recent Defence and Foreign Policy White Paper (DWP; FPWP) releases of 2016 and 2017 (respectively), which carefully analysed the risk and potential of this region in great detail.³ Much discourse surrounds this topic and focuses on reiterating the same message: that Australia *will* be an integral part of the IP. Yet crucial questions remain; what will Australia actually do to define this role? Will these methods work? And, what will Australia's role look like in the future?

As Professor Rory Medcalf once said, the IP is "quite literally, Australia's place in the world".⁴ Australia has taken carefully considered steps to ensure that their place in the region is solidified through economic, environmental, cultural and security-based connectivity with IP states. Sri Lanka has also been included in the scope of this strategy, although perhaps not to a significant extent. Sri Lanka and Australia have shared a long and harmonious relationship, boasting over 70 years of bilateral relations.⁵ These relations are underscored by a growing global emphasis on the IP, which has seen Australia shift their strategic direction almost entirely towards this region. Sri Lanka is strategically located within the IP and with growing opportunities for more robust trade, environmental, cultural and security-based interactions, the relationship between Australia and Sri Lanka should be examined in more detail. Whilst Australia has openly admitted that Sri Lanka is not of first order priority in the IP (Japan, Indonesia, India and South Korea take the top spots), the nation should utilise this long-standing relationship more strategically.⁶

This paper seeks to define the role of Australia in the Indo-Pacific region through the four aforementioned pillars: the trade and economy; the environment; education and culture; and security. Each will be explored with specific application to Sri Lanka. Current research on these two countries often fails to reflect on their position in the broader context of the IP, and as such, this paper will make reference to key examples of Australia policy and practice that can be used to interpret this role.

Trade and economy

Australia has made quite clear their stance on economic development and investment in the IP, which includes the facilitation of goods, services and ideas through open markets, and the integration of all economies in the IP region.⁷ The nation wishes to see other state economies boom whilst utilising this

¹ Department of Defence [DoD], 2016.

² DoD, 1976.

³ DoD, 2016; Commonwealth of Australia [CoA], 2017.

⁴ 2019.

⁵ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade [DFAT], n.d.

⁶ CoA, 2017.

⁷ CoA, 2017.

success for domestic interests; “Australian businesses and their employees can be big winners from the Asian century, with new and expanding opportunities for our miners, manufacturers, farmers and a broad range of service providers”.⁸ The IP is known to be the future of global trade and plays host to the busiest trade corridor in the world.⁹ Growing realisation of the potential of new economic endeavours such as sustainable infrastructure, energy and digital economies has facilitated a platform for Australia to engage more stringently with IP states to promote economic growth. In 2018, Australia announced their A\$2 billion ‘Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility’ for the IP and has stepped into the global stage as the second largest contributor to the Asian Development Bank, with ASEAN-Australia investment totalling over A\$220 billion in 2016.¹⁰ Moreover, the signing of dozens of guidelines to lay the foundation of digital economic growth during Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations shows the commitment of Australia to promoting a ‘free and secure Indo Pacific’.¹¹

Australia has not forgotten about Sri Lanka’s role in this growth. In 2017, the two governments signed the Australia-Sri Lanka Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) and in the same year, two-way trade between the states surpassed the A\$1 billion mark.¹² Official Development Assistance to Sri Lanka is estimated at A\$27.1 million for 2019-20 and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has outlined three key fundamentals for their Sri Lankan Aid Investment plan: expand economic opportunities for the poor; support the government to be more responsive to the needs of citizens and the private sector; and increase gender equality.¹³

⁸ Hill, 2013.

⁹ CoA, 2017.

¹⁰ Goodman, de Brouwer, Armstrong & Triggs, 2019.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² DFAT, n.d.

¹³ DFAT, n.d.b.

Figure 1

Key Australian investment projects in Sri Lanka since 2009¹⁴



Whilst Australia's approach to development assistance in Sri Lanka has become increasingly explicit, questions surrounding Sri Lanka's place within the broader trade strategy continue to persist. Geographically positioned at the heart of major international shipping routes and boasting largely positive relationships with its regional neighbours, Sri Lanka's economic importance to the IP region is increasing. Australia currently ranks as the 21st largest import source country for Sri Lanka, with trade and services exports to Sri Lanka valued at approximately A\$883 million as of 2019.¹⁵ Though this relationship is beginning to flourish under the recent establishment of the Joint Trade Committee and TIFA, there is certainly a wealth of untapped opportunity concerning this bilateral trade relationship. Australia enjoys a diaspora of over 124,000 Sri Lankan-Australians according to the 2016 Australian census, yet surprisingly falls far behind international allies such as the United States, United Kingdom and China in bilateral merchandise and service exchange levels with Sri Lanka.¹⁶ Moreover, Sri Lanka's investment in Australia amounts to over 500% more than Australia's investment in Sri Lanka displaying

¹⁴ DFAT, 2019.

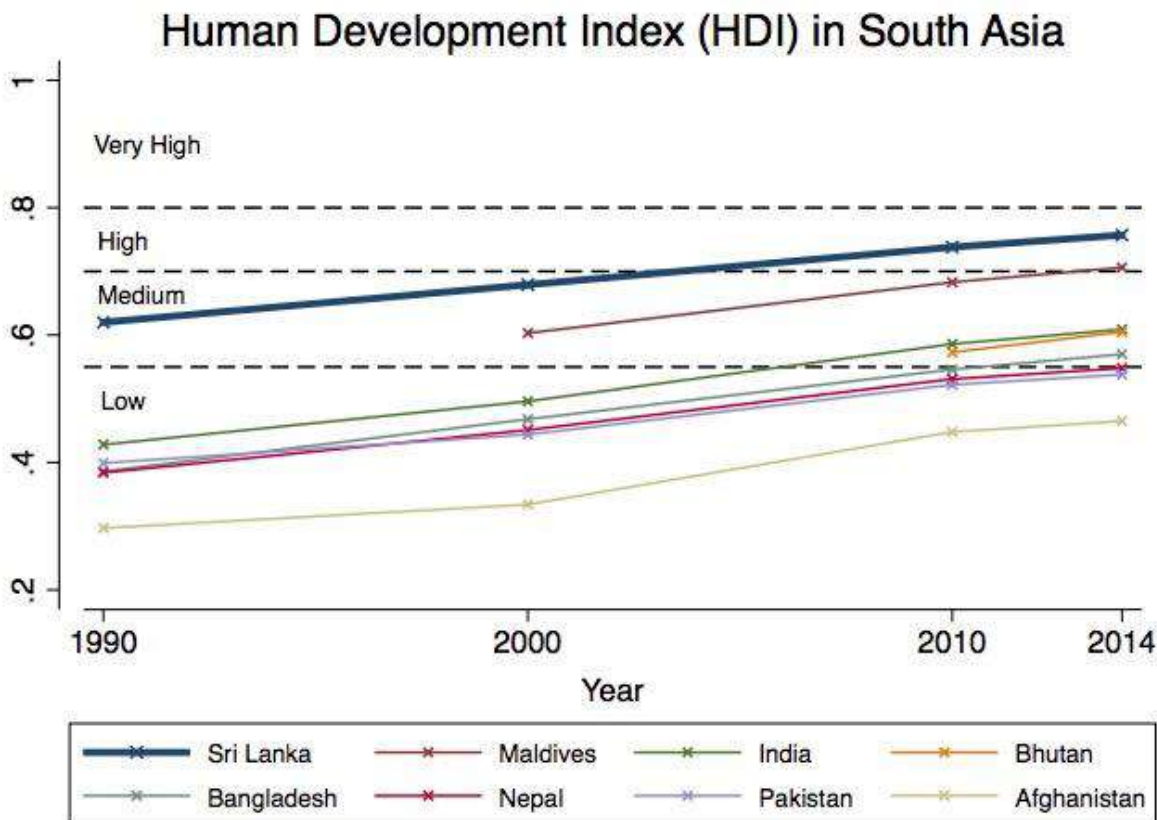
¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019.

an explicit opportunity for more rigorous economic exchange between the two nations.¹⁷ With high literacy standards, widely spoken English, growing market leadership, and rapidly increasing Human Development Index performance, commercial opportunities in Sri Lanka are more abundantly available.

Figure 2

*Sri Lanka's HDI performance from 1990-2014*¹⁸



The nation ranks third in South Asia on the World Bank's 'Ease of Doing Business' survey, and could constitute a critical gateway for exporters to the Indian market through the India-Sri Lanka Bilateral Free Trade Agreement.¹⁹ Capitalising on this gateway presents a unique and unparalleled opportunity for Australia to achieve its recently adopted India Economic Strategy, which seeks to boost Australian exports to India from \$14.9 billion in 2017 to around \$45 billion by 2035.²⁰

Although bilateral trade between Australia and Sri Lanka grew at an average of 8.6% between 2012 and 2017, there is an increasingly prevalent need to diversify the Australia-Sri Lanka trade portfolio.²¹ Three product categories account for 72% of Sri Lanka's total exports to Australia, while two product categories account for 65% of Sri Lanka's total imports from Australia.²² Having just transitioned into

¹⁷ DFAT, 2019.

¹⁸ Harvard Centre for International Development, 2018.

¹⁹ World Bank, 2018.

²⁰ DFAT, 2018.

²¹ "Australia-Sri Lanka trade up," 2018.

²² "Bilateral trade and investment research report," 2017.

upper-middle income status according to the World Bank, Sri Lanka's forthcoming loss of the European Commission's GSP+ scheme presents a vital opportunity for Australia to step in and make the most of prospective openings in Sri Lanka's trade portfolio.²³

Increasing bilateral trade with Sri Lanka not only presents an abundance of opportunities for Australian entrepreneurs and business leaders within domestic Sri Lankan markets, but simultaneously facilitates direct access to the increasingly crucial Bay of Bengal: an area that is home to almost a quarter of the world's total population and over US\$3 trillion in GDP.²⁴ Further, if Australia is able to diversify its trade relationship with Sri Lanka, this is likely to have a significant impact on minimising many of the security threats that underscore the two nations' cooperation today. Indeed, there is a direct and mutually reinforcing relationship between economic resilience and political stability across the developing world. By increasing economic complexity in Sri Lanka's domestic markets and expanding opportunities for entrepreneurship across the nation, Australia has the opportunity to contribute immensely to the economic and political resilience of the nation.²⁵ This may subsequently stabilise growth levels across Sri Lanka, thereby facilitating sustained development across the nation and the amelioration of local living standards.

The environment

As global warming continues to threaten in the natural environment, an amalgamation of pervasive issues will consistently emerge as the climate change becomes the world's greatest security threat. Many countries that neighbour Australia will be severely impacted by, and have already begun to experience, the detriments of a changing climate. Since 2006, Australia has been 'committed' to reducing these burdens in the IP through initiatives such as the Asia-Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate (APP).²⁶ Focusing on cleaner fossil energy and renewable energy, at the time of inauguration the seven member states of the APP represented over half of the world's economy, population and energy use.²⁷ Projects including the APEC Energy Working Group and G20 Energy Transitions Working Group reflect the positive influence Australia can have on the region. Furthermore, the recent Australia Pacific Climate Partnership saw the nation commit A\$75 million from 2018-2022.²⁸ This partnership "brings together a suite of long running programs that connect high quality climate data with decision making for climate and disaster resilient development across the region".²⁹ This includes the Climate and Oceans Support Program in the Pacific (Phase 2), and Climate Change Risk Governance which builds on the Pacific Risk Resilience Program.³⁰ Australia has committed A\$300 million over four years (starting 2016/2017) to support climate/disaster resilience in the IP, pledged up to A\$45

²³ World Bank, n.d.b; European Commission, 2019.

²⁴ World Bank, 2016.

²⁵ Harvard Centre for International Development, 2018.

²⁶ Parliament of Australia, 2010.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ DFAT, n.d.c.

²⁹ DFAT, n.d.c.

³⁰ Ibid.

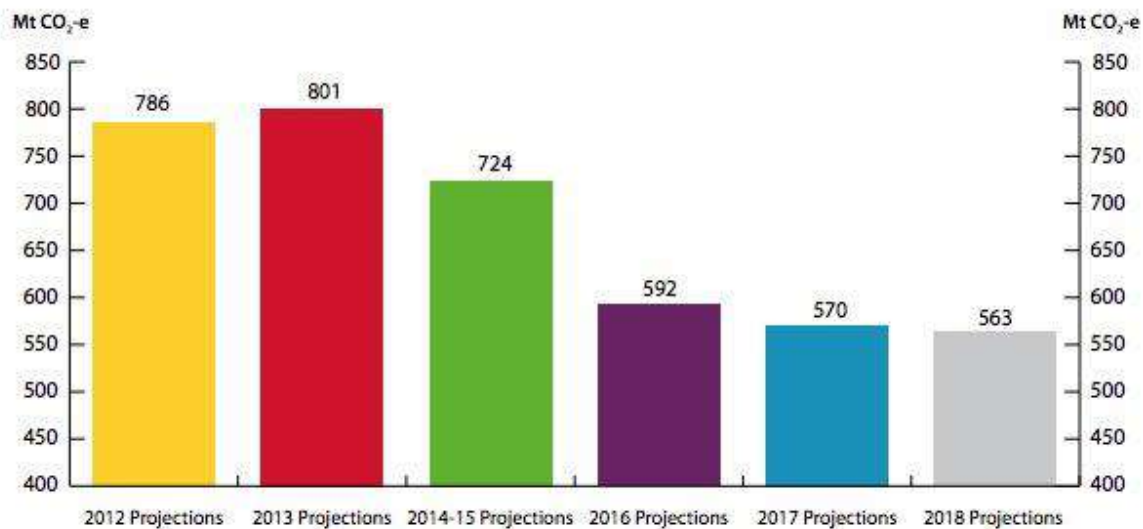
million for the Fisheries Development Assistance, and announced at COP21 (2015) a commitment to spending A\$1 billion on climate change in developing countries (primarily in the IP).³¹

Over a decade later, however, it is abundantly clear that initiatives of this nature are *not* a priority for Australia in the domestic sphere. In June of 2019 the controversial and topical Carmichael mine (dubbed ‘Adani’) in northern Queensland was approved for construction by the recently elected Liberal Government.³² This mine has been scrutinised by the public and scientists alike for the role it is likely to play in the degradation of the Great Barrier Reef and other fragile ecosystems in the region.³³ Moreover, Australia has pledged to cut emissions by 26%-28% by 2030 under the Paris Agreement, yet is far from meeting this target.³⁴ A recent report released by the Department of Environment and Energy shows emission projections at a 7% decline by 2030, far from the 28% target.³⁵

Figure 3

Australia’s predicted emissions in 2030 (a 7% estimated decline from 2005 figures)³⁶

Figure 2 Projected emissions in 2030 over time



It is quite unfathomable that the Government would approve such a large-scale, non-renewable, climate damaging and unsustainable energy project such as Adani. Australia is already overwhelmed in trying to meet Paris Agreement targets and should be following the lead of the Sydney Council who recently declared a Climate Emergency in the city.³⁷ As Australia continues to neglect the threat of climate change in domestic policies, the state undermines *any* promise or commitment made to the IP.

³¹ Ibid; DFAT, n.d.d.

³² “Adani mine,” 2019.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Department of the Environment and Energy, 2015.

³⁵ Ibid; Sauer, 2019.

³⁶ Harvard Centre for International Development, 2018.

³⁷ Hannam, 2019.

Moreover, the majority of the climate aid focus has remained narrowly on risks associated with Australia's neighbouring Pacific Islands, rather than the broader IP as a whole. Indeed, many Indian Ocean islands are facing similar dangers in the face of rising sea levels, the growing prevalence of natural disasters, and increasing vulnerability to food and water insecurity.³⁸ Whilst Australia presents itself as a major partner to Sri Lanka on the front of human and national security, it certainly seems odd that close to none of the two nations' bilateral portfolio explicitly addresses climate risk and disaster resilience.³⁹ Australia was a major partner to Sri Lanka in the wake of the nation's 2004 tsunami and has taken significant steps in assisting with subsequent economic recovery and development processes; however, many of these activities are at high risk of being undermined by the increasing instability posed by climate change.⁴⁰ Civil tensions are already a point of concern in Sri Lanka's national security, and many scholars have warned about the serious potential for these to worsen as climate insecurity grows.⁴¹ If Australia intends to bolster its participation in the IP region, ensuring its allies are climate resilient should undoubtedly be a top priority. Failing to do so is likely to have serious implications on many of the gains Australia has set out to achieve in the region, ranging from boosting economic growth and domestic development to maritime security and defence cooperation.

This contradictory position of the Australian Government in different areas of climate strategy therefore begs the question, why is Australia so committed to providing relief in certain areas of the IP, when domestic policies almost blatantly ignore the threat of climate change? If the country set an example for its IP neighbours and encouraged nations to work on sustainable and green practices, there might be no need to spend millions on 'bandaiding' over the issue. As one of the largest polluters in the region, Australia's relationship with the environment has accurately been described as 'abusive' and 'dysfunctional' by the Climate Change Coordinator for Palau.⁴² The Australian Government fosters overwhelmingly conservative views on climate change yet offers millions in climate aid and development to the IP. Australia is also "responsible for diluting the strength of resolutions on the environment"⁴³ by promoting climate action internationally but restricting efforts domestically. Despite the fact that 97% of Australians are aware of climate change, and 64% of Australia adults rank climate change as the number one threat to the nation's interests, current efforts to curb global warming are insignificant, to say the least.⁴⁴

Education and culture

From the outset it would appear that Australia excels at educational and cultural exchange in the IP. Initiatives like the Colombo and New Colombo Plans boosted tourism and the broadcasting of Australian television in IP states all contribute to the vital soft power growth Australia promotes in the region. Conceived at the Commonwealth Conference on Foreign Affairs in Colombo in 1950, the Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic and Social Development in Asia and the Pacific was a flagship

³⁸ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2014.

³⁹ DFAT, n.d.

⁴⁰ DFAT, 2014; Ibid.

⁴¹ Werrell & Femia, 2018.

⁴² Lyons & Doherty, 2018.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Lee, Markowitz, Howe, Ko & Leiserowitz, 2015; Murphy, 2019.

program to further the development of economies and peoples in the region.⁴⁵ Australia was a founding member and continued to support the Colombo Plan significantly. By 1980 over 20,000 Asian students had the chance to study in Australia to further their skill base for application in home states.⁴⁶ When combining the Colombo Plan with the ‘Australia Awards’ of today, over 80,000 individuals have studied in Australia, many of whom are from the IP.⁴⁷ In 2014, DFAT (under the charge of Foreign Minister Julie Bishop) announced their ‘New Colombo Plan’ (NCP), a signature initiative that finances Australia students to study specifically in the IP. A parallel of the Colombo Plan, the objectives of NCP are to increase knowledge and forge strong networks in the region by building an ‘Asia-capable workforce’.⁴⁸ By the end of 2020, the program will have supported an estimated 40,000 young Australians to study, work and live in the IP.⁴⁹

In Sri Lanka there were over 200 mobility students placed on short term programs in 2018, and of 2019, four full-time scholars were working and studying in Colombo in a range of fields including international business, public policy, philosophy, criminology, counter-terrorism and international relations.⁵⁰ Australia ranks as the second most popular destination for Sri Lankan students to study internationally with almost 10,000 Sri Lankan students in Australia in 2017.⁵¹ Various degree programs from Australian universities are offered in Sri Lanka which only helps promote the already robust educational exchange between the states.⁵² These highly influential, large-scale initiatives reflect Australia’s sought-after cultural position in the IP. Australia may not have the hard power to forge an identity in the IP but clearly recognises the potential of soft power to transform a region; “Having the ability to influence the behaviour or thinking of others through the power of attraction and ideas is also vital to our foreign policy.”⁵³ By promoting cross-cultural exchange and educational opportunities, Australia is solidifying its role in this region as a provider for world class learning and development, particularly for nations in the IP region.

Furthermore, somewhat simple initiatives such as securing direct flights from Australia to Sri Lanka are small-scale examples with significant impacts. Tourism between the states has increased dramatically since that time (excluding the impact of the recent 4/21 attacks) and is another display of Australia’s commitment to boosting soft power growth in the IP.⁵⁴ Further examples include an A\$17 million commitment to broadcasting Australian television programs to the IP in a bid to increase soft power and cultural influence.⁵⁵ It appears that not only is Australia committed to promoting this soft power but also examining the *actual* influence this growth has on the region. The recent announcement of a ‘soft power review’ by the Australian Government reflects how important it is for states to examine and understand their soft power roles. The review, conducted by DFAT, will examine the nature of soft power, Australia’s soft power objectives and challenges, opportunities for Australia to increase its soft power

⁴⁵ Colombo Plan, 2018.

⁴⁶ National Archives of Australia, 2019.

⁴⁷ CoA, 2017.

⁴⁸ Hill, 2013.

⁴⁹ DFAT, n.d.e.

⁵⁰ Hill, 2013.

⁵¹ DFAT, n.d.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ CoA, 2017.

⁵⁴ DFAT, n.d.

⁵⁵ Vatsikopoulos, 2019.

and reputation on the global stage, and what relations (civil, governmental, private) are key to promoting Australian soft power in the future.⁵⁶ Without the soft power review finalised, it becomes somewhat difficult to examine the actual success of Australian cultural and educational exchange in the IP. However, one can see that Australia takes a serious stance on soft power and much of its role in this region is hinged on the success of future soft power endeavours. The nation has managed to operate as a cultural power in the IP for some time, with DFAT citing Australia as being a leader in democracy, multiculturalism, rule of law, economic prowess, lifestyle and institutions.⁵⁷ The nation also comes in at 10th place in the ‘Soft Power 30 Report’ of 2018, only being trumped by Japan at 5th for the IP region.⁵⁸

Yet this position may change if Australia does not continue to pursue objectives and policies aligned with the cultural expectations of the increasingly liberal-minded world. The Soft Power 30 Report states that “Australia’s global influence is hampered by the tyranny of distance, making it all the more important to attract international attention for the right reasons.” Incredibly strict policies on asylum seekers (even to the point of violating international human rights obligations), poor environmental protections, issues with Indigenous rights, and low GDP aid percentage do not attract attention ‘for the right reasons’ and are serious barriers to successful soft power persuasion.⁵⁹ The continuation of anti-asylum seeker policies and sanctioning of growing anti-immigrant rhetoric risks antagonising both domestic support of soft power policies abroad, as well as many of the populations in the IP that Australia is striving to bolster its relationships with. Certainly, Australia must be mindful of adopting a more future-focused soft power approach that is weary of these obstacles if it is to remain a leader in cultural exchange and soft power in the IP.

Security

“No long-term foreign policy objective is more important to Australia than ensuring our region [the IP] evolves peacefully...”⁶⁰ From this statement, one can envision Australia’s stance on security in the IP quite clearly. The nation has spent decades ensuring strong bilateral relations and international networks to enrich and promote domestic prosperity, and hence a peaceful region is vital to ensuring these relationships endure through a rapidly changing IP. Australia has pioneered IP relations since the 1950s and naturally, many security concerns and challenges have consequently emerged from the region since.⁶¹ Cyber and technological threats, military modernisation, border control, climate change and violent extremism are frequently cited as the main threats to Australian security and freedoms in the IP.⁶²

The recently announced ‘International Cyber Engagement Strategy’ (2017) and the appointment of Australia’s first ambassador for Cyber Affairs, Tobias Feakin, are prime examples of commitment to securing the cyber-sphere. Priority is placed on the IP region for strategic planning, as “under-resourced Pacific Island nations may prove a weak link in the chain of security required to keep the internet

⁵⁶ DFAT, n.d.f.

⁵⁷ CoA, 2017.

⁵⁸ McClory, 2018.

⁵⁹ Wiseman, 2018.

⁶⁰ CoA, 2017.

⁶¹ McClory, 2018.

⁶² DFAT, 2017.

safe”.⁶³ However, Australia must tread carefully in this realm, particularly in balancing key relationships whilst maintaining stringent security measures. Recent concerns over Chinese involvement in cyber-attacks targeted at Australian defence forces, and tension over the banning of Huawei from the Australian 5G network may contribute to a breakdown of the Chinese-Australian relationship that would be indescribably detrimental to Australian economic interests.⁶⁴ Solutions could be to diversify Australian trade relationships with other states so the reliance on China is not so significant (24% of total trade as of 2017).⁶⁵ For now, Australia seems committed to ensuring cyber security and appears to be a leader in this front. Re-elected as Chair of the Asia-Pacific Computer Emergency Response Team, the Australian Cyber Security Centre represents Australia’s accepted role as a leader in safe cyber spaces in the IP.⁶⁶

In terms of military modernisation, Australia continues to rely on its relationship with the US for support in the hard power realm. Australia’s primary means of mitigating the threat of hard power is to have a clear, concise and implementable defence strategy, namely in the form of a defence white paper (DWP) or national security strategy (NSS). The DWP of 2016 has been cited as a leading example of how a national security strategy should be executed and disseminated.⁶⁷ More countries in the IP are developing their own NSS with the growing realisation that a well formulated strategy is an invaluable tool in understanding and preparing for a range of threats to any state. Sri Lanka is yet to develop their own NSS and is in dire need of one (specifically considering the recent Easter Sunday attacks and subsequent civil unrest). In 2017, the Australian Government, along with civilian and military representatives, hosted a workshop on the development of the Australian DWP, giving practical steps to ensure the Sri Lankan Government had the knowledge and tools to develop their own. Indeed, steps have been taken to promote discourse and gain some traction on the issue, but tangible outcomes are yet to be seen since the event. Transparency, the promotion of democracy, open lines of communication and a greater understanding of the security environment are just some of the notable benefits of developing a DWP, and if Australia is to mitigate the threat of hard power and military modernisation, promoting defence white papers in the IP would be in the interests of the state.

Border control has been and remains one of the greatest concerns of the Australian Government who have continued to tighten policies and measures over the past decade. Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB) is a testament to this. Launched in 2013, the operation seeks to stop illegal immigration and people smuggling, whilst ‘preventing people from risking their lives at sea’.⁶⁸ However, OSB is inherently flawed as people continue to flee to Australia by sea in the hopes of resettling there. In the wake of dozens of Sri Lankans being intercepted and turned away by Australian and Sri Lankan patrols through May, Australia has made their strict policy very clear.⁶⁹ In June of 2019, Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton visited Colombo to announce the ‘Zero Chance’ campaign.⁷⁰ As Commander of OSB, Dutton reiterated Australia’s tough stance on turning away asylum seekers who attempt to land in

⁶³ Spry, 2019.

⁶⁴ Spry, 2019.

⁶⁵ Tang, 2018.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Karlin, 2018; Baker, 2016; Lovegrove, 2016.

⁶⁸ Department of Home Affairs, n.d.

⁶⁹ Bolger, 2019.

⁷⁰ Attygalla, 2019.

Australia illegally, even when immigrants are from a country with such strong cultural connections such as Sri Lanka.

In examining the Australian-Sri Lankan security relationship specifically, much of the focus is on promoting strict border control in both countries. Both are island states and are ideal locations for transnational crime groups due to thousands of kilometres of accessible coastline. Together these states do face an inherent threat to border security as the IP region becomes more globalised and connected. For years Australia has focused interests on Sri Lankan border control development, with more salient examples including the Memorandum of Understanding on Legal Cooperation against the Smuggling of Migrants (2009), and the 2017 Memorandum of Understanding on people smuggling and other transnational border crimes.⁷¹ Australia has also gifted 3 Stabicraft vessels for the Sri Lankan coast guard, as well as 2 Bay Class vessels for the Sri Lankan Navy with the purpose of enhancing maritime security.⁷²

Yet there remains a more humane, sustainable and financially viable option to excessive border controls that must be explored. Opening the doors (not floodgates) to Australia and recognising the opportunity immigration offers to the region. Australia is quite literally a migrant nation; as of the 2016 census, 49% of the nation's citizens were either born overseas or had at least one parent born overseas.⁷³ In 2018, Australia boasted population density figures of just 3 people per square kilometre (sqm), whilst its IP partner, India, sat at 455 people per sqm.⁷⁴ There is both the precedence and the place to house individuals desperately seeking asylum. Instead, Australia chooses to place these people in offshore detention facilities that are so inhumane and deplorable, residents have set themselves on fire in protest.⁷⁵ In fact, only in June of 2019 did an Indian immigrant burn himself alive to protest the conditions of Manus Island, one of Australia's offshore facilities in Papua New Guinea.⁷⁶ This man is now being charged for attempted suicide and arson, a man who would rather have burned to death than face life in an Australian detention centre.⁷⁷

Many of these immigrants are skilled workers and with holistic integration programs could be utilised most efficiently. Instead, 'border protection' from 2016-2017 cost Australian taxpayers over A\$4 billion, an incredible waste of resources that is stripped from more suitable options such as proper housing, integration systems and skill building.⁷⁸ Since the early 2000s, literally thousands of those seeking asylum in Australia have died as a result of border control policies, an inconceivable waste of life and potential.⁷⁹ As Professor Damien Kingsbury so rightly noted, "Australia's current asylum seeker policy is shameful, and is one that future generations will look back upon as a dark stain on our political history,"⁸⁰ Reinventing Australia's asylum seeker policy to embrace immigrants is a strong alternative to some of the problems associated with border control, yet Australia is set on not only increasing security

⁷¹ Attorney General's Department, 2009; Australian Border Force, 2017.

⁷² DFAT, n.d.

⁷³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017.

⁷⁴ World Bank, n.d.

⁷⁵ Doherty, 2018.

⁷⁶ Lam, 2019.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Karp, 2018.

⁷⁹ Monash University, 2019.

⁸⁰ Deakin University, n.d.

domestically but encouraging other IP states to follow suit. This is a dangerous precedence that is completely unsustainable for the future of the region. If Australia wishes to save any face and undo at least some of the damage to its reputation on the global stage, it would be wise to halt hard-line border control policies domestically and encourage IP states to do the same.

Australia's stance on climate change is fairly obvious with the aforementioned discussion and does not need additional examination, however, if Australia does truly see the environment as a real security threat and continues to adopt the same climate change mindset, then the nation will face unparalleled dangers in the coming years.

Lastly, the threat of violent extremism is well cited as a major concern for Australia yet has not proven to be a danger in the most traditional sense. From 2014-2017, Australia lost only nine lives to terrorism.⁸¹ Sri Lanka is a different story entirely, with the 4/21 attacks and civil war a testament to that. However, the non-traditional impacts including institutionalised oppression, economic depression, widespread fear, poverty, social disharmony and breakdown of law and order are the more perverse effects of terrorism that should be concerning IP states. These impacts can quite ironically be the root causes of terrorism that perpetuate a vicious cycle, one that is difficult, but possible, to stop. Australia must work with IP nations, especially those suffering from violent extremism (including Sri Lanka), to engage in productive discourse that targets these root causes of terrorism. Whilst sometimes unfavourable to admit, misplaced fear and hard-line policies tend to avoid these underlying issues and can actually encourage extremism further.

In the lead up to the Sri Lankan federal elections, Australia is presented with a unique opportunity to apply soft pressure to candidates with the intention of reducing violent extremism. Encouraging productive measures (unlike the current 'burqa ban' and anti-Muslim sentiments) that empower individuals, promote economic and social prosperity, and unite ethnic groups are crucial in combatting extremist tendencies. Australia is failing as a regional security provider by neglecting to promote this mindset. The nation's own xenophobic rhetoric and conservative legislation that allows for harsher penalties over community-based initiatives sets a poor example for IP neighbours looking to Australia as an pillar of security.⁸² If Australia wishes to work with regional partners on actually combatting terrorism and extremism, forging policy that targets the real causes of these radical behaviours is needed.

In summary, there are various security threats that have the potential to disrupt the relative peace and stability of the IP. However, these threats do have viable solutions or at least alternatives that can assist in mitigating their intensity and seriousness. More evidence based, academically supported and logically sound solutions need to be explored in the security sphere of the IP.

Conclusion

It is clear Australia wishes to maintain its role as a leader in promoting harmony and prosperity in this region. The nation has taken some significant steps towards solidifying this role as the IP becomes more

⁸¹ Smoleniec & Joshi, 2018; Institute for Economics & Peace, 2018.

⁸² Institute for Economics & Peace, 2018.

clearly defined, however, far more could and should be done. This paper sought to explore the role of Australia and its relationship with Sri Lanka in the broader context of the IP. Further, an examination on current practices as well as future directions was undertaken. Overall, it would appear that Australia is active in all the four pillars discussed (trade and economy, the environment, educational and cultural exchange, and security), but the extent and impact of each pillar differs.

In terms of economic endeavours, Australia is somewhat present in IP development and trade, however, has a low-level relationship with Sri Lanka. Analysis revealed that the trade portfolio between the states needs diversification in order to build more robust economic exchange, with the additional bonus of mitigating potential security threats present in the region. Environmentally, Australia's domestic policies undermine any and all efforts to curb climate change and make a mockery of promises to international audiences on cutting emissions. Australia invests millions in climate aid and assistance in the IP yet fails to apply the same mentality to domestic practices. The nation is on the verge of causing irreparable damage to the natural environment and needs to start setting a better example as a regional leader if it is to affect real change in the global environment. Current security endeavours seem misguided, to say the least. Australia and the broader region face a variety of threats to stability and peace yet seem to be addressing these issues in the wrong manner. Aforementioned security strategies outlined in this paper appear quite obvious yet seem to be avoided. Indeed, the Australian Government must take heed of the fact that following conservative and traditional measures will not be sustainable in a rapidly changing, contemporary landscape. Cultural and educational exchange, however, is something Australia performs significantly better in. Decades of promoting soft power in the IP region and ensuring strong cultural relationships has been a success for Australia.

Nevertheless, the state's position as a global leader in soft power is threatened to falter as it fails to address serious concerns across the other three pillars. Much of this concern comes from lacking recognition that Sri Lanka *is* an emerging player in the IP region and needs to be taken seriously as such. It would appear that Australia has so far failed to recognise the strategic potential the small nation is likely to have in the future, and it would be well within Australian interests to invest more heavily across the four aforementioned pillars. As Adamson quoted, "We are not among the great powers, and nor are we insignificant players".⁸³ Australia *has* the potential to become a great power (or at least an essential player) in the IP region by strategically working with the 'up and coming' states, including Sri Lanka. Concentrated efforts to build bilateral relations on stronger foundations than currently exist will be essential of Australia is to truly capitalise on this potential.

⁸³ Adamson, 2019.

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INDO-PACIFIC AND GEOPOLITICS OF BRI: A SRI LANKAN PERSPECTIVE

Professor Asanga Abeyagoonasekera

Abstract

Sri Lanka is a geo-strategically positioned island that lives with an 'existential threat'- the disarray of internal politics and external geopolitics. This paper will examine the Indo-Pacific and geopolitical tension in the South Asian region from a Sri Lankan perspective. Arguments will be presented regarding BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) projects, both for and against investments. Issues including Chinese 'debt traps' and 'predatory loans' will be examined, with specific reference to the Indo-Pacific Strategy Report (IPSR) that highlights China's military modernisation and predatory economics. From Delhi to Washington, BRI is viewed by policy makers and scholars from varying perspectives. Some see it as a serious national security threat and paint a somewhat negative picture. This paper will discuss why such speculations need to be viewed in a wider geopolitical lens and importance of countering such negativity. It is clear to many nations that being part of the BRI initiative will bring more benefits than consequences. BRI has filled the much-needed infrastructure deficit in many nations, and Sri Lanka sees BRI as an initiative that will bring prosperity to the nation and entire continent.

*“When two elephants fight, the grass suffers;
And when the same two elephants make love, the grass also suffers.”*

Lee Kuan Yew

Indo-Pacific Strategy Report

During the 2019 Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, United States (US) Acting Defence Secretary Patrick Shanahan released the first comprehensive strategic document on the Indo-Pacific. The Indo-Pacific Strategy Report (IPSR) in its first line identifies this massive geographic construct as the Department of Defence’s “priority theatre”. The IPSR mentions that the “People’s Republic of China, under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, seeks to reorder the region to its advantage by leveraging military modernization, influence operations and predatory economics to coerce other nations.”¹

Moreover, the US’s National Security Strategy (NSS) and the National Defence Strategy (NDS) articulate on developing a more lethal Joint Force with a more robust constellation of US allies and partners. For this, increased investments in this regard will sustain US influence in the region to ensure favourable balances of power and safeguard the free and open international order.

The IPSR identifies China as a ‘revisionist power’, accusing the state of undermining the “International System by exploiting its benefits while simultaneously eroding the values and principles of the rules-based order”.² In regard to Chinese investments, the IPSR highlights China’s one-sided and opaque deals, inconsistent with the principles of a free and open Indo-Pacific that are causing concern in the region. For example, in 2018, Bangladesh was forced to ban one of China’s major state firms for attempted bribery and in the same year, the Maldives’ finance minister stated China was building infrastructure projects in the country at significantly inflated prices compared to what was previously agreed. Furthermore, a Chinese state-owned enterprise purchased operational control of Hambantota port for 99 years, taking advantage of Sri Lanka’s need for cash when its Government faces daunting external debt repayment obligations.

Despite this, the US does not necessarily oppose China’s BRI activities as long as they respect sovereignty and the rule of law, use responsible financing practices, and operate in a transparent and economically sustainable manner. The US does have some concerns, however, primarily relating to China’s potential to convert unsustainable debt burdens of recipient countries or sub-national groups into strategically/militarily accessible areas, including by taking possession of sovereign assets as collateral.

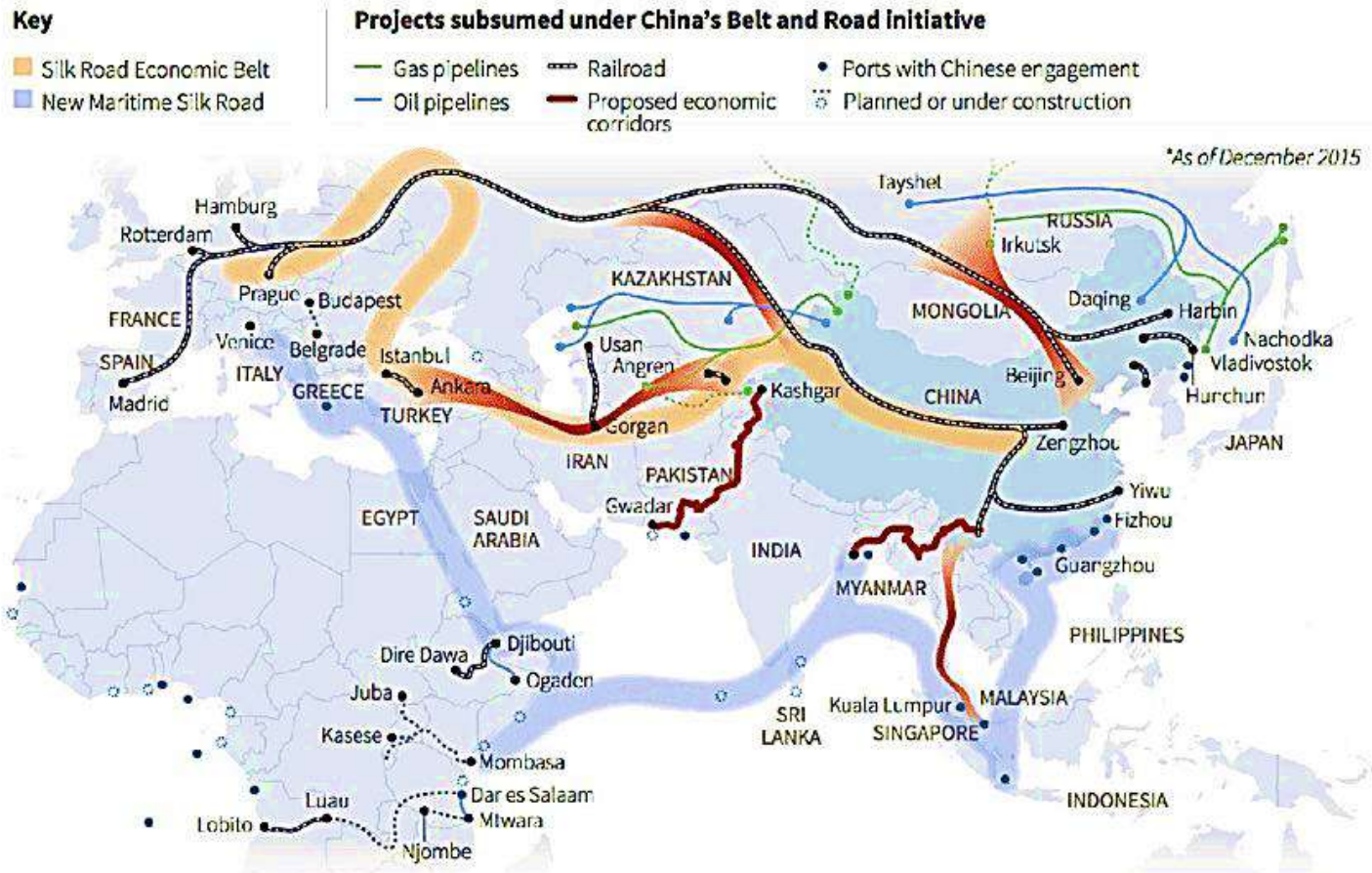
¹ US. Department of Defence, 2019.

² Ibid.

Figure 1
BRI Map³

Reviving the Silk Road

Announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013, the Silk Road initiative, also known as China's Belt and Road initiative, aims to invest in infrastructure projects including railways and power grids in central, west and southern Asia, as well as Africa and Europe.



Hostilities in the region

At the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi used the term Indo-Pacific eleven times. Historically, there has been ambivalence in the term, with the US referring to the region largely as Asia-Pacific or Indo-Asia-Pacific. It was only during US President Donald Trump's five-nation tour of Asia in late 2017 that the term 'free and open Indo-Pacific region' was used frequently.⁴

According to Dr. Satoru Nagao, infrastructure demand in the Indo-Pacific has surged over the past few years, partly as a result of rapid economic development. Since 2012, BRI has impressed states in its

³ Research Gate, 2018

⁴ Roy-Chaudhury, 2019

ability to fulfil political and strategic demands; “For want of a better phrase, China’s BRI is ‘the only game in town’”, particularly as no other infrastructure development project of BRI scale and magnitude exists in the Indo-Pacific.⁵ Yet, despite the ability of Beijing to fill this need, a number of powers in the region including India, Japan and the US, have expressed their concerns over the way in which China engages with recipients of its official development aid (ODA).⁶

Sri Lanka’s neighbouring country and the regional hegemon, India, decided to openly boycott China’s first ‘Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation’ held in Beijing in 2017. India is the only South Asian country not part of this grand initiative, and according to Pant, “has been the most vocal opponent of the BRI”.⁷ South Asia lacks basic infrastructure for trade including ports, railways and roads, as well as investment for such infrastructure when compared to other regions.⁸ The BRI addresses this gap and provides necessary and fundamental infrastructure for the region. Unfortunately, India is being left behind due to its present policy.

This hostility towards China’s BRI endeavour becomes clear when examined through the prism of geopolitics.⁹ Some Indian and Western scholars see Sri Lanka and Pakistan’s newly built infrastructure projects, Hambantota and Gwadar, as a strategic threat to India. This position is due to two factors. First, through India’s recent military alignment with US and second, due to the decline of US global power in Eurasia.¹⁰

Indo-US partnership

In July of 2011 at the Anna Centenary Library in Chennai, the former State Secretary Hillary Clinton asked India “not just to look East, but to engage East and act East as well”.¹¹ After this statement, the US actively supported India’s ‘Look East’ policy over the following years. At the La Martinier School for Girls in Calcutta in 2012, Clinton reiterated her belief in the centrality of India’s Look East Policy to the growth of the Indo-Pacific region. Since then, India was encouraged to focus on the security of the entire Indo-Pacific, which has become a permanent feature of US diplomacy vis-a-vis New Delhi, since the launch of the Pivot to Asia (later Rebalance to Asia) policy.

In June 2016 India was designated as a major defence partner of the US, and a few months later, signed the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), which gives both countries access to designated military facilities for refuelling and replenishment activities. India and US also signed a Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) that will facilitate access to advanced defence systems and enable India to optimally utilise existing.

These defence entanglements encourage India to support US liberal hegemonic foreign policy in the region, and some recent foreign policy decisions could be identified as ‘buck-passing’ tactics used by the

⁵ Nagao, 2019.

⁶ Nagao, 2019.

⁷ Pant, 2019.

⁸ Ranasinghe, 2019.

⁹ Hindustan Times, 2017.

¹⁰ With specific reference to the US policy of ‘liberal hegemony’ as explained by Walt and Mearsheimer.

¹¹ US Department of State, 2011.

US on India.¹² India, rather than viewing China's BRI as a threat, should move to join BRI like other neighbouring countries. The BRI should be seen as an opportunity for India and the entire region by Indian policy-makers. It is likely that India will join the BRI in the coming future, however, due to the geography of Indo-China and the economic prowess of the initiative.

The Quad and counterbalancing Chinese influence

The Quad, or 'quadrilateral' grouping (comprising of US, India, Japan and Australia), took place alongside President Trump's formal enunciation of the term 'Indo-Pacific'. It was perceived that where the Indo-Pacific was the new regional 'geo-strategic concept', the Quad was its 'operating concept' - a revived partnership between the four countries seeking to both counter China as well as offer other regional countries diplomatic alternatives.¹³ However, India has some reservations over potential limitations of the Quad's operationalisation. Specifically, it is not clear how the Quad will evolve in the future and how Quad nations view the BRI.

In his book, 'India turns East', French scholar Frederic Grare rightly identifies India's attempts to pre-empt the development of China's relationships in the Indian Ocean through the development of their own security relationships.¹⁴ This includes countries such as Singapore, Indonesia, Japan and Australia within the framework defined by the Look East Policy.¹⁵

There are also emerging counterbalancing axes against the BRI, including through Japan-India-US relations. Dr. Nagao explains that these three states have the potential to strategically use Sri Lanka's Trincomalee port as a naval base, as Trincomalee has a depth of 25m meaning US aircraft carriers can access the well-protected area.¹⁶ A further example is the gifting of the Chinese-built Mattala airport to India to counterbalance the Chinese sphere of influence in the deep south.

China's predatory loans

During US Vice President Mike Pence's speech at the Hudson Institute, there were warnings about China's "debt diplomacy"¹⁷ toward developing nations, specifically citing Sri Lanka. In reality, this example has no real substance. When examining the actual debt percentage with China, Sri Lanka's sovereign bonds are much higher than Chinese loans.¹⁸

According to a recent article by Dr. Harsh Pant ('India, BRI, and Delhi's Indo-Pacific Strategy')¹⁹ "India has also expressed scepticism regarding several other infrastructure projects undertaken by Beijing in other countries. China has employed the BRI as a tactic for statecraft and attempted to influence foreign

¹² Mearsheimer, 2000; 'buck-passing' is when a state attempts to get another state to deter or fight an aggressor state while it remains on the sidelines.

¹³ Roy-Chaudhury, 2019.

¹⁴ Brewster, 2012.

¹⁵ Grare, 2017.

¹⁶ Nagao, 2019.

¹⁷ Hudson Institute, 2018.

¹⁸ De Mel, 2019.

¹⁹ Lin, Koga, Roy-Chaudhury, Pant, Graham, Easton, Scott, Nagao & Hemmings, 2019.

policy in some of these nations, Sri Lanka being a noteworthy case.²⁰ The construction of ports and highways by Chinese companies on the island nation has resulted in the accumulation of monumental amounts of debt at extortionate interest rates.²¹ China has waited for the concerned governments to sufficiently entangle themselves, and by the bribing of political leaders,²² then influenced Colombo's foreign policy. The case of Sri Lanka in and of itself served as a major cause for the hardening of India's stance. While the development of the Sri Lankan port of Hambantota began in 2009, it was not until 2014, when Colombo allowed the docking of Chinese nuclear-powered submarines at the same port, that Indian concerns were validated."²³

However, this is inaccurate and speculative information; the submarines in question were not nuclear-powered and it was not a knee jerk decision to accommodate Chinese submarines by Sri Lankan policy makers. The two submarines that arrived in September of 2014 were conventional and not nuclear powered.²⁴ The Chinese and Sri Lankan Governments both informed the Indian Government prior to this decision, and as a sovereign nation Sri Lanka has the rights to receive and conduct friendly port calls without informing other nations. Despite this, Sri Lanka actively informed India and this hegemonistic approach of India should change in the future.

In the same manner, a Japanese scholar visiting Sri Lanka described the Hambantota port lease as a national security threat. This was with particular reference to the deterioration of Sri Lanka's economic condition and concerns that China would eventually convert the commercial operations into a military outpost. Speculative information and discourse bring a negativity to the BRI and instead facts need to be examined critically. The Sri Lankan Government has clearly articulated its position on Chinese military presence; there will be no foreign military bases in Sri Lanka.

Declining US power

Stephen Walt argues that US power decline is due to its policy of liberal hegemony post-Cold War. This foreign policy through leaders from Clinton to Trump, has seen US interference (e.g the Middle East) that has not necessarily economically benefited any states. Protecting and restoring the democratic agenda to win over local communities has failed due to these double standards. This is further examined by former-President Carter, who, after a recent phone call with President Trump, explained the President had concerns of China surpassing US power. Carter went on to discuss military operations of the past decades and the subsequent cost; "Since 1979 do you know how many times China has been at war with anybody? None. And we have stayed at war."²⁵

These unfruitful exercises in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq and Libya to restore democracies and regime changes has cost US more than any benefit gained. Mearsheimer explains in his book 'Great Delusion'

²⁰ Davidson, 2018.

²¹ Fernandez, 2019.

²² Reuters, 2015.

²³ Aneez & Sirilal, 2014.

²⁴ Chinese Navy type-039 (Song Class)

²⁵ Malloy, 2019.

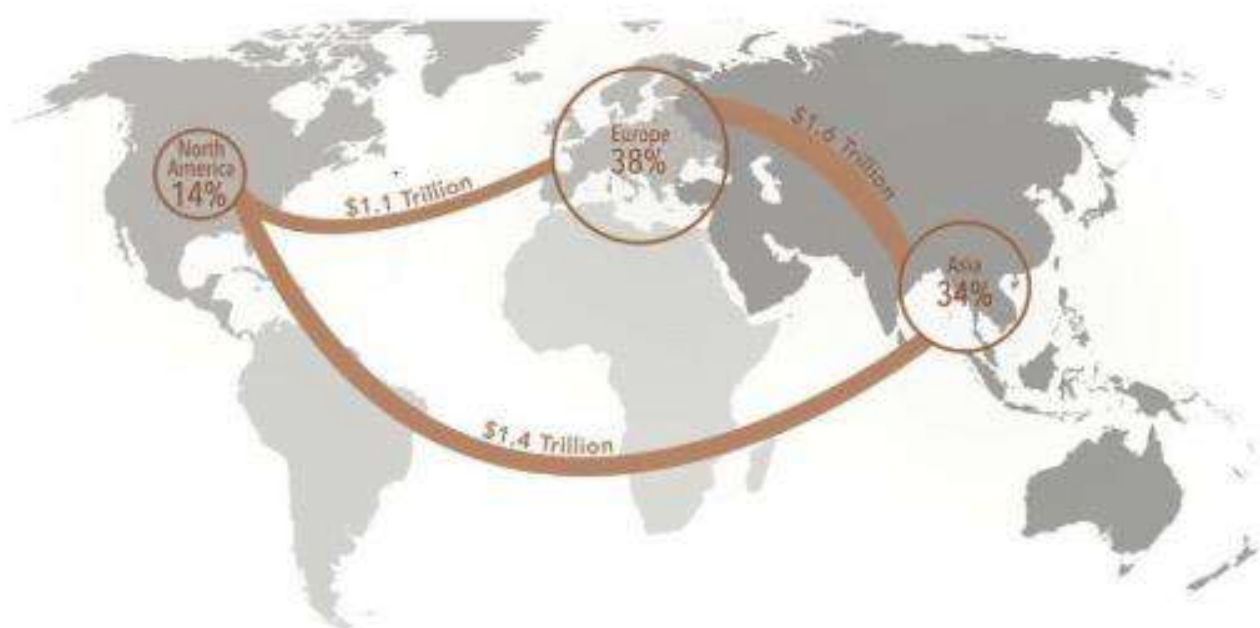
very clearly why the US needs to change its present foreign policy of liberal hegemony.²⁶ Now, the US is entangled in Venezuela which is likely to amount to another huge cost. The US position was explained by U.S. Southern Commander Admiral Craig S. Faller in a recent interview, where he stated, “President Trump is determined not to see Venezuela fall under the sway of foreign powers...Beijing is using disinformation and debt diplomacy to dig in as Maduro clings to power....I think the biggest threat to democracy and the way of life around the world is the trend that we see in China”.²⁷ This notion of liberal hegemony in attempting to implement a regime change strategy in Venezuela whilst blaming the Chinese sphere of influence is dangerous. This was the same strategy used to remove leaders of Iraq and Libya, and what the US should engage in is a much sounder foreign policy of offshore balancing, not regime change.²⁸

Eurasian trade

China is heavily engaged in trade and today Eurasian trade has become a significant component in terms of volume. With its connected geography, Europe and Asia are the two most significant regions in global trade. According to Khanna, they surpass both the transatlantic (\$1.3 trillion), and US-Asia (\$1.4 trillion), sitting at a booming \$1.6 trillion.²⁹

Figure 2

‘The Future is Asian’³⁰



²⁶ Mearsheimer, 2019.

²⁷ Seligman, 2019.

²⁸ Walt, 2018.

²⁹ Khanna, 2019.

³⁰ Ibid.

Through recent investments, it would appear that China works to strengthen economic and trade agendas of BRI supporting nations. However, the existing global power, the US, has accused China of ‘predatory loans’ and ‘debt trap diplomacy’, citing Sri Lanka as a prime example. Further international examples include Secretary of State Mike Pompeo referring to Huawei in Budapest, stating “Beijing’s handshake sometimes comes with strings, strings that will leave Hungary indebted both politically and economically.”. Further, French President Emmanuel Macron has warned that Beijing “took advantage of our division”.

Whatever the criticism, China consistently secures support from nation to nation in its global agenda. China is filling the large infrastructure vacuum which is the underdeveloped South Asia region. Success stories range from Africa to Latin America, yet speculative arguments and criticism still surround these projects as some scholars see the BRI and China’s influence as a major threat to the existing global liberal hegemonic order.

Sri Lankan foreign policy, oscillating between two poles

President Sirisena clearly articulated his foreign policy in his election manifesto, making reference to a “balanced Asia centric foreign policy,” between the triple sphere of influence from India, China, and the US. This has been a challenging exercise due to Sri Lanka’s geostrategic position in the Indian Ocean. Sitting at the centre of strategic lines of communication, Sri Lanka is a “super-connector”.³¹ Sri Lanka’s position could be compared with other two nations: UK facing the Atlantic and Japan facing the Pacific.³² Sri Lanka’s struggle has been that, even with its nonaligned past, it is evolving today into a more ‘multi-aligned’ foreign policy that creates both opportunities and challenges.

Sri Lanka’s strategic partnership alignment with China during the Rajapaksa regime was seen by India as a threat and a drift away from the Indian/US orbit towards Chinese influence. And although a calibration of foreign policy was seen by the present Sirisena regime (with the Prime Minister encouraging US balancing of China), currently there seems to be a revisiting of the Rajapaksa regime’s foreign policy, leaning toward China.

In Sri Lanka, the division on the Beijing factor is deep and polarized. This is reflected through policy makers who are engaged with two spheres of influence- the US and China. Deficiencies in articulating foreign policy and oscillation between these two increasingly divided fractions of Washington and Beijing is problematic.³³ The two fractions are further supported by proxy nations such as India and Japan. Not only does the pendulum swing with greater frequency between these poles, but the swings themselves have become more extreme and visible.

Sri Lanka has just celebrated its 71st year of independence from British colonial rule, but even after seven decades, policy makers have failed to realise promises of economic prosperity. What is seen instead is an underdeveloped nation with less than 4% annual growth. At the end of 2019, Sri Lanka will face a Presidential election followed by Parliamentary election in 2020. Domestic elections will ideally

³¹ Abeyagoonasekera, 2019.

³² Ibid; particular reference to geopolitical thinker Halford Mackinder’s map

³³ Abeyagoonasekera, 2019.

bring political stability to execute strong policies. Sri Lankan policy makers need to craft its security and foreign policy by examining national interests and the geopolitical environment surrounding Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka as one of the initial South Asian countries supporting the BRI initiative, even hosting the first BRI conference in Colombo.³⁴ This reflects concrete steps towards achieving prosperity and creating an Asian century. As Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said, “The Belt and Road Initiative is really creating an economic system which is helpful to us in Asia. I would call it innovative.”³⁵ Instead of Chinese influence being examined so critically, the US should be discussing the benefits that are likely to emerge. Growing tensions between superpowers are detrimental to all, and Lee Kuan Yew was right to say when larger nations fight, smaller nations suffer.

³⁴ Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute’s seminar on the 21st century MSR, 7th Nov 2014

³⁵ ‘PM and speaker praise China-proposed Belt and Road initiative’, 2019.

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MARITIME SECURITY OF THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

Rear Admiral Noel Kalubowila

Introduction

The Indo-Pacific region stretches from the eastern part of the Indian Ocean to the West Pacific Ocean, connected by the state of Malacca. Countries falling in the vast Indian and Pacific Oceans are known as Indo-Pacific countries. This area has become a central area for maritime, geopolitical, security, trade and environmental activities. Today, the Indo-Pacific region compiles of 44% of the world's surface area, 65% of the world's population, and contributes 62% of global GDP and 46% cent of global merchandise trade.¹

Issues of collaboration in the maritime domain

The Indo-Pacific sits in the midst of international trade. 40% of global exports come from the region and the area is contested between powerful nations such as the US, China, India and Japan.² The potential for great power rivalry is therefore high. Increasing maritime competition between China and the US has been driving the security dynamics of the Indo-Pacific for years. Further, China's assertiveness in the South China Sea has caused boarder disputes with various South Asian nations, naturally increasing security risks across the sea lines of communication. Moreover, US balancing policy has enabled the state to conduct security operations in Indo-Pacific, whilst other regional countries such as Japan, Australia, the Philippines and Indonesia also increase their maritime reach to secure sea lanes of communication.

In the Indian Ocean, there remains an issue of increasing maritime rivalry between India and China in order to counter Chinese influence in the region. The situation flared after 2009 when Chinese warships were compelled to protect merchant ships with counter piracy operations in the Indian Ocean. China maintains a continuous presence in the region like many other nations. The People's Liberation Army and Navy (PLAN) were operating without any bases in the region, and hence PLAN established a logistic facility in Djibouti to support their counter-piracy operations. Commonly, China's economic and defence assistance to countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Maldives, Myanmar and Sri Lanka are seen as military expansionist ambitions by India and US. Chinese investments and constructions of sea ports are also seen as building prospective naval facilities for PLAN.

¹ De, 2018

² Ibid.

Non-state threats

Threats in the Indo-Pacific are not only from states but may be from non-state actors that could have ramifications for the entire region. The Indian Ocean is a region of conflict. Most of these conflicts are internal and remain localised, but some can reach regional and global levels due to the weakness of state trade, poverty, the absence of democracy, corruption, competition for scarce resources, interference by foreign powers and turbulence in the Islamic world.

Some of the common non-traditional security threats plaguing the region include maritime privacy, maritime terrorism, irregular migration by sea, human smuggling, illegal narcotics and illegal fishing. In this context, Chinese BRI projects look particularly suspicious, especially by India, as an attempt to isolate India's influence in the region. This suspicion is hampering the efforts of some developing countries such as Sri Lanka who are waiting to benefit from the BRI.³ This situation has also allowed naval capability build up by China and India and has led to an increased US presence with the stated objective of maintaining freedom of navigation.

Main players in the region

The 21st century Indo-Pacific region has become a clear area of geostrategic and geo-economic competition. Due to this, various countries have focused their attention towards the area, including main players China, Australia, Japan, the US, India and Sri Lanka.

a. China

Discussions of safeguarding the security of overseas interests is present in the 2016 Chinese military strategy, and the country's armed forces carry out missions in the Gulf of Aden and other sea areas required to secure sea lanes of communication. It is apparent that the PLAN will gradually shift its focus from offshore defence with open sea protection, with indications that China is focusing its attention on the Indian Ocean. China's capability enhancement alongside expanded military operations has been quite remarkable. BRI is one example, where China has undeniably developed maritime infrastructure including strategically placed ports. According to a recent report by the Center of Strategic and International Studies, Chinese ports are found in four main areas: Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Iran.⁴ China at present is developing an overseas port network in accordance with the construct for the 21st century maritime silk road and is attempting to exercise sea power in the Indo-Pacific region as predicted.

b. Australia

The Australian Defence White Paper of 2016 indicates that Australian strategic defence and economic interests are in the Indo-Pacific region and that a rules-based global order supports state interests.⁵ Further, the White Paper identifies Australia's key economic and security based interests in the Indo-

³ Including capitalising on the geostrategic location and deep-water ports available and the objective of becoming the maritime hub of the region.

⁴ Green, 2018.

⁵ Commonwealth of Australia, 2016.

Pacific through maritime South East Asia within which most of their trade activities occur. It anticipates that Australia will face new complexities and challenges and identifies Australia's strategic defence interest as a resilient Australia including secure sea lanes, secure nearer regions, a stable Indo-Pacific region and rules-based international order.⁶

c. Japan

It is also evident that Japan is focusing more on maritime security in the Indo-Pacific. The state is working with the US and India in conducting trilateral exercises in Malabar whilst focusing on technology sharing in the undersea Indian Ocean environment.⁷ Japan has changed its defence posture with constitutional amendments envisaging more effective military defence forces, and on November 6, 2017, the leaders of Japan and the US reached an agreement on the free and open Indo-Pacific strategy, confirming free and open maritime order, and that the rule of law is the cornerstone for stability and prosperity of the international community.⁸

d. The United States

The Indo-Pacific emerged as strategic discourse under the Obama administration and became a key regional term officially used by the Trump administration.⁹ The US has been the leading power in the Indo-Pacific since 1945 and a prominent power in the Indian Ocean since 1980s.¹⁰ Now, the US, Japan, India and Australia are faced with Chinese assertiveness in the region. Not surprisingly, in the face of these Chinese challenges, the US has crafted an Indo-Pacific response. Admiral Scott David, 25th Commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command, has stressed that "We will put our most capable forces forward in the Indo-Pacific for effective maritime security architecture".¹¹ The US has committed more of their maritime forces including carrier strike groups, the amphibious ready group and attack submarines to the Indo-Pacific. The state is committing their navies in most advanced platforms including ballistic missile defence systems and intelligence gathering platforms. Further, India and the US signed an agreement on sharing military logistics, a major step forward in coastal bilateral defence cooperation. Both sides clarified that they will not set up military bases, however, this agreement will facilitate logistic supplies, support and refuelling services during the joint mission.¹²

e. India

India has renewed its focus not only on the immediate neighbourhood of the country, but of the entire region. The Indian navy has developed their power projection capabilities and is known for enhancing their own (and other Indo-Pacific states') Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) capabilities. The tri-lateral MDA agreement among India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives is aimed at information sharing of merchant vessels at sea by way of the Merchant Ships Information System (MSIS) and Automatic Identification System. There is a keen interest especially by India to include Seychelles and Mauritius

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Flake, Smith, Sambhi, Wilson, Jaishankar, Baruah, Lang, Padmanabhan and Reddy, 2017.

⁸ Parameswaran, 2019.

⁹ Scott, 2018.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Panda, 2016.

into expanded initiatives of MDA. India has been taking steps to augment infrastructural capacity at all major ports under the Sagar Mala project. Partnership with ports located in Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam, make Indian ports important gateways to ASEAN countries and vice versa, enhancing maritime security in the region.¹³ In addition to ASEAN countries, South Korea and Russia have expressed interest in maintaining maritime security in the Indo-Pacific. They too depend on these oceans for energy and prosper with maritime commerce. However, this interest by world super powers, regional super powers and emerging powers has led to a ‘maritime cold war’ in the Indo-Pacific.

Whilst there is no prospect of an immediate combat situation, many regional and extra regional navies have been compelled to come to the Indo-Pacific to protect their merchant shipping. The collaboration of weapons of mass destruction, increased missile capabilities, a rise in non-traditional threats, and power projections by foreign militaries have not made the Indo-Pacific safe.

f. Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is primarily a maritime nation and greater maritime connectivity between Sri Lanka and main trading partners is an imperative for Indo-Pacific connectivity. There is no doubt that Sri Lanka is strategically located in a maritime hub of major world economies (including Japan, India, China and South Korea) who rely on the Indian Ocean. Sri Lanka holds a significant place in important sea lanes and is a vital place for ships to port.¹⁴

The way forward in enhancing maritime security

Security dynamics are changing rapidly in the Indo-Pacific. The main driver of this shift has been China, which over the years has been working to push its borders far out into international waters by means such as building artificial islands in the South China Sea. Due to enhanced competition and emerging threats, maritime cooperation is a necessary element in both foreign and security policy framework moving forward.

The maintenance of peace, stability and security of the seas; independent lawful commerce; freedom of navigation; protection and reservation of maritime resources; and sustainable and responsible fishery frameworks are all key interregional needs of maritime security and cooperation. To mitigate these threats, all countries should agree to clarify their territorial and/or maritime claims on the basis of international law and to settle any disputes by peaceful means and never through forces of coercion.

Integrating greater maritime connectivity in the Indo-Pacific is an imperative to forming strengthened security and growing investment in the region. Maritime connectivity is a multinational task that requires implementing strong policy initiatives. One way to achieve greater mutual understanding is to broaden and increase dialogue, and recommendations include hosting events such as an annual high-level dialogue in maritime cooperation.

¹³ Tabasum, 2018

¹⁴ Sri Lanka Navy; From 2009-2018, 489 warships visited Colombo port.

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INDIA'S STANCE IN THE INDO-PACIFIC DURING THE PERIOD OF NARENDRA MODI

Ruwanthi Jayasekara

Abstract

This research paper will examine how the region of the Indo-Pacific is identified by India and other key states. Further discussed will be India's relations with the remaining Quadrilateral powers consisting of Japan, the United States (US) and Australia, as India's relations in the Indo-Pacific are mainly relied upon and supported by these states. An analysis of the security, economic, maritime and technological dimensions of India's policies towards the Indo-Pacific will be given, with specific emphasis on the shift from the 'Look East' to 'Act East' policy. Finally, this paper will offer recommendations to further improve Indian relations with other Indo-Pacific states for the betterment of the entire region. A literature review was conducted to achieve the above research objectives, concluding that India must strategically maintain relations with the Quadrilateral powers and other states to balance against the inevitable rise of China.

Introduction

In the current world system, great attention is being paid to the Indian Ocean region. The actions of every involved state power prove true the words of Rear-Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan, stating whichever state is in charge of the Indian Ocean will be the most powerful in the world. The term Indo-Pacific was first used by Indian historian Kalidas Nag in 1941, and then was given prominence when Shinzo Abe referred to the concept of the Quadrilaterals (the Quad; consisting of Japan, India, Australia and the US), in his famous speech, “Confluence of the Two Seas” in 2007. The Quad has since aimed at having “a free, open, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific region”.¹ With Narendra Modi coming into power as the Indian Prime Minister, India’s relations are specifically aimed at cordial interactions with the US, Japan and Australia. Most significantly, these relations are focused on the Indo-Pacific and thus India’s relations with the Quad define India’s stance in Indo-Pacific. With a transformation from the ‘Look East’ to ‘Act East’ policy, Modi in both of his terms has emphasised the importance of both the Indian and Pacific regions, in order to gain economic, security and diplomatic prowess. Being strategically located in the Indian Ocean, it would appear that India seeks to be a state with dominant power capabilities. To establish this, India promotes cordiality with the Quad as a strategy to stop interference (without Indian consent) from the included states. Thus, India creates a strong state grouping whilst securing the Indo-Pacific and establishing dominance in economic, security and technological realms.

Overview of the Indo-Pacific

At first, India avoided forming relations with outside powers in the Indian Ocean. The impression that there were no other strategic players in the region and that external states would intervene in domestic affairs saw India promote its role as the sole hegemonic power.

However, with imperatives of economic and security integration, India articulated the concept of ‘extended neighbourhood’, spanning states within ASEAN, the Pacific region, Central Asia, the Gulf, West Asia, North Africa, and the Indian Ocean Rim, neatly aligning with an Indo-Pacific regional construction.

According to Mile’s Law 2, “where you stand depends on where you sit”,² summarising India’s interests in the Indo-Pacific. In his keynote speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2008, Modi defined the Indo-Pacific as “a natural region extending geographically from the shores of Africa to that of the Americas”,³ highlighting India’s clear role in it. He further delivered India’s vision for Indo-Pacific as “free, open, inclusive, stable, secure and prosperous”.⁴ It is therefore the belief of some scholars that India is contesting its established foreign policy traditions (such as non-alignment) and is now focusing

¹ Chacko, 2012.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

on strong regional partnerships. According to Brookings India, it is widely believed that the Indo-Pacific now forms the dominant framework for India's extended neighbourhood.⁵

Quad activities concerning the Indo-Pacific are an attempt to define the economic and security architecture of the region, as the threat of China's growth in the region becomes more apparent. With an increase in competition for strategic interests in Indo-Pacific, "the Indian Ocean must be treated as a partner, not as an arena" for the mutual benefit of everyone.⁶

From the perspective of India, the Indo-Pacific has become a major concern in the current context. This is underscored by statistics produced by Dhruva Jaishankar, which identified India's top three priorities as cross border connectivity, naval/maritime capability and military industry. Along with this, important states for Indian interests are recognized as Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and some Southeast Asian states, covering a major area of the Indian Ocean region.

According to the Indo-Pacific Governance Research Centre, Modi has plans in maritime sphere for security enhancement, economic development and investment on technology.⁷ A focus on economic and security-based aspects within the country has led to integration of the region, further moving towards maritime connectivity under the leadership of Modi.

The Indo-Pacific under Modi

Modi's plan has extended from economic and security architecture towards adhering to maritime rules and regulations and technological assistance. Both of Modi's terms are specifically characterised by official visits to states including Sri Lanka, which captured regional attention assisting in his second term win. Active engagement with other states is also reflected including an invitation to speak at the Shangri-La Dialogue by China. The highlight of Modi's speech in 2018 was the mention of the 'Indo-Pacific' ten times, interpreted by some as an action "to placate China or dampen US enthusiasm" in the region.⁸ Accepting the invitation itself was progression toward better relations between India and China, yet this does not mean that tensions are completely resolved between the two superpowers. Even in the presence of China, Modi has spoken on regional measures such as Indo-Pacific cooperation with India, that specifically excludes China.

Emphasizing on the Rimland theory by Nicholas Spykman, India has always focused on the Indian Ocean region as they key to future gains. Modi has emphasised the 'rules-based order' nature of the Indo-Pacific, indirectly targeting China's violation of international maritime rules. Moreover, according to Roy-Chaudhury, Modi values "respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, consultation, good governance, transparency, viability and sustainability", which does not favour major investment projects by China in Asia.⁹

⁵ Jaishankar, 2019.

⁶ Roy-Chaudhury & de Estrada, 2018.

⁷ Chacko, 2012.

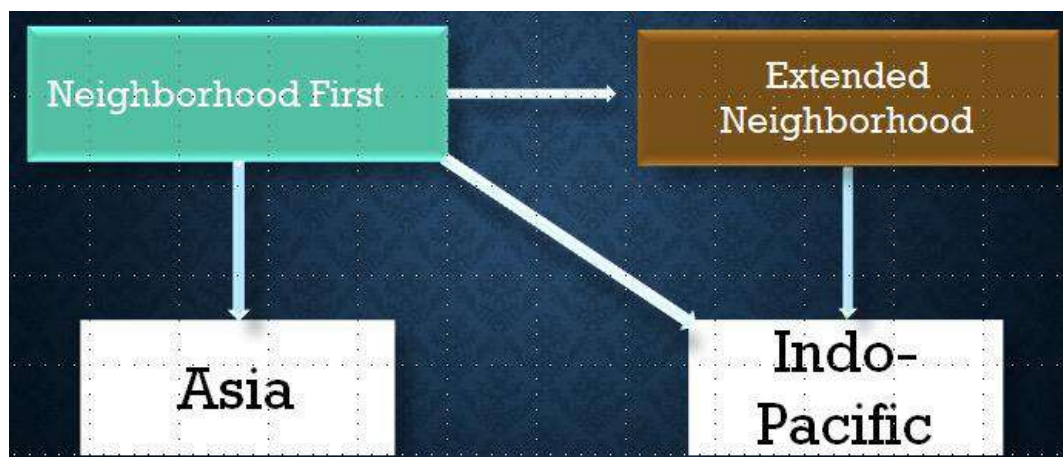
⁸ Roy-Chaudhury, 2019.

⁹ Ibid.

Thus, in a way, Modi’s plan for the Indo-Pacific can be considered a policy to tackle the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China. In April 2017, “India agreed to provide its third line of credit to Bangladesh for \$4.5bn, including for port upgrades”.¹⁰ However, China is pursuing investments in Sri Lanka including Trincomalee port, Hambantota airport and the Port City project. Hence, despite Indian attempts at BRI level investments, these BRI projects are viewed as a threat to India. According to a survey of India’s strategic community by Brookings India, 54% of respondents see China’s assertiveness as the most significant external challenge India faces.

Figure 1

India’s policies on Indo-Pacific



India initiated its ‘neighbourhood first’ policy to improve its relations in its own region and to balance threats from external states. With power rivalries and strategic competition in the region, India was persuaded to expand its sphere of influence and go towards an extended neighbourhood policy. All these were strengthened by Look East and Act East policies through which India improved the economic and security conditions, gradually targeting the economic and security integration of the region. Under the leadership of Modi, the Act East policy was brought to the forefront of India’s foreign policy. According to Roy-Chaudhury, Act East is “the cornerstone of [the Indian government’s] engagement in the Indo-Pacific region”.¹¹

Act East has recently become more active in engaging with other states, reflected in the below examples. First, India is gearing its Act East policy mainly through ASEAN which seems to be an indication of strengthened relations between the states and a shift from “an economic and trade-based policy to nurturing political and security relationships”.¹² This is not only beneficial to India but to ASEAN member states who are provided with assistance in “trade, investment, people-to-people links, maritime issues, transport, infrastructure, technology, R&D, terrorism, tourism, climate change, education and IT”.¹³

¹⁰ Roy-Chaudhury & de Estrada, 2018.

¹¹ Roy-Chaudhury, 2019.

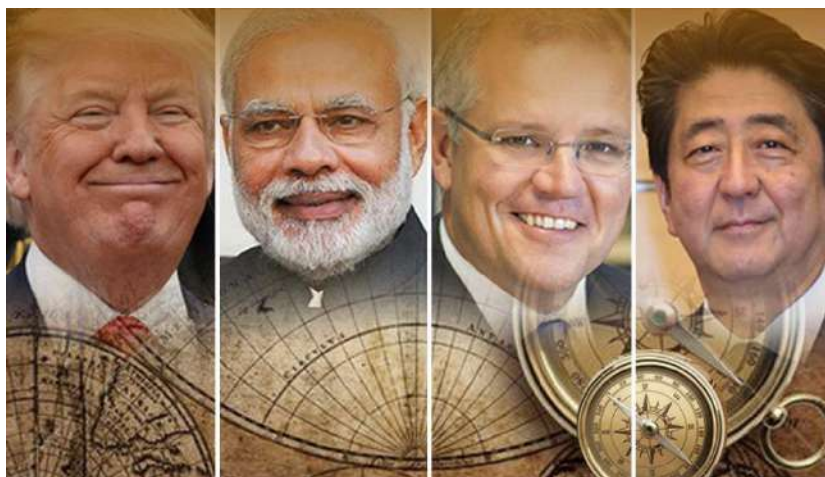
¹² Ibid.

¹³ Flake, Smith, Sambhi, Wilson, Jaishankar, Baruah, Lang, Padmanabhan & Reddy, 2017.

India's relationship with the Quad has been focused on securing and achieving India's dream position as hegemon in the Indo-Pacific. In 2016, the US and India signed a Memorandum of Understanding to provide each other military support, emphasising India as the US's "major defence partner".¹⁴ However, India does not rely solely on the US and has included Japan as a permanent participant to exercise MALABAR (a bilateral exercise between India and the US till 2006).¹⁵ These defence partnerships are an indication of India's balancing approach to mitigating Chinese influence in the region and ideally achieving this dream.

Figure 3

The Quad



In terms of India-Japan relations, both states upgraded their status to a "special strategic and global partnership"¹⁶ in 2014, which may be considered a milestone for both countries. During Modi's visit to Japan in 2014, he mentioned that "Everywhere around us, we see an 18th century expansionist mind-set: encroaching on another country, intruding in others' waters, invading other countries and capturing territory".¹⁷ This statement was clearly directed at China who is in the process of building artificial islands whilst simultaneously encroaching on the sovereign rights of some Indo-Pacific states.

Moreover, relations with Australia were upgraded to a special partnership, and in a visit to Australia, Modi reiterated the importance of partnership for the sake of regional security.¹⁸ During this visit, former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott praised India, calling it "the world's emerging democratic superpower",¹⁹ "a model international citizen",²⁰ and a "friend to many that threatens no one"²¹, later signing a pact on civil nuclear cooperation.

¹⁴ Roy-Chaudhury, Estrada & Kate, 2018.

¹⁵ Flake et al., 2017.

¹⁶ Ministry of External Affairs of India, 2014.

¹⁷ Obe & Mandhana, 2014.

¹⁸ Wroe, 2014.

¹⁹ Parliament of Australia, 2014.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

What is significant in the relations of India with the Quad states is the fact that India cooperates with all of the states individually in defensive and security-based realms.

But there seems to be some flaws even in the Quad. Quad 2.0 returned with the officials of the four participating countries formally meeting in Manila. Four different press releases (rather than a joint statement) after the meeting indicates how strategic objectives and preferences in the region do still differ. Commonality was missing in action and there is a clear issue if Quad meetings are limited to consultation rather than implementation.²²

India's relations with non-Quadrilaterals in the Indo-Pacific

India's relations in Indo-Pacific are mainly with the Quad but are not limited to that. India maintains cordial relations with other states in a multi-actor level, including ASEAN, The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). The primary relationship of interest is that of India-ASEAN, as these states hold prime geopolitical spots between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, whilst neighbouring China. The relations between these states can be analysed under three domains of security, the economy and technology.

In the security domain, India believes in an open security architecture, and according to Chacko, this “creates a stable regional environment that is conducive to the cultivation of key trade and investment linkages for India's domestic economic development”.²³ Considerable steps to secure the region include a joint statement at the January 2018 ASEAN–India Summit in New Delhi which sought to strengthen regional maritime cooperation.²⁴ Furthermore, India and Singapore signed an enhanced defence cooperation agreement in November 2015 which included the establishment of an annual bilateral Defence Ministers dialogue.²⁵ India's relations with Vietnam increased with providing Vietnam with “patrol boats, a US\$500 million line of credit for defence spending, anti-piracy cooperation as well as submarine and combat-aircraft training”.²⁶ These activities show India's security relations with non-Quadrilaterals do matter and in time it is likely these actors will have some significance in the Indo-Pacific region.

For India, being a hegemonic power in the Indian Ocean region, maritime security plays a major role in security relations. With an urge for an open and secure environment, India continues to pledge for the same in the maritime domain. The 2015 Maritime Security Strategy notes “the incontrovertible link between secure seas and India's resurgence in the 21st century”.²⁷ India's maritime security has been revitalised with numerous initiatives such as Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR), the Cotton Routes, the Spice Routes, Project Mausam and an inter-continental consultative framework,

²² Oak, 2019.

²³ Chacko, 2012.

²⁴ Roy-Chaudhury, 2018.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Roy-Chaudhury, Estrada & Kate, 2018.

notably the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), through which India aims to protect commercial and maritime interests in the Indian Ocean region.

According to the Ministry of External Affairs, India has cooperated with Indonesia to conduct “biannual coordinated patrols (INDINDOCORPAT) in the Six Degree Channel in the Andaman Sea since September 2002”.²⁸ Moreover, India has provided two Advanced Offshore Patrol Vessels for Sri Lanka and has taken part in regional level initiatives such as the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP), which involves the Indian navy and coast guard.²⁹ These actions show Indian interest in Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) and strategic cooperation in strengthening maritime security and orderly governance in the region.

However, some concerns from regional states are centred on India’s management of the South China Sea dispute. It would appear India will not benefit from confronting China over this issue, yet as the hegemonic power in the region, Vietnam and the Philippines rely on India’s support to protect their states from Chinese threats.

In terms of the economy, India has not historically been an active player in economic cooperation, but in the current context, has become a member of international economic organisations and has signed Free Trade Agreements with Sri Lanka, Thailand and ASEAN. With an increase in economic driven cooperation, there seems to have an increase in trade flows leading to India solidifying its position as an economic giant in the region.

According to India’s Ministry of External Affairs, Indonesia is India’s largest ASEAN trading partner, with bilateral trade valued at US\$15.9 billion in 2015–16.³⁰ India’s recent relations in the domain of economy with Sri Lanka include the Dollar Credit Line on KKS Harbor securing US\$45.3 million by India’s Export and Import Bank.³¹ Considering the rest of the developing states in the Indian Ocean region, India, with its booming economy, has the possibility to better serve to the region, with further bilateral level Free Trade Agreements and investment projects. Inability to accelerate towards this will be an incitement for external states to fill the vacuum in the region (such as China), which will complicate the relations in long run.

In terms of technology, this realm is booming for India. The state hosted the annual Internet Corporation of Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) summit³² and became a member of UNGGE with tasks related to information and telecommunications technology within the context of international safety and security.³³ These are all prominent steps for India to become a leader in developing technology. The Indo-Pacific is home to dynamic digitalisation and China and India have potentially the strongest stake in this. Yet even in the technological sphere, there seems to be tensions between India and China with India’s support of a multi-stakeholder model in cyber-governance clashing with China’s envisioned

²⁸ Flake et al., 2017.

²⁹ Chacko, 2012; Ministry of Finance, Government of Sri Lanka, 2018.

³⁰ Ministry of External Affairs, India, 2017.

³¹ Ministry of Finance, Government of Sri Lanka, 2018.

³² Flake et al., 2017.

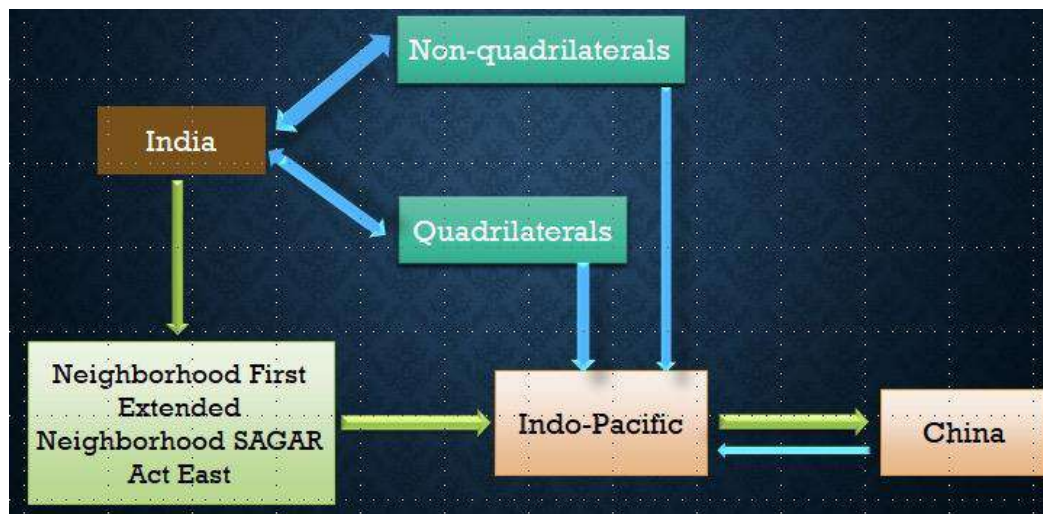
³³ Ibid.

sovereignty in the cyber sphere. However, India’s model will ideally prevail, as “The multi-stakeholder model both preserves the fundamental ideal of the internet and provides the necessary regulatory space for open digital economies”.³⁴ Domestically, the armed forces of India have their own Computer Emergency Readiness Teams, and the banking sector has a dedicated Information Sharing and Analysis Centre (ISAC).³⁵ Since the cyber domain remains quite amicable, India is attempting to develop cyber technology carefully and through cooperation. However, India’s neighbours remain far behind in technological advancement. A recommendation for improvements is to have a global cyber platform which would include key states such as India, Japan, the US, China and Australia.

After analysing the three domains through which India has geared up its foreign policy (including neighbour first, extended neighbourhood, SAGAR, and Act East), India’s focus has clearly been on the Indo-Pacific. Yet, India’s relations with Asian states would not have been as successful without cooperation from extra-regional states including the US and Australia. The integration of the Quad with India’s neighbours may worsen tensions with China, creating a strong space for high military involvement. India must therefore take note of this and align to the ethos of the Non-Aligned Movement with an emphasis on the Indo-Pacific region.

Figure 3

India’s balance of relations



In conclusion, India’s priority is to strengthen its policies and strategies which consist of neighbourhood first, extended neighbourhood, Look East and Act East. These policies have been successful to firstly safeguard national interests, to primarily contain the rise of China, to improve domestic conditions as a hegemonic power, and to then engage in cooperation and connectivity of the region. Ultimately, India is on the path of achieving its goals in Indo-Pacific as hegemon with the support of various regional and extra-regional powers.

³⁴ Flake et al., 2017.

³⁵ Ibid

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Annex 1: Discussion

Mr. Kobbekaduwa:

Mr. Kobbekaduwa discussed how Sri Lanka is wedged between two large emerging economies (China and India). He mentioned both countries are pushing for huge economic growth, and amidst this, people are failing to address the economics of Sri Lanka, specifically how to grow the Sri Lankan economy. He then asked the panellists to expand further on the topic of 5G, and specifically the issue of 5G and China.

Professor Asanga Abeyagoonasekara:

The Director General responded by explaining that the 5G issue has been raised all around the world, and President Trump's position on the topic has been very clear. He then spoke of the battle between the US and China and quoted, 'when elephants fight the grass suffers', meaning when great powers clash smaller nations (such as Sri Lanka) suffer.

Mr Abeyagoonasekera briefly mentioned the importance of regional discourse between all players, making reference to a conference hosted by the US in which Pakistan was barred from attending. He hopes that Modi 2.0 will bring a better neighbourhood policy where all countries can exchange dialogue.

He then addressed the 5G question by explaining that all products using 5G need to be examined and not just Huawei products, or at least this is Singapore's stance. This segued into a discussion regarding China's influence and the positives that can come with it. Specifically, there needs to be some degree of accountability for actions taken by Sri Lanka in regard to Chinese infrastructure. For example, China didn't want Hambantota Port, Sri Lanka did.

Mr Abeyagoonasekera then stated Sri Lanka needs their own policies and guidelines to mitigate potential problems with 5G.

Participant:

One audience member shared some of his thoughts, specifically the belief that the US is retaining power in the world, however, the Chinese override in terms of economic strength. He discussed the power change from bipolar to unipolar to multipolar, and stated the world is becoming more multipolar, especially in the Asian region. The speaker then mentioned this is something Indo-Pacific countries should be able to move towards. He then discussed military expenditures and the fact that China hasn't used hard power since the 60s and has really only pushed soft power in the region.

There was mention that India is like Sri Lanka's 'big brother' but asked if there was any point to this relationship if Sri Lanka wasn't to get any benefit. He commented that India as the world's largest

democracy cannot make decisions quickly however, China can which would inherently benefit small states like Sri Lanka. He then asked, ‘why are we being so pessimistic about China?’.

Sri Lanka Navy Captain KAPSK Kariyapperuma:

Captain Kariyapperuma spoke briefly about two books written that predicted the future of the Indian Ocean and the importance of this region (‘Sea Power’ and ‘Monsoon’). He described how as China’s influence moves west and India’s moves east, expansion conflict is almost inevitable. He then asked if conflict could be mitigated by developing relations with these powerful nations, and how should Sri Lanka formulate its foreign policy to take maximum benefits of this situation and become a maritime power of this world?

Prof. Asanga Abeyagoonasekera:

Mr Abeyagoonasekera addressed the previous questions by examining the role of China and the US in the region. He first asked how much the US is investing in the IP, with specific reference to struggling nations like the Maldives (who are now leasing out their own islands). Mr Abeyagoonasekera stated that China claims they are only investing in the region for economic development, and projects like the BRI are not geopolitical strategies.

But Sri Lanka needs to judge the legitimacy of these statements themselves, and quick decisions regarding China are dangerous. Huge investment and infrastructure projects have to be discussed in depth. A 99-year lease may not have been a problem if it was discussed further, said Mr Abeyagoonasekera.

He then spoke about the issue of colonisation and media distortion. There is a current rhetoric that some large players are trying ‘colonise’ sovereign states (such as Sri Lanka). However, colonisation is a process which involves one country being controlled by another’s government, which is clearly far from the truth in Sri Lanka. In this sense, media amplification of issues to do with China and the US can be dangerous.

Mr Abeyagoonasekera then moved on to addressing statements about a foreign policy and specifically mentioned strengthening the relationship with India in this strategy. The problem he sees with a foreign policy is the constantly changing interests of political leaders making a consistently implemented strategy difficult. He briefly mentioned a scholar who came and spoke on the issue and made reference to Ms Stronach who researched a defence policy and will be presenting her paper soon.

Ms. Lucy Stronach:

Ms Stronach addressed statements about China by explaining that China hasn’t done anything overly threatening *yet*. But this is the key word- ‘yet’. She discussed how states need to be aware of any hidden agendas or potential motives behind Chinese rising influence. She spoke about properly examining these key relationships and not to underestimate the power of a state like China. She then spoke about the Australian perspective on China’s rise, and specifically concerns with social influence. Ms

Stronach mentioned that Australia and China have robust economic ties, and this isn't necessarily where the concern comes from, but rather the contrasting political and social systems that some Australians are weary of. She concluded by stating that China is rising, and states must embrace this, but do have to be careful that the rise doesn't encroach on sovereign systems.

Participant:

An audience member raised the point that the US is using Sri Lankan airports and ports, but can the Sri Lankan navy or air-force go into US territories/ports?

Prof. Asanga Abeyagoonasekara:

Mr Abeyagoonasekera agreed and reiterated this question. He then made reference to some scholars who claim the western hemisphere 'belongs' to the US, stating this is inherently flawed in the 21st century. He then spoke of China's threatening speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue, where Chinese representatives stated, "do not twist the arm too much". This is the first-time threats of this nature have come from Chinese representation at the conference and was a serious warning.

Dr Ranga Jayasuriya:

Dr Ranga continued the China-Sri Lanka discussion by explaining that the primary problem with Chinese loans is that Sri Lanka has a tendency to engage in poor economic practice. For example, taking loans to pay off loans. The country has accumulated a huge debt, and while it is politically convenient to blame China for this, in truth this has been happening for years. Dr Ranga stated that this is simply mismanagement of the economy, and the government needs to start working towards strengthening Sri Lanka more strategically.

Ms. Ruwanthi Jayasekara:

The final panellist, Ms Jayasekara, spoke of involvement from other states and mentioned that Sri Lanka has an issue with viewing states as 'arenas' and not partners. The current political regime is set on the 'Chinese arena' rather than working with China as an equal partner. A foreign policy can help envision this, she stated.

Annex 2: About the Authors

Dr. Satoru Nagao



Dr. Satoru Nagao is a Visiting Fellow at the Hudson Institute. His research area is US-Japan-India security cooperation. Dr. Nagao was awarded his PhD by Gakushuin University in 2011 for his thesis titled “India’s Military Strategy”. He is also a Research Fellow at the Institute for Future Engineering, visiting Research Fellow at the Research Institute for Oriental Cultures in Gakushuin University, Research Fellow at the Japan Forum for Strategic Studies, Associate at the Society of Security and Diplomatic Policy Studies, Research Fellow at the Security and Strategy Research Institute for Japan, Senior Fellow at the Institute of National Security Studies Sri Lanka, and a Senior Research Fellow of the Indian Military Review. He was a Visiting Scholar at the Center for Strategic & International Studies in Washington D.C and was a Research Fellow at The Tokyo Foundation. Dr. Nagao was a post-doctoral fellow at the Research Institute for Oriental Cultures at Gakushuin University, and has taught at Gakushuin University, Aoyama-Gakuin University and Komazawa University as Lecturer. He was also a Security Analyst at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and a First Lieutenant of the Japan Ground Self Defense Forces (Japanese Army). Dr. Nagao has authored numerous books and articles on security issues, and also writes for a column, ‘Age of Japan-India ‘Alliance’” at Nikkei Business, the journal of one of Japan’s leading newspapers.

Professor Asanga Abeyagoonasekara



Professor Asanga Abeyagoonasekera is the Director General of the national security think tank the Institute of National Security Studies Sri Lanka (INSSSL) under the Ministry of Defence. He is a visiting professor for Geopolitics at Northern Kentucky University, of International Security at the University of Colombo, and of International Political Economy at the University of London. Asanga is a Columnist for IPCS and the South Asia Journal. He has authored many academic journal articles and presented in defence/foreign policy think tanks, universities and government ministries including Quai d' Orsay in Paris, LKY School of Public Policy in Singapore, and at Cambridge University. His major field of interest is geopolitics of South Asia, the Indian Ocean region and regional security in South Asia. He was the former Executive Director of the Government think tank on foreign policy, the Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute for International Relations and Strategic Studies, and was the

Advisor to the Minister of External Affairs from 2012-2015. At the same time, he was the Director General of Bandaranayake International Diplomatic Training Institute and has been educated at Harvard Kennedy School, Jackson Institute for Global Affairs at Yale University, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, Edith Cowin University, and the University of Oxford. Asanga is an Alumnus of the US State Department International Visitors Leadership Program, National Defense University in Washington and APCSS. He was recognized as a Young Global Leader (YGL) for the World Economic Forum in 2012. His 2015 published book 'Towards a Better World Order' focuses on geopolitics of the region and importance of preserving Sri Lanka's democratic institutions. In 2016 he authored a chapter for 'The Modi Doctrine: New Paradigms in India's Foreign Policy', and in 2018, he published his book 'Sri Lanka at Crossroads'.

Ms. Lucy Stronach



Lucy Stronach is a final year student of a Bachelor of Criminology majoring in Criminal Behaviour and Legal Studies. She recently graduated from a Bachelor of Arts majoring in Criminology and Security, Terrorism & Counter-Terrorism Studies at Murdoch University in Western Australia.

Lucy is currently studying at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura (Criminal Justice) and working as a Research Assistant at the Institute of National Security Studies Sri Lanka. Her current studies are being undertaken as a component of the Australian Government's New Colombo Plan Scholarship, in which Lucy has been awarded a fully funded

Fellowship to study in the Indo-Pacific.

Lucy has strived for excellence at the tertiary level, being awarded the Vice Chancellor's Award and the Prize in Criminology, as well as being elected as a Councillor of the Murdoch University Student Guild, and as the Murdoch University Criminology Representative.

Lucy has had many years of practical experience in the field of crime and security, particularly working with the Parliament of Western Australia, Western Australian Police, the Department of Corrective Services and at NGOs in Vietnam, India, the US and Thailand. She is the current Founder and CEO of a local NGO helping to improve the experience of children in prison, and her research interests include human trafficking, incarceration, juvenile justice and non-traditional security threats in the Indo-Pacific.

Rear Admiral DNSC Kalubowila



Rear Admiral Noel Kalubowila has held a range of prestigious appointments both locally and abroad. He has held staff appointments at various levels in Navy Headquarters and in Area Commands, including Director of Naval Projects & Plans, Director of Maritime Cooperation and Deputy Area Commander in North Western, Southern and Eastern Naval Areas. He is currently the Commander of the Southern Eastern Naval Area. Rear Admiral Kalubowila was also appointed as Commandant of SLN Vidura Training Establishment and Chief instructor of the Defense Services Command and staff College, Batalanda. He also served as the Defense Advisor (counsellor) to the Sri Lankan High Commission in New Delhi (2012-2014). He was awarded with the gallantry medals of Rana Wickrama Padakkama (RWP) four times and Rana Sura Padakkama (RSP) three times for heroism demonstrated and contribution made to eradicate terrorism from the country. He is also a recipient of Uttama Seva Padakkama (USP) for his unblemished record of service in the Sri Lanka Navy. Due to his service excellence he was awarded with Commander of the Navy's Commendation badge four times. He obtained his Bachelor of Science degree with Honours from the Navy War College, Pakistan, his Master's degree in Defense Studies from General Sir John Kotelawela Defense University, and a Master's degree in Maritime Policy from the University of Wollongong, Australia. At present he is reading for his PhD.

Ms. Ruwanthi Jayasekara



Ms. Ruwanthi Jayasekara is a graduate from the University of Colombo, with an Honours degree in International Relations. She is currently working at the Institute of National Security Studies Sri Lanka and was appointed as the Secretary of the Sri Lankan Node of The Millennium Project, a global think tank under the United States government. She also interned at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was the Manager of AIESEC Corporate Internships during 2016/17. She has won awards and recognition during her tertiary education, including the 'Best Young Leader' at AIESEC in 2017 and the 'Best Position Paper' at the National Youth Model United Nations in 2016. She is interested in the areas of diplomacy, national security, foresight analysis and sustainable development.

Ms. Nishtha Chadha



Nishtha Chadha is a final year student of a Bachelor of International & Global Studies at The University of Sydney, majoring in Government & International Relations. She is currently working as a Research Intern at the Advocata Institute in Colombo while completing her final semester at the University of Colombo (International Relations). Her research focuses on public policy, international relations and good governance in the Indo-Pacific region. Nishtha is an Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade New Colombo Plan Scholar for 2019. She has significant experience in the field of international relations, including recent internships with The Asia Foundation Washington DC office and the New South Wales Parliamentary Research Service, as well as various NGOs across Southeast Asia. In 2017, she was awarded the United States Studies Centre Study Abroad Prize and in 2016, she was chosen as one of five Wesley College

Overseas Study Experience Scholars.

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