

Security Salon on

“STORMS ON THE HORIZON: THE INTERACTION OF GEOPOLITICS AND ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY THREATS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN”

30th April 2021 from 1000hrs- 1130hrs

Organized by Institute of National Security Studies (INSS)

INSS, the premier think tank on National Security established under the Ministry of Defence Sri Lanka organized a Security Salon titled “Storms on The Horizon: The Interaction of Geopolitics and Environmental Security Threats in the Indian Ocean” which was held on the 30th April 2021 from 1000 hrs -1130 hrs (IST) via Zoom platform. The Guest Speaker for the event was Dr. David Brewster, Senior Research Fellow in the National Security College, Australian National University. The session was moderated by the Director General of INSS, Admiral (Prof.) Jayanath Colombage. The security salon was held virtually, creating a platform with the participation of academics, military personnel and Think Tanks in Sri Lanka covering the subject through multiple dimensions.

At the onset, the Director General Admiral Professor Colombage provided a descriptive analysis and recommendations to overcome and implemented effective and efficient solutions to the threats and challenges within the Indian Ocean Region, along with the Pacific, which has long been an epicenter for a range of natural occurring hazards in the world, but it is also one of the regions with the least capacity to respond.

Adding further significance to the discussion the Guest Speaker presented an informative and insightful presentation of the topic by providing many key examples of the impact of many natural hazards, such as cyclones, floods and earthquakes magnified by the relatively high population density of parts of the region. The natural environment in the Indian Ocean Region is now being strongly affected and challenged by climate change and other human interactions. This will likely act as an impact multiplier, increasing vulnerabilities caused by natural hazards. It may exacerbate existing threats to human security, including geopolitical, socioeconomic, water, energy, food and health challenges that diminish resilience and increase the likelihood of conflict. The incidence and severity of environmental disruptions will likely grow in coming years as a result of climate

change. But these environmental security threats can't be properly understood in isolation from each other, or in isolation from 'conventional' security threats. Therefore, the Security Salon examined the potential for magnification or cascading influences that can make it difficult to predict the threats and consequences in the Indian Ocean Region.

Dr. Brewster highly focused on the Indian Ocean littoral states which should be considered for a collaborative arrangement enquired for training, capacity building and disaster response for a range of environmental security threats. The potential to build regional response through an Indian Ocean Environmental Security Partnership regional arrangement should be encouraged by pooling of a team of expertise and resources with local partners, with a focus on collaboration among military and civilian officials. Importance of collaboration with NGOs (international and local), and Pacific Environmental Security Partnership could provide valuable lessons for similar collaborative mechanism focused on the Indian Ocean. In practice these disruptions have the potential to go far beyond what is normally understood as discrete environmental challenges. Rather, we need to understand them as 'geo-environmental' challenges, on par with geopolitical challenges in terms of their potential to become a significant disruption to the strategic order. The likely growth in the incidence and severity of environmental disruptions in the Indian Ocean in coming years will require a collective response, preferably one that is organized by the Indian Ocean region itself. The Security Salon gave way to a discussion which was concluded successfully with a number of significant outcomes.