

Hambantota: Revival of Maritime Silk Route Indo-Pacific Strategy, Power Rivalry in the Region and its Impact on Sri Lanka

C Ranaweera

Sri Lanka Army

chranaweera@yahoo.com

Abstract— There is a significant shift in the United States' focus from Middle East to South Asia and more towards South East Asia, which is now termed as the Indo-Pacific Region along with a considerable change in their foreign policy. The Hambantota harbor which was built solely with funding by China under its “One Belt One Road” strategy is also considered as a part of “String of Pearls” which encircle India strategically from the south also a major security concerns of India, a major ally of United States in the Indo-Pacific Region. Sri Lanka with her geostrategic location attracts higher level of concerns of the regional and global economic powers. With the traditional strategic power rivalry between India and China in the region Sri Lanka has undergone and is still facing many consequences. Whatever the concerns may be, Sri Lanka needs to maintain an equilibrium in foreign policy in order to achieve her development goals without antagonizing major players in the region. Sri Lanka needs to correctly identify the contemporary regional and global strategic environment and needs to maintain a well-balanced foreign policy accommodating India and China as well as the extra regional powers like USA, Japan and Australia. During this endeavour the writer expects to find out the growing socio- politico and geo- strategic concerns of India, China, USA and the other key players in the Indo-Pacific Region and its impact on Sri Lanka.

Keywords- *Indo-Pacific Region, India, China, USA, Sri Lanka*

Introduction

British forces left the region due to heavy economic constraints after dominating nearly 200 years and with the escalation of Cold War in the 1970s USA and Soviet Russia replaced them in the region. In post-Cold War USA became only superpower by making the world a unipolar one. China expanded her maritime domain by developing her maritime capabilities in mid 1980s with a clear vision to make her blue water capable power. China also a dependency of Middle East and African region when it comes to the oil and minerals, which are major requirements for her development projects and expanded her naval presence westwards, whilst developing and securing her assets in the South China Sea. The Maritime Silk Route was revived by President Xi Jinping in year 2013 with the aim of expanding and strengthening the cooperative interactions, social, economic and political connectivity with the others over the globe. Sri Lanka having been located in a strategically important location in the East-West sea route unintentionally became a part of Maritime Silk Route (Abeygoonasekera, 2014)¹. This strategy of Chinese has aroused many security concerns in the region. Influence of Chinese in South China Sea also has become one of the security agenda among the key players in the region. As Peng Er Lam describes “India considers Hambantota Harbor which was funded by Chinese which encircles the India from the South also a major security concern of India and her allies” (Peng Er Lam, 2015).²

Also considers by the USA that, the rising Chinese maritime power is also posing a threat to mighty American sea power along the sea routes those connect China to her energy resources also a major concern of the day. The most important fact in this regard is that whether Sri Lanka to be victimize on this issue by handling two emerging powers in the region who are also claimed to be

¹ Asanga Abeygoonasekera, “The Best Stop-over in Maritime Silk Road | Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Sinhalese,” 2014.

² Peng Er Lam, “Sri Lanka and China’s Maritime Silk Road: A Convergence of Interests.” *East Asian Policy* 07, no. 03 (July 1, 2015): 114–23.

good friends of the country. Hence leadership of the country should handle these complexities carefully to achieve development goals. As Robert Kaplan says, “The Indian ocean and the future of American power, Indian ocean is the ocean in the 21st century” (Kaplan 2010)³.

By virtue of being located in a most strategically important place in the Region, also falls in India’s sphere of influence and as many think forms a part of String of Pearls strategy in Maritime Silk Route, Sri Lanka would attract many positive and negative impacts on her.

Research Objectives

This study aims to find out the historical background of China, India, USA and their major concerns in the Indo-Pacific Region and also being a littoral state located in a strategically important place in the region, how and what measures Sri Lanka should carry out in order to minimize the tensions among the big players whilst maintaining its neutrality thus reducing the harsh impacts on her. The study has the following sub objectives;

- To identify and provide comprehensive review on the cooperation among China, India, USA and Sri Lanka in the Indo-Pacific Region.
- To identify the main causes as to why the key players like India and USA consider Sri Lanka as a part of Chinese “String of pearls”, in the Maritime Silk Route domain.
- To critically analyze the importance of the location of the Sri Lanka in Indo-Pacific and her role to ease the tension among big players in the region by maintaining neutrality in order to reduce the harsh impacts on her.

Hambanthota Harbour and its Background in Maritime Domain

There is much historical evidence to confirm the existence of a harbor for Second Century AD and had been a most important one in the region. Even during the colonial era of Portuguese, they carried out settlements in the area by knowing the

importance of the port. After that Dutch and the British’s too have had their influence over the area and has functioned the harbor. Hence it is clearly evident that for nearly past five centuries the name Hambanthota has been in existence. In 1994, excavations were done in Godavaya by Sri Lankan and German archeologists to unearth the laden history of this valuable port and confirmed that there had been a port much earlier (Kessler, 1998).⁴ Team has found inscriptions in an around Godavaya Temple proving that this was a major sea port in the region. Much Chinese and Persian pottery has also discovered from the place. Even in many historical literatures Sri Lanka is regarded as a major sea trade Centre on the old Chinese Maritime Silk Route.

Indrakeerthi Siriweera on his literature, *Mathota: The Great Port of Ancient Sri Lanka* published in the *Island* on 10 May 2013 explains that “due to the geo – strategically position of Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean, this tiny island has become a center for Transshipments even during the ancient days. There he has further said that Sri Lankan ports around the island has played key role in maritime trade” (Siriweera, 2013)⁵. It is the first in – built harbor carved out from the land. And this could provide all the services to the vessels passing through this channel. And also, naturally the Hambanthota port is located in area where the depth of the sea is facilitating most of the events pertaining to the shipping industry. Its location gives a clear dominance over the India and most of the Indian transshipment handling could be done here. Further with the pace of globalization many eyes were on these lanes of Indian Ocean mainly to transport their trade and energy sources through this.

According to the feasible study carried out and master plan, the area selected could be expanding without any major obstruction for the other related industries. With the further development ship building and ship repair facilities, bunkering facilities, an oil refinery and a free trade zone were also in the cards. Hambanthota does provide a convenient mid-way point on the sea-routes between China, and the Middle East and Africa. However, with President Mahinda Rajapakse’s visit to China in early 2007 and sign of agreement

³ “Australian Journal of Maritime & Ocean Affairs,” ResearchGate, 2010.

⁴ Oliver Kessler, “Godavaya - WikiVisually” 1998, Accessed December 31, 2019.

⁵ W I Siriweera, “MATOTA: The Great Port of Ancient Sri Lanka,” 2013.

on “friendship city relationship” Hambantota becomes a much vociferous among the other key players in the region.

With her pivot to Asia strategy earlier in 2011 and Indo-Pacific Strategy now USA is also playing a crucial role in Sri Lankan geopolitics.

The Interest of China in the Region

China started to expand her arms towards the West which is known as westward move which made considerable consequences to the USA making changes to her security perspectives indicating new geopolitical shifts. With her neighbors around, as indicated by John Wong, “China is doing this through its soft power with the motto of peaceful rise. China is a major country in the Asian region and with the opening of her economy it has acquired considerable gains especially in economy and industry”.⁶(Wong, 2014)

As explained by the Ni Lexiong that “there is a connectivity between China’s blue water strategy and the opening of economy in the context of post Mao reforms initiated under the chairmanship of Deng Xioping. According to the Cheng Ruisheng China’s intends to maintain a cordial and peaceful environment with south Asian countries in the 21st century. China also has a common interest of developing trade and economic cooperation in the region.⁷(Cheng,2008). As describes in the literature of Christopher J Pehrson on String of Pearls, according to the strategic analysis US Department of Defense Annual report to the congress “The dependence on overseas resources and energy supplies, especially oil and natural gas, is playing a role in shaping China’s strategy and policy. Such concerns factors heavily in Beijing’s relation with Angola, Central Asia, Indonesia, the Middle East (including Iran) , Russia , Sudan and Venezuela – to pursue long term supply agreements – as well as its relations with countries that sit astride key geostrategic chokepoints – to secure passage. Beijing’s

believes that it requires such special relationship in order to assure its energy strategy and force planning in the future. Indicators of such a shift would include increased investment in a blue – water capable fleet and, potentially a more activist military presence abroad. As he further explains “China’s growing influence and interest from South China Sea through the Indian Ocean and onto the Arabian Gulf has been describes as “string of pearls” a part of China’s grand strategy.⁸(Pherson,2006)

According to the statement given by a retired PLAN (Peoples liberation Army – (Navy) Rear Admiral, Yin Zhao “The Chinese navy is tasked with two principal mission: preserving China’s maritime security (including its territorial seas and EEZ): and protecting China’s expanding and island maritime interests, especially those in the IOR and West Africa” ⁹(Philip,2011). This statement is supporting the China’s implementation of “Far Sea Defense Strategy.” As Christopher J. Pehrson further describes “China’s development from its expanding economy and increased global influence to its growing military might and demand for energy, presents tremendous challenges to China’s leaders as they manage the turmoil of massive structural, technological and social changes. China has three major concerns: regime survival, territorial integrity, and domestic stability”.¹⁰

China is also a giant neighbor to the South Asian region. Hence definitely China will play all her cards to strengthen relationship with the aim of achieving her goals in the Region. The major tools that China utilize for this purpose are the economic assistance those needy countries in the region. The flow of Chinese money to economically deprived countries especially in South Asia and Africa will definitely be a greater relief for them.

As Christopher J Pherson describes in his article on String of Pearls, according to the report submitted by US-China commission in year 2005 “Globally, China is increasingly active in striving for energy security in ways that portend direct

⁶ John Wong, “Reviving the Ancient Silk Road: China’s New Economic Diplomacy.” Text. The Straits Times, July 9, 2014.

⁷ Cheng Ruisheng “Trend of India’s Diplomatic Strategy.” *China International Studies* 10 (2008):20.

⁸ Christopher, “String of Pearls: Meeting the Challenge of China’s Rising Power across the Asian Littoral.” Fort Belvoir, VA: Defense Technical Information Center, July 1, 2006.

⁹ Phillip C. Saunders et al., “The Chinese Navy: Expanding Capabilities, Evolving Roles.” Fort Belvoir, VA: Defense Technical Information Center, January 1, 2011.

¹⁰ Christopher, “String of Pearls: Meeting the Challenge of China’s Rising Power across the Asian Littoral.” Fort Belvoir, VA: Defense Technical Information Center, July 1, 2006.

competition for energy resources with the United States. This is producing a possibility of a conflict between the two nations”.

As Bernard D Cole (2013) describes, “ocean provides the most important medium for both peacetime and wartime activities, from trade to national conflict also,” the maritime strategies of the Asian powers are designed primarily to defend their homelands and associated vital national security interests on the ocean and seas”. By analyzing this statement carefully, it has given a clear distinct to the thoughts of Alfred Thayer Mahan.¹¹(Cole,2013)

As time goes China implemented the strategy of reviving the silk route phenomenon with the formulation of her grand strategy in 21st century. As Rajiv Chathurvedi explains China’s main strategy focuses on followings: ¹²(Chaturvedi, 2014)

- Acquire” comprehensive national power essential to achieving the status of a “global great power that is second to none”.
- Gain access to global natural resources, raw materials, and overseas markets to sustain China’s economic expansion.
- Pursue the three Ms: military buildup (including a naval presence along vital sea lanes of communications and maritime choke points), multilaterals, and multi polarity.
- Build a worldwide network of friends and allies through “soft power “diplomacy, trade and economics dependencies via free trade agreements, mutual security pacts, intelligence cooperation, and arms sales.

As foreign ministry spokesperson, Hua Chunying describes “with a view to realize the common development of China, European and Asian

countries, we have put forward and promoted the initiatives of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. So far over 50 countries along the Belt and Road have responded and joined the initiative. In these two major international events, we have advocate common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security in Asia, and called for efforts to shape the future through Asia-Pacific partnership. All these efforts have enabled China to make indelible contribution to the historical process of maintaining peace and security and advancing cooperation and development in the Asia-Pacific region”¹³(Chunying,2014). China is also a major investor in the many littoral countries in the Indo-Pacific Region and also in most of the African countries. As Rupert Herbert Burns (2012) explains” petroleum exists in abundance in the IOR. Crude oil and natural gas remain unquestionably the most important raw material exports from the region. In short, the global economy would not function without them. When viewed in an aggregated sense, the total oil and gas reserves held by IOR states as a percentage of the entire worlds proven reserves are impressive. Chinese Navy or the PLAN’S main strategy has two significant elements first, preserving China’s maritime security including its territorial seas and EEZs. second, protecting China ‘s expanding and distant maritime economic interests in Indian Ocean Region and West Africa. This China’s phenomenon called “Far Seas Defense Strategy” has increased the concern of India and USA.

This has been clearly indicated in the first ever Chinese Defence White Paper published in 2015 stating that, “In the new circumstances the national security issues facing China encompass far more subjects, extend over a greater range, and cover a longer time span than any time in the country’s history. Internally and externally, the factors at play are more complex than ever before”.

China also considers Indo-Pacific region also falls within her rightful sphere of influence and started to militarize and develops island chains in the

20 Cole, Bernard D. *Asian Maritime Strategies: Navigating Troubled Waters*. Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2013.

International Journal of Applied Economics and Econometrics 22, no. 1 (2014): 23–56.

¹² Chaturvedi, Kattumuri, and Ravindranath, “Mainstreaming Adaptation to Climate Change in Indian Policy Planning.”

¹³ Hua Chunying, “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying’s Regular Press Conference on December 31, 2014,”

South China Sea in order to counter expansion of USA in the region. With the aim of China becoming a maritime power, conforming the Xi Jinping's "China Dream" and gaining considerable superiority in the South China Sea, expanded her involvements in the region.

During the keynote speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation 2019, Beijing on 26 April 2019 stated that "Connectivity is vital to advancing Belt and Road cooperation. We need to promote a global partnership of connectivity to achieve common development and prosperity. I am confident that as we work closely together, we will transcend geographical distance and embark on a path of win-win cooperation".

By analyzing above, it is very clear that China's main aim is to connect with the global partners peacefully through OBOR initiative. He further elaborated stating that "It will promote high quality economic development, meet the people's desire for a better life, and contribute to world peace stability and development"¹⁴(Xi, 2019).

The Interest of India in the Region

Virtually being the big power among Indian Ocean littorals, India is playing a major role in the region in order to secure her interests. Her navy is playing many activities like humanitarian, relief operations and counter piracy operations in the region.

According to the India's strategic perspectives her major concerns are to expand its naval presence and extending maritime diplomacy. India also has started developing bases in the places of her interest in the IOR.

According to the Donald Berlin, India's concerns in regard to the IOR is clearly describes in the following; "New Delhi regards the Indian Ocean as its back yard and deems that India function as, eventually, the predominant influence in this region.... In the expansive view of many Indian's, India's security perimeter should extend form the Strait of Malacca to the Strait of Hormuz and from

the coast of Africa to the western shores of Australia"¹⁵(Donald,2006).

With a background of many external and internal skirmishes, proxy wars and due to certain interest in security perspectives India has manifested her National Security Strategy as follows:¹⁶(Philip.2016)

- Defending the country's borders as defined by law and enshrined in the constitution.
- Protecting the lives and property of its citizens against war, terrorism, nuclear threat and militant activities.
- Protecting the country from instability and religious and other forms of radicalism and extremism emanating from neighboring states.
- Promoting further cooperation and understanding with neighboring countries and implementing mutually agreed confidence building measures.

However, with regards to the India's tilting towards East: 'Look East Policy' was initiated by then Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao in 1992 with an aim to connect economy to India's trading partners of either side of Strait of Malacca. In 2016 Prime Minister Narendra Modi named it as "Act East Policy" in order to invest in the region. In the meantime, India also promoting its culture, arts and religion as part of its broader interests and also involve in patrolling, military exercises, port calls, anti-piracy missions and humanitarian missions to show her worthiness in the region. Whilst maintaining a cordial atmosphere with her neighbors India too think that China as her one of traditional rivals thus stretching her arms in the IOR in order to secure the interests. India too thinks that strategy of China's String of Pearls is mainly to contain her from southern. As Donald Berlin, professor at the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies in Honolulu explained about the Indian interest in the IOR; "New Delhi regards the Indian Ocean as its back yard and deems that India functions as, eventually, the predominant influence in this region. In the expansive view of many Indians, India's security perimeter should

¹⁴ Xi Jinping, 2019. "Xi Jinping Attends the Opening Ceremony of the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (BRF) and Delivers a Keynote Speech,".

¹⁵ Donald Berlin 'India in the Indian Ocean' 2006.

¹⁶ Philip Campose, "India's National Security Strategy: Imperative of Integrating Defence Policy," 2016, 18.

extent from the strait of Malacca to the strait of Hormuz and from the coast of Africa to the Western shores of Australia”¹⁷(Herbert,2012).

This clearly indicates the intentions of India in the region. In the meantime, post war development scenario in Sri Lanka raised many concerns of India.

As Lee Cordner states “Sri Lanka’s signing of many bi-lateral agreements with China on strategic issues, docking of Chinese submarines in Colombo too fueled the tensions among Indians. Though China claims that it seeks only acquiring energy supplies, India sees this act of China in IOR is a part of strategic encirclement”¹⁸(Lee,2010).

With this background India aims to counter the rise of Chinese influence in the IOR. Therefore, India will continue to build its relationship with neighboring countries in order to perceive her security agendas. The recent visit of India’s premier Narendra Modi to most of the island nations of IOR is a clear evidence to show the world about India’s concerns on the region.

Indian strategic views have always been manipulated or arranged with its long-lasting history, culture and geopolitical aspirations. India is a country which holds a land frontier of 15000Km and 7500 Kms of coastline. Its unique location at the base of Asian continent dominates most of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean. Also, India is speedily becoming the economical giant in the region and aims to be the regional superpower by 2050. Hence, virtually being the largest country in the region India has all the rights to dominate the Indian Ocean Region.

By analyzing India’s grand strategy, it has three major components: Firstly, which encompasses the immediate neighborhood. India has sought primacy and veto over the actions of outside powers.

Secondly, what encompasses the so-called extended neighborhood stretching across Asia and the Indian Ocean littorals? India has sought to balance the influence of other powers and prevent

them from undercutting its interests. Thirdly, which includes the entire global stage India has tried to take its place as one of the great powers, a key player in international peace and security.

As elaborated by Dr Rahul Roy Chaudry, at the 5th Berlin Conference on Asian Security from 30th September to 01st October 2010 “as India’s strategic focus expands beyond its immediate South Asian neighborhood to encompass the Indian Ocean region, the Indian Navy is eminently suited to support the country’s foreign policy objectives in the area. Its priorities could include countering the expansion of Chinese naval influence in the region as well as combating piracy off the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Aden”¹⁹. By evaluating the growing dependence on the sea by India and also the security environment mainly the maritime security environment it is identical that following perspectives are included in the primary missions of the Indian navy;

- The security and stability of SLOCs in the Indian Ocean (especially the security of energy supplies from West Asia to India).
- The effective conduct of the surveillance of the extended maritime zones and to ensure the safety and security of India’s maritime assets.
- To promote maritime and naval cooperation in the Indian Ocean.
- To deter the use of nuclear weapons.

However, by analyzing the India’s interests in the region, she has very clearly expressed her desire of spreading her assets more towards East especially. The Malacca Strait which connects the Indian and South China has become the primary strategic interest. Also, India has become the more attractive partner of USA in the region, which has many interests in the region mainly to contain the rise of China. In order to counterbalance Chinese influence in the region, US started to support the development of Indian blue water naval capability thus making her much suited partner to counterbalance Chinese hegemony in the region.

¹⁷ Herbert-Burns, “Petroleum Geopolitics: A Framework of Analysis.” 2012, 281.

¹⁸ Lee Cordner, “Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean Region: Compelling and Convergent Agendas.” *Australian Journal of Maritime & Ocean Affairs* 2 (January 1, 2010): 16–27.

Interests of the United States of America in the IOR

After the end of cold war in late 80s and with the rise of China as economical giant competing USA and escalation of terrorism in the Middle East and the Asian region USA shifted her attention from Pacific and Atlantic Oceans to the Indian Ocean. The rapid incline of exporting energy sources from Middle East to Asia has raised the alarms in order to secure her interest in the region. According to the Rupert – Herbert Burns in his article on Naval Power in the Indian Ocean: Evolving Roles, Missions and Capabilities to the book “Indian Ocean Rising”, argues the presence of US navy in the region has following key reasons; ensure the freedom of navigation for crude exports, conducting military operations in the Persian Gulf during wars, Monitoring and deterring Iranian threat and undertaking maritime security operations in the region.

Rupert Herbert Burns (2012) further clarifies that spectrum of naval presence of USA mainly depend on due to complicating strategic and operational level factors as describe below ;(Herbert,2012) ²⁰

- The Naval expansion and deployment programs of India and China.
- The persistent challenge presented by Iranian activities.
- Long term base security in Bahrain.
- The potential for the deepening intersection between AL – Shabab in Somalia and AQ- AP in Yemen.
- The possibility for full scale civil war in Yeman challenges.
- The decline of naval forces deployment by extra regional and regional a result of government spending cuts.
- The continued weakness of regional maritime forces.

After the President Barack Obama’s Pivot to Asia initiative, this turns US assets to the Indo-Pacific

region increasing her economic, military and diplomatic efforts in the region with a aim of retaining supremacy in the region without making further loses in the Middle East. When it comes to the guarantee of resource supply through the region, US has given become sole guarantor with few allies like India, Japan and Australia.

The extra regional naval force like USA maintains a considerable presence in the region in order to secure her security perspectives as discussed above. To accomplish this, it is important to form an ally with the India is a need of the hour. Also, the presence of her sole competitor: China in the region in considerable magnitude too invited USA to increase her presence in the region.

However, being a maritime power USA will not abandon her security providing activities since USA is the main security provider to her major allies like Japan and Korea those mainly depending on mineral resources from Gulf and African region which voyage through IOR.

The message from the Secretary of Defense to the Department of Defense Indo-Pacific Strategy Report June 2019 has clearly expressed about the interest of USA in the region stating that “The Indo-Pacific is the Department of Defense’s priority theatre. The United State is a Pacific nation; we are linked to our Indo-Pacific neighbours through unbreakable bonds of shared history, culture, commerce, and values. We have an enduring commitment to uphold a free and open Indo-Pacific in which all nations, large and small are secure in their sovereignty and able to pursue economic growth consistent with accepted international rules, norms, and principles of fair competition” (Patrick,2019),

As announced by the President Donald Trump in 2017 during the APEC Summit in Vietnam, the principles for a free and open Indo-Pacific as mentioned below,

- Respect for sovereignty and independence of all nations.
- Peaceful resolution of disputes.

²⁰ Herbert-Burns, “Petroleum Geopolitics: A Framework of Analysis.”

- Free, fair and reciprocal trade based on open investment, transparent agreements, and connectivity.
- Adherence to international rules and norms, including those of freedom of navigation and over flight

As mentioned by then Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis, during the speech at Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2018 “The US offers strategic partnership, not strategic dependence. Alongside our allies and partners, America remains committed to maintaining the region’s security, its stability, and its economic prosperity” (James,2018).

By analysing the recent activities of USA in the region, she has taken whatever the feasible stances to contain the rise of China. The ongoing trade war with China, proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership Strategy with the neighbors of China and also the attempts to influence North Korea from Chinese ally to a neutral nation state are also recent developments in the geopolitical arena in the region. Strengthening military ties with leading nations like India, securing bases and strategic ports through agreements also forms parts of this strategy. Further IOR was placed under the US Indo-Pacific Command in order to counter China in the region.

In 2016, India and US signed a military logistic agreement, enabling both the parties to use of land, air and naval bases with a motive of countering China. Though USA is rushing to establish more deals like SOFA, China to increase her presence in the region in order to provide security to her workers involve in multibillion-dollar investment projects spread across the region under the Belt and Road Initiative. China has secured her interests by establishing a military base in Djibouti. The ports constructed by China in Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Pakistan for commercial aspects are also under the criticism.

Sri Lanka’s Role in the Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain

Being located in the strategic position in the most vital SLOC which connects, East – West voyage of trade and oil transportation has to play a key role in order to ease the tension among big rivalries in the region and also has been a key player in the

maritime cooperation and marine protection activities in the region.

After the three decades of bloody conflict Sri Lanka started to develop the country with the aids flowing from her foreign friends, mainly the China. Hambantota Harbor and Colombo South Terminal are the few to name among those projects. Sri Lanka enjoys many benefits out of Chinese investments in the country.

As Ajith Nivard Cabral the former Governor of the Central Bank stressed out not only the Sri Lanka, the countries those linked to this 21st century MSR are also expected benefits like;

- Strengthened economic cooperation.
- Increased security cooperation.
- Enhanced technical and scientific cooperation.
- Strengthened maritime economic activities

Geopolitically Sri Lanka does not cause any threat to any state or rather to a country in the region and Geo-economically also Sri Lanka is a dependent country on monetary agencies and rich states. Hence, her posing any kind of a threat is out of the subject. However, using her strategically important location in the IOR may arouse concerns of the interested parties. Also, the Sri Lanka is geopolitically located in the Indian spheres of influence, India consider it as a part of her security strategy. Hence Sri Lanka has to maintain cordial relationship with India by getting all the benefit to develop the country without jeopardizing the Indian security concerns.

However, with the revival of 21st century maritime silk route by Chinese President Xi Jinping and with China’s strategically westward movement through IOR involving Indian Ocean littorals like Sri Lanka has opened the eyes of its giant neighbour. Sri Lanka has become the most important country of IOR which carries the Dragon to promote China’s objectives.

However, a small littoral country like Sri Lanka should be aware when forming coalitions. Hence Sri Lanka needs to maintain cordial relationship with close neighbour India whilst maintaining the same rapport with China who is the main investor of the country in present day context.

With the adoption of Indo-Pacific Strategy by USA and its allies to contain the rise and westwards

movement of China, geostrategic location of Sri Lanka became vulnerable to many regional and extra regional players. Some military analysts have described the country as a potential permanent aircraft carrier. In order to counter China, USA is in the process of making alliances and signing agreements in the region. The latest developments in signing of Agreements like Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement (ACSA), Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and Millennium Challenge Cooperation (MCC) are the clear evidence to show their interests. Hence Sri Lanka needs to be more vigilant without been penalized by making alliances and should committed to be a nonaligned nation stay away from the big power politics only concerning to achieving of her desired goals to become a develop country. Balance manipulation of foreign policy is the key of the hour. That does not mean the giving of Hambanthota to China, Trincomalee to USA, and some others to Japan and India. Sri Lanka needs to maintain the strategy of "Friends of All, Enemy of None".

Conceptualization

By analysing the research hypothesis writer identified the 'Balancing Role' as the dependent variable and 'cooperative approach' as the independent variable. Further writer was able to identify the indicators such as; Geo-strategic location, Enemies of none- friends of all, infrastructure support, government policy and supporting industries. Further based on the answers submitted for the questioner above stated variables were measured. Then the evaluation of hypothesis was carried out. During the research those indicators identified under independent variable are considered for evaluation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In the overall summary of the research it can be recognized that the main problem statement of the research referred to as what are the main defense concerns of India on the Maritime silk route and its effect to country of SRI LANKA has been mainly addressed. It was mainly concluded that there are four key factors that are related to the Indian Ocean defense strategy and their impact on the Sri Lankan political stance.

Hence in the general summary, when taking a recap on the generic outlook of the topic it is noted

that sea lanes in the Indo-Pacific Region are considered among the most strategically important in the world. According to the Journal of the Indian Ocean Region, more than 80 percent of the world's seaborne trade in oil transits through the Indian Ocean choke points, with 40 percent passing through the Strait of Hormuz, 35 percent through the Strait of Malacca and 8 percent through the Bab el Mandeb Strait. In addition to being strategically located and being the main route for sea trade, the Indian Ocean Region is also crucial for energy security, a resource that is abundant in the region.

Therefore, all developing societies need access to the new material produced around the Indian Ocean littoral. And according to Kim Beazley, Australia's ambassador to the United States, "In the long-term the Indian Ocean is going to be massively more significant in global politics than it has ever been before." This illustrates the role the Indian Ocean currently plays and is set to play in global politics. India's Indian Ocean Strategy the IOR is becoming increasingly significant in the world arena. Particularly in India, many strategists are concerned about the imaginary Chinese 'string of pearls strategy'.

India imports about 70 percent of its oil through the Indian Ocean Region to its various ports. As a consequence, it has been enhancing its strategic influence through the use of soft power, by becoming a major foreign investor in regional mining, oil, gas, and infrastructure projects. In addition, India has aggressively expanded its naval presence specifically in the Indian Ocean littoral such as in the Seychelles, Madagascar and Mauritius.

In late 2009, it successfully appointed the Maldives as part of its southern naval command, thereby securing its security interest in the greater IOR as well as its immediate interests in the region. India's unique geographic location forms the cornerstone of India's aspiration to dominate the Indian Ocean or even to transform the Indian Ocean into India's Ocean. Many Indian strategists view the Indian Ocean as India's 'rightful domain' and contend that 'India will have to play a very large role in the region if the prospects for peace and cooperation are to grow'.

It is due to this unique geographic positioning and the aspiration to be the dominant power in the region that Indian politicians and strategists pay

great attention to the linkages between the Indian Ocean and India's national security. India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru argued that India's independence and survival depended on India's control of the Indian Ocean. India's Maritime Military Strategy (2007) highlighted that 'whatever happens in the IOR can affect our national security and is of interest to us'.

In addition to the soft power politics played by India, it has also heavily invested in military and mainly naval capabilities in and around the region. India often accuses China of engaging in a String of Pearls strategy to surround her. But where China has led, India has certainly been following. Judging by India's naval build-up, though, the truth could actually be quite the opposite. Further, Chinese analysts have also commented on the IOR strategy of India. The launch of India's first indigenous aircraft carrier Vikrant has been viewed by them as reflecting India's "ambition to dominate the Indo-Pacific Ocean" heralding a greater Indian presence in the Pacific. This illustrates the need for India to be the principal figure in Indo-Pacific Ocean politics, taking charge of the region's dynamics.

In the development of the remedial actions to create a successful synergy between the country of SRI LANKA and the stakeholders of Indo-Pacific should be through the following political and economic correlations.

1. Enter into mutual agreements of understanding and cohesion to strategically align Maritime policies to the upcoming future.
2. Develop regional summits to create a hybrid defense strategy.
3. Exchange forces-based assets and knowledge in between the countries.
4. Develop economic and defense planning to meet forecasted future defense stances.

Accordingly, through a successful development of strategically and politically significant defense mechanism and remediation's between the countries it will be easier for the government of Sri Lanka to buffer the potential threats and negative impacts of the defense based threats and isolation especially in the region and India.

In the meantime, with the China's innovative development and her interests in the region it will create window of opportunity to for the developing nations like Sri Lanka to obtain many Foreign Direct Investments. With the advantage of being a country located close proximity to international sea trade route should grasp this to make the country to be an ideal destination for Chinese investments to reallocate. With the China's regional focus on 13th five-year plan which is a part of One Belt One Road initiative and also Sri Lanka being a strategic partner in the Maritime Silk Route has all the avenues to be the Asian hub in the Indo-Pacific Ocean Region.

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Author Biography



Brigadier Chandana Ranaweera RWP RSP ndu is presently serving as the Director Veterans' Affairs at the Army Headquarters, Sri Lanka Army. He has obtained a master's degree in Security and Strategic Studies from KDU and master's degree in

National Security and War Studies from National Defence University, Pakistan