

Strategic Significance of Sri Lanka in India's Indian Ocean Approach

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Abstract

The Indian Ocean has long been a significant topic of historic-strategic debate in the annals of world history. The region, which is home to a variety of activities ranging from trade to transportation, and a tangled web of power struggles, is also gaining prominence as a major energy corridor for Asia's energy-hungry nations. For India, a close relationship with Sri Lanka is important for several reasons: first, the latter's proximity to the strategically important Andaman & Nicobar Islands, as well as the SLOCs that fall under India's EEZ; second, safeguarding Indian initiatives in the Western Indian Ocean; and, third, Beijing's antagonistic and hegemonic advancement in the region. On the other side, for Sri Lanka, which is mired in debt, cooperating with old friend India can help alleviate the load while also contributing to the country's development. Sri Lanka has lately realized that in Beijing's Indian Ocean strategic chessboard, it has been more of a 'pawn' than a 'pearl'. For Sri Lanka, India is an ideal partner due to its geographical proximity, historical linkages, and strategic location.

Keywords: Indian Ocean, India, Sri Lanka, China, and Maritime strategy.

1.0 Introduction

The Indian Ocean has emerged as the focal point for international concerns since the turn of the century, and it continues to be a site of collaboration, competition, and conflict. The world's third-largest body of water has been neglected for generations. Despite its geographic importance and large population, its position in global politics and geostrategic planning has been weakened by economic and political events elsewhere. Furthermore, during the majority of the preceding century, geopolitical processes were centered in various geographic settings, but have recently shifted to the Indian Ocean. Superpower

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rivalry conducted abroad and across seas has now relocated to the IOR as the geopolitical framework has moved beyond the aegis of the American empire, and Asian countries such as India and China are rising as powerful in the international environment. As a result, this body of water's geostrategic and economic significance is greater than it has ever been.

The Indian Ocean is without a doubt the most lively and sought-after nowadays. The world's rising reliance on nonrenewable energy resources from the Middle East and Africa, the ocean's abundant hydrocarbon resources, and the increasing reliance on the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) and chokepoints for global trade are all contributing to the Indian Ocean's importance. Its geographical features of several small chokepoints make it vulnerable to power domination, putting other countries at risk. In addition, these waters transport 90% of India's trade by volume and 90% of its energy imports (Kanodia, 2020). Thus, India emphasizes peace and security in the Indian Ocean for both economic growth and social stability. India's position allows it to play a key role in the developing geopolitical landscape of the IOR.

The expanding presence and involvement of far-off powers such as China, Japan, and the United States, as well as the advent of India, are among the factors that have propelled the Indian Ocean to the forefront of world attention. Their presence has altered the dynamics of the region and has influenced the policy of littoral states. The increased competitiveness creates possibilities for tiny littoral governments by giving them a greater voice, as well as problems by forcing small countries to rethink their approaches and policies to avoid becoming embroiled in power struggles.

Sri Lanka, a small littoral state in the Indian Ocean, is caught in the middle of this regional power struggle. The strategic importance of the island nation does not need to be explained. Its strategic location in the middle of the Indian Ocean's busiest shipping channels, connecting the East and the West, explains why it has been a site of strategic

contestation in the Indian Ocean's evolving geopolitical dynamics for millennia.

China and India regard Sri Lanka as a necessary element of their Indian Ocean maritime discourse. The two players have been attempting to garner influence through multipronged initiatives since the early 2000s. China utilizes its economic might to entice the island nation with much-needed aid and investments. India, for example, leverages historical ties and geographical proximity to exert influence in the country. To Sri Lanka, India was more of a 'big brother' and an 'intrusive neighbor' than a helping hand (Attanayake, 2021). However, as a result of China's spectacular entrance, India is rethinking its role in Sri Lanka and focusing more on improving the economic and development partnership.

In his book 'Asia's Cauldron', Kaplan predicts that the IOR will be the century's most intense point of confrontation. This puts pressure on Sri Lanka to comply with global demands or remain neutral. As a result, maintaining Sri Lanka's sovereignty and non-alignment foreign policy will be difficult. Since the end of the civil war in 2009, Sri Lanka has gone through its transformations. Its strategic horizons have been broadened to include the maritime environment. As a result, Sri Lanka has a revived interest in the Indian Ocean after decades of neglect. It now occupies a central position in the country's strategic planning and policymaking. As such, Sri Lanka is seen emphasizing its Indian Ocean identity as never before. In this context, the chapter, using a *content analysis methodology*, will examine the strategic relevance of Sri Lanka in the IOR, Indian interests in Sri Lanka that contribute to its multifaceted engagement in the IOR, and the importance of New Delhi-Sri Lanka-Male Trilateral for fostering maritime security and regional peace.

2.0 Geographic Significance of Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's geographic location as a littoral has historically been significant for global and regional power rivalry and struggle. Sri Lanka is situated in the heart of the Indian Ocean and the southernmost section of the Asian continent, on the world's busiest shipping channel and second-largest oil transit chokepoint. In terms of transportation, about

two-thirds of the world's oil and half of the world's container shipment pass via Sri Lanka's southern coast, making it crucial for the security of regional Sea lanes of communication (Wijesinha, 2016). Apart from that, Sri Lanka has several ports that, if fully developed, may become important commercial and strategic hubs in the Indian Ocean. Sri Lanka's geographic location and access to regional markets benefit its economic interests greatly, and because the region is a hotbed for great power projection, its location makes it a significant role in the IOR security and geopolitics.

Sri Lanka was governed by both the Portuguese and the Dutch before becoming a British colony. As these colonial powers established authority over enormous swaths of territory in Asia and Africa, there was a heated battle for control over the Indian Ocean, which included vital sea lanes for maritime trade and from which the empires drew their strength. The British Defense and External Affairs Agreement of 1948 and the Maritime Agreement with the Soviet Union of 1962 (Lee, 2013), both signed during the Bandaranaike administration, are two examples of major powers' interests in Sri Lanka's strategic location (Nissanka, 1984). Sri Lanka was chosen to establish the Voice of America transmitting station (suspected of being utilized for intelligence collection and electronic monitoring of the Indian Ocean) even during the tenures of J.R Jayewardene and Ranasinghe Premadasa. Sri Lanka's geostrategic importance increased manyfold during the Cold War. As a result, major powers have strived to influence the island nation, which grew in importance in the global geostrategic battle (Chauhan, 2020).

Sri Lanka has several strategically important ports along the world's busiest shipping corridors. According to the Lloyds List, Sri Lanka's Colombo Port is the world's 25th busiest container port (Fernando N. , 2018). Trincomalee's natural deep-water harbor is the world's sixth-largest natural harbor. During WWII, the port city of Trincomalee was the principal base for the Eastern Fleet and the Royal Navy of the United Kingdom (Nissanka, 1984). This port serves as a key transit route due to its strategic location in the Indian Ocean in terms of armed and unarmed ships. The Hambantota port, one of the controversial ports

built by China in the southern part of Sri Lanka, plays a strategic role in the Maritime Silk Road in the Indo-Pacific region, in addition to the Colombo and Trincomalee ports. Sri Lanka's ports are very close to the major SLOCs in the east and west IOR, compared to other ports in the region. Sri Lanka has become an attractive trading hub in terms of terminal productivity and the successful handling of mega-ships because of its unique physical setting in the IOR.

Small powers, such as Sri Lanka, can be influenced by superpowers, great powers, and regional powers in terms of strategic importance. Sri Lanka's strategic location in the IOR is a major bargaining chip for a small country. However, in the international system, each state must fend for itself. In the international arena, all states are equal, but their capabilities are not. Sri Lanka is the only country in the IOR with the strategic location to become a maritime hub, and it may evolve as a major sea-trade facilitator in the IOR. As Mahan observed: "*Whoever controls the Indian Ocean dominates Asia. In the 21st Century, the destiny of the world will be decided on its water*". In the IOR, Colombo has become a major epicenter of great power struggle and a vital strategic asset for all major powers hoping to dominate the IOR.

3.0 India's Strategic Interests in Sri Lanka

India's interests in Sri Lanka have evolved from geostrategic power balance to pragmatic security considerations since the end of the Cold War. Efforts to help Sri Lanka's peace and stability were overshadowed by India's strategy to escape the Cold War power struggle in the 1980s and early 1990s. However, in the post-Cold War period, India's economic and pragmatic security interests drove it to place a greater emphasis on Sri Lanka's peace and security to contain the conflict's externalities, which jeopardized India's security. As a result, India's top focus now is Sri Lanka's unity, peace, and stability. Maritime security in the Indian Ocean, particularly between India and Sri Lanka, has also become a major worry for Indian officials. Third, China and Pakistan's involvement in Sri Lanka is concerned with India's security concerns.

Many geo-strategic analysts have remarked that the start of the post-Cold War period weakened Sri Lanka's strategic prominence in regional affairs (Sahadevan, 2007). Because of the impact on India's stability, India's main strategic focus switched to Sri Lanka's instability. Sri Lankan ethnic violence harmed India-Sri Lanka relations. Instability in Sri Lanka also jeopardizes security in the Indian Ocean, which India has a vested interest in safeguarding. International shipping channels pass immediately near Sri Lanka's southern coast, making it an important location in the Indian Ocean's strategic environment.

India, in particular, has significant economic incentives to maintain a secure security environment in and around the Indian Ocean. Maritime trade accounts for approximately 89 percent of India's total transnational trade, and nearly all of the country's oil imports arrive by sea. Sri Lanka is particularly important in India's maritime trade: the port of Colombo receives more than 70 percent of Indian imports. India's reliance on the Indian Ocean as a maritime trading zone and transitway for oil trade has meant that securing the Indian Ocean is crucial to its continued engagement with the international marketplace in the post-Cold War period, particularly since India passed trade-oriented economic reforms in 1991.

Sri Lanka is also strategically located to project naval might into the Indian Ocean, making it a sought-after military staging point for large nations with interests in the region. Even though the post-Cold War balance of power conflict has subsided, India has strategic interests in Sri Lanka due to pragmatic security concerns.

4.0 India-Sri Lanka Maritime Cooperation in IOR

India's maritime engagements with Sri Lanka include training, ship visits, staff meetings, intelligence sharing, the supply of military assets such as ships and planes, hydrographic assistance, and exercises involving the Indian Navy and Coast Guard. Sri Lanka, along with India and the Maldives, participates in the trilateral maritime security cooperation exercise DOSTI (Naha, 2020). The Indian Navy undertakes an exclusive bilateral exercise with Sri Lanka named SLINEX since 2005. Sri Lanka is

also a member of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) and Exercise MILAN, a multilateral maritime exercise conducted by India. In addition, the Indian Navy trains officers from the Sri Lankan Navy regularly. Importantly, the Sri Lankan navy personnel make up the largest number of foreigners trained by the Indian Navy (Ministry of Defence, 2005). Sri Lanka has also received the most military help and exports from India (Q-Tech Synergy, 2015). The SLNS Sayura, Sri Lanka's largest ship, is an offshore patrol vessel (OPV) presented to the country by India in 2000. The Sri Lanka Navy has received two Barracuda-class OPVs from India (PTI, 2014).

Amid the presence of Chinese shadow all over the island, the return of the Rajapaksa brothers has caused considerable alarm in India. However, Colombo's close ties with Beijing only serve to drag the island nation deeper into debt. Sri Lanka owes China at least \$8 billion (Malhotra, 2022). Sri Lanka has been forced to surrender Hambantota, to the Chinese since 2017 owing to its inability to pay \$ 1.1 billion Chinese debt (Schultz, 2017). Sri Lankans are becoming increasingly resentful of China and its presence in the country, and this feeling could benefit India if it decides to resolve the bilateral irritants with Sri Lanka (Srinivasan, 2021). However, China's constant intervention makes it difficult for Sri Lanka to pursue development goals with other significant countries such as India, Japan, and the United States, which Beijing regards as competitors. This is seen in the cancellation of the Eastern Container Terminal (ECT), a trilateral initiative with India, and Japan, the suspension of the Japan-funded Light Rail Project, and the risk of abandoning the US-backed Millennium Challenge Corporation Project (MCC) (Fernando A. , 2020).

At a time when Sri Lanka's tourist-dependent economy has been severely harmed by the extended Covid crisis, Colombo is beset with embarrassingly large debt, which it has requested Beijing to restructure. China has refused to comply with the request. It could be one of the reasons why Sri Lanka's Rajapaksa brothers - President Gotabaya, Prime Minister Mahinda, and others – believe it's time to diversify their international interests and stop putting all their eggs in the '*Chinese*

basket' (Malhotra, 2022). In this context, India's decision to grant a \$912 million loan and a \$1.5 billion credit line for the purchase of food and gasoline from the country is seen as a big rebuke to China (Dikshit, 2022). The Sri Lankan government recently cleared the way for the collaborative development of the Trincomalee oil tank project in eastern Sri Lanka (Srinivasan, 2022). India has also outsmarted China in terms of vaccine diplomacy during the pandemic. Sri Lanka has flatly rejected the Sinopharm vaccine developed by its 'closest friend' to combat the COVID-19 outbreak. Instead, it preferred the AstraZeneca-Covishield vaccine that was gifted by India (ANI, 2021). As Sri Lanka's High Commissioner to India observed,

'The west terminal [at Colombo port] and the tank farm are two very important transactions (with India). Of course, given the nature of the power play in this region, Chinese presence can be looked at differently. In that context, I think our dialogue with India is what is important – to build trust and to understand each other...' (Dikshit, 2022).

India and Sri Lanka have an equally important strategic position, which forces them to work together to keep the Ocean rim peaceful and secure. Above all, India's strategic location in the Indian Ocean means it is directly accountable for regional security. President Gotabaya recognizes India's critical contribution to the IOR's peace and security. During his visit to New Delhi, Gotabaya declared that Colombo will never do anything to harm India. Sri Lankan Foreign Secretary Colombage also stated that the country's new foreign policy will be based on an 'Indian first approach'. (Sri Lanka will adopt 'India first policy': Foreign Secretary Jayanath Colombage, 2020). India has also designated its southern neighbor as a 'Priority One' defense partner (Moorthy, 2021). The Indian Air Force took part in the Sri Lankan Air Force's 70th-anniversary festivities. During his visit to Sri Lanka, National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval too reaffirmed India's commitment to complete cooperation in the fields of defense and security (Subramani, 2020). This marks a sense of renewed strategic pragmatism in the relationship. In November 2021, Chief of the Indian Navy Admiral Karambir Singh and Sri Lankan Vice Admiral Nishantha Ulugetenne met at the Goa Maritime Conclave. They addressed ways to improve mutual

collaboration in maritime security, mutual support, information sharing, and navy and coast guard training, among other things (Times of India, 2021).

With escalating Indo-Chinese competition in the Indian Ocean, their respective military ties with Sri Lanka are becoming increasingly essential in this great maritime game. Thus, Sri Lanka must conduct a balancing act between India and China, which it does admirably (Rajagopalan, 2021). In the words of Induja JS, *'This balanced nature provides the island immense possibilities to shift according to its national interests and gain.'* (JS, 2021). The narrow space that occurs as a result of this pivoting nature serves as a platform for India and China to project their might. Sri Lanka is trapped in the middle of a strategic conflict between India and China, from which the island benefits by playing the 'China Card'. Maintaining a balance in South Asia despite the India-China rivalry is achievable if Sri Lanka takes a more balanced approach based on the realization of a multilateral system (Basu, 2021). In the post-covid world, Sri Lanka can act as a stabilizer amongst powers, resulting in a less chaotic zone where powers cooperate to achieve good outcomes and mutual progress.

5.0 Combating Terrorism

Ethnic tensions in Sri Lanka have resulted in violent terrorist assaults. Thousands of people had died and many more had been injured as a result of decades-long civil warfare. With the death of LTTE supremo Prabhakaran in May 2009, the LTTE episode came to an end. Terrorism, on the other hand, has not yet been eradicated. Terrorism has been a constant threat to India and Sri Lanka. The deadly Easter Sunday assaults in Sri Lanka in 2019 leftover 250 people dead and exposed significant flaws in the country's security structure. Despite many warnings from Indian intelligence, the criminals were able to carry out various acts, inspired by ISIS. Due to a breakdown in the working relationship between Sri Lanka's former President, Sirisena, and then-Prime Minister, Wickremesinghe, as well as a sense of complacency in

Colombo following the end of the civil conflict in 2009, these warnings were missed.

Both countries have taken several collaborative steps to combat international terrorism. In November 2015, India announced a USD 50 million special line of credit to help Sri Lanka improve its counter-terrorism capabilities, especially the skills of its intelligence services. This is the first time India has granted a credit line to another country just to fund counter-terrorism efforts; previous lines of credit have been used to pay infrastructure projects and defense equipment purchases. ISIS has attracted Sri Lankan and Indian youth. More than a hundred Indians are thought to have traveled to Syria to join ISIS. The security of South India has been jeopardized as a result of the influx of Indian youngsters from the region. The credit line from India will mostly be utilized to give further counter-terrorism training to Sri Lankan police, as well as bomb disposal help.

In a recent piece published in *The Hindu*, Meera Srinivasan discussed Sri Lanka's pleas for military help from India. Sri Lanka has sought increased military training from India as well as security and defense cooperation in a variety of sectors, including regional security, drug smuggling, human trafficking, and security force training. India and Sri Lanka should continue their bilateral cooperation and dialogue on (i) delimitation of the continental shelf in the Bay of Bengal; (ii) adopting a common position on the statement of understanding concerning a specific method; and (iii) strengthening measures to prevent poaching in the two countries' internal waters, territorial seas, and Exclusive Economic Zones.

6.0 New Delhi-Colombo-Male Maritime Trilateral

The Maldives is strategically important for Indian security. Located in the middle of the Indian Ocean, it is situated about 450 miles westward of Sri Lanka and its, northernmost tip is nearly 300 miles away from the Southern coastline of India. To mitigate conventional and non-conventional maritime threats the littorals of the IOR must develop 'cooperative security' to explain the underlying logic of regional

cooperation, which according to C. Rajamohan, could be understood, as policies of governments, which see themselves as former adversaries or potential adversaries to shift from or avoid confrontationist policies (Rajamohan, 2004).

In 2020, after a gap of six years, the triangular maritime security dialogue started between New Delhi, Colombo, and the Maldives. Mr. Ajit Doval, the national security advisor of India, and the defense minister of Maldives went to Colombo to attend the meeting. In 2014, when the first trilateral maritime security was started with a lot of expectations then it was very responsive. After becoming the President of Sri Lanka Gotabaya Rajapaksa gave a proposal to resume the trilateral meeting, but the pandemic COVID-19 made an unprecedented obstacle in this regard. However, this meeting among the South Asian Indian Ocean littoral states created an opportunity towards ensuring collective security in IOR. This meeting focused on trilateral naval exercises and defense cooperation and preparing a legal framework and policies to stop sea piracy. On July 2021, a virtual trilateral meeting was conducted to discuss the best practices to counter common trans-national crimes, such as narcotics, sea piracy, etc. The top-ranked defense officers of India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives had given their opinion. As a part of the cooperation, the trilateral exercises are very caring about the safety of cargo ships also. As a part of trilateral maritime security, through the successful operation of Sagar Aaraksha-2, the Singaporean cargo ship MV X-Press Pearl was rescued from a fire in May 2021. After a very difficult joint operation by India Coast Guard and Sri Lankan Navy the fire was doused (The Print, 2021). Through the trilateral maritime cooperation, these three countries of IOR not only ensure the potential Interaction among India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives but also protects these states from external traditional and non-traditional security threat.

In November 2020, the 4th trilateral meeting of the National Security Advisors was held in Colombo for enhancing trilateral maritime security. In March 2021, these countries formed a trilateral secretariat for National Security Advisors (NDSA). The member countries agreed to enhance maritime domain awareness. They also discussed introducing an automatic identification system and long-range identification and tracking to identify suspicious vessels. As a part of the activities of the NSA, some

mechanisms were taken to stop illicit maritime activities in the Indian Ocean region. A coastal surveillance radar system was installed to ensure the surveillance of the security of Indian Ocean littoral states including Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and Lakshadweep. The last southern edge of Lakshadweep is geographically very close to the northern edge of the Maldives. Most of the islands of the Maldives are vacant. These islands can be occupied by China or any other extra-regional powers. The security of Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep are also threatened by China. So, the security of India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives can be ensured by umbrella diplomacy. As an important initiative for the maritime security of the Indian Ocean, India set up the CSRS in the Maldives, Mauritius, and Seychelles (Sultana, 2021).

7.0 Sri Lankan Economic Crisis and Indian Efforts

Since gaining its independence, Sri Lanka's economy has consistently experienced a trade deficit since its import expenses have constantly exceeded its export earnings. For years, a sizable portion of the foreign exchange earnings has been used to pay import expenses. The government's commitment to debt servicing has increased the strain on foreign reserves in recent years. On the other hand, foreign exchange inflow to the nation decreased, first as a result of the Easter Sunday attack's effects on the tourism sector in 2019 and then as a result of the Covid-19 that affected all of the island nation's main foreign exchange earning sectors, including '*export, remittances, and tourism*' (Sultana, 2022). Sri Lanka lost almost \$4 billion in annual tourism-related foreign currency inflows as a result of the pandemic.

The government's obstinate refusal to seek assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and careless economic policy adjustments, such as the tax cuts offered in late December 2019, led to a steady decline in the country's credit ratings. The reluctance to seek IMF's assistance was because the Rajapaksa administration promptly slashed tax rates and eliminated several taxes following its election victory. The IMF has strongly backed the proposed law that would have guaranteed the independence of the Central Bank, but the government decided against moving forward with it. Additionally, contrary to what the IMF advises, the

Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) has been managing the exchange rate. Therefore, requesting IMF support would require the Rajapaksa administration to implement economic reforms and revise the majority of its economic policies. On the other hand, China and India may lend Sri Lanka money without any restrictions. Of course, some stipulations and agreements must be met to receive this financial aid. However, these criteria diverge from those promoted by the IMF since Chinese and Indian interests are more geopolitical compared to the economic interests of the IMF.

Indian bilateral assistance can be broadly categorized into two groups: (i) assistance to meet immediate needs; and (ii) assistance to Sri Lanka in its efforts to revive the sectors that were negatively impacted by the global pandemic and the foreign reserves crisis. Sri Lanka and India agreed to a \$500 million credit facility in February for the importation of fuel (Jayasinghe, 2022). This was a component of the \$1.5 billion financial aid India had pledged to give Sri Lanka to help it through its current economic crisis (Chaudhury, 2021). On June 23, 2022, a group of senior Government of India representatives traveled to Colombo under the direction of Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra and included Secretary of the Department of Economic Affairs Ajay Seth, Chief Economic Advisor Dr. V. Anantha Nageswaran, and others. Their goals were to assess the situation on the ground in Sri Lanka and look into potential areas of cooperation for mutual benefit. It is important to note that India has been a key player in the IMF, as well as in regional and plurilateral organizations, in urging other nations to assist Sri Lanka in coping with the post-COVID normalization of economic activity, which has been well acknowledged and appreciated by the island nation.

The Indian government gave the Sri Lankan government a US\$ 1 billion concessional loan in March 2022 that will be available until March 2023 in addition to more than 3.5 billion dollars in foreign reserves assistance and a shipment of 40,000 MT of fuel delivered outside the LOC facility by Indian Oil Corporation. India has also provided a US\$ 400 million currency swap facility under the SAARC Currency Swap Framework 2019–22 and a US\$ 1 billion deferment of dues until March 2022, to be paid by the CBSL

to the Reserve Bank of India under the Asian Clearing Union, to support Sri Lanka's declining foreign reserves.

Additionally, in response to the urgent need for medications, a sizable shipment of pharmaceuticals and medical supplies was donated to numerous hospitals in Sri Lanka. Additionally, kerosene has been provided for Sri Lankan fishermen to use. Ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr in April 2022, representatives of the Indian High Commissions gave dry ration packs to widows and other impoverished families in Kalmunai, Ampara District. The Tamil Nadu government has also promised to provide \$16 million in humanitarian aid, including 40,000 MT of rice, 500 MT of milk powder, and medications for the people of Sri Lanka. The government of India has agreed to provide a US\$55 million-dollar credit line at the request of the government of Sri Lanka for the purchase of 65000 MT of urea fertilizer for the Yala season's planting. India and Sri Lanka have also entered into several cooperative agreements to strengthen the ailing energy sector. These agreements include one to jointly develop the Trincomalee oil tanks farm, one between NTPC Limited from India and the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) to develop a 100 MW Solar Power Plant at Sampur, and another for the establishment of two renewable energy projects in Northern Sri Lanka.

India's support for Sri Lanka is consistent with its 'neighborhood first' strategy and '*Security and Growth for All*' (SAGAR) agenda. These two guiding principles highlight India's priority of becoming a first respondent and collaborating with other nations to satisfy the needs of neighbors in the region. India has therefore taken a multifaceted approach to the Sri Lankan problem, not just to offer urgent aid but also to assist the nation in recovering the economy and maintaining stability. India has been successful in changing the thinking of the people of Sri Lanka thanks to their concerted efforts. While a sizable portion of Sri Lankans appreciates India's efforts, there is still a constituency in Sri Lanka that is dubious and skeptical of India's strategy for solving the Sri Lankan crisis.

8.0 Conclusion

The geopolitical map of the world has shifted faster than it did in the preceding century with the center of gravity shifted to the Indian Ocean.

The strategic maneuvering of the powers might be interpreted as a return of great power politics to the IOR. As a result, the Indian Ocean's prominence has been established in the new geopolitical map. The new alterations are having a significant influence on the littorals. Sri Lanka is no exception. Sri Lanka transformed the end of the conflict in 2009. It has expanded its strategic horizons to encompass the maritime environment. As a result, after decades of neglect, Sri Lanka has rekindled its interest in the Indian Ocean. It now plays a key role in strategic planning and policymaking in the country. It is difficult for a small country like Sri Lanka to emphasize its Indian Ocean character in the face of changing geopolitical imperatives. As a result, Sri Lanka is presented with a wide range of opportunities and problems. It is, however, placed at the core of a regional geopolitical power struggle. It urges Sri Lankan policymakers to develop ways to fully exploit the potential. Due to the ferocity of the power battle and the quick changes in the geopolitical landscape, Sri Lanka will need to be watchful and modify its policies regularly to survive in this big power war.

India's key goal will be to preserve a stable and peaceful Indian Ocean, with an emphasis on economic and military changes that will eliminate the frightening Chinese menace. New Delhi has expanded its military capabilities from a local presence to a regional presence spanning the Malacca Strait to the oceans of the African shores. India would seek to enhance its position in the IOR in the aftermath of the COVID-19 outbreak when the world order is projected to undergo a geostrategic upheaval. In this dynamic, India will look forward to expanding its engagement with Indian Ocean littorals, particularly Sri Lanka, to monitor China's rise. While Modi has not made a significant change in India's general policy toward Sri Lanka, the present government's outreach to Colombo appears to be much more focused, focused, and energetic. The implications of China's rise have been a recurring issue in much of Modi's foreign policy activity, and this is reflected in the way Sri Lanka is addressed. Modi also appears to be less bound by the traditional Tamil Nadu factor, suggesting that he may be able to reach out to all of Sri Lanka's many constituencies and achieve a favorable outcome for India.

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