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Indo-Sri Lanka Relations: Change and Continuity

in the Context of China's Increased Involvement in Sri Lanka

A thesis

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of China's continuous engagement with Sri Lanka from 2005 to 2019, Indo-Sri Lanka relations have exhibited constant fluctuations featuring drastic ups and downs. As a geo-strategically located small island state, Sri Lanka has juggled its relations with China and India, the two regional giants, in the face of mounting Sino-India strategic competition in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). This thesis poses twin questions related to the above phenomenon: How does China's engagement with Sri Lanka affect the Indo-Sri Lanka relations, and how does Sri Lanka conduct its relations with India, the immediate neighbour and the most powerful regional actor, in the wake of China-India parallel involvement in Sri Lanka? To address these questions, the study first analyses the impact of China's robust engagement with Sri Lanka on Indo-Sri Lanka relations. Secondly, it analyses Sri Lanka's foreign policy toward China and India in the backdrop of their parallel involvement in Sri Lanka. In doing so, the study focuses on how Sri Lanka, as a small state in the IOR, serves as a critical site for strategic competition between the two regional powers.

The findings reveal that Indo-Sri Lanka relations fluctuated considerably from 2005 to 2019 amidst the growing involvement of China in Sri Lanka as the civil war with the Tamil Tigers came to an end, and in the face of post-war reconstruction imperatives coupled with war crime allegations by the west. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Sri Lanka's participation in it meant an increased Chinese presence in Sri Lanka, leading India to react by making various policy choices in relation to ethnic conflict resolution and acting as a development partner of Sri Lanka. The choices India opted for had an adverse impact on Indo-Sri Lanka ties despite Sri Lanka's efforts to achieve a balanced foreign policy strategy. In essence, an extensive Chinese presence brought on heavy pressure from India on Sri Lanka, which, in turn, caused Indo-Sri Lanka relations to fluctuate. The thesis makes two major contributions: First, it provides a nuanced insight into the literature on foreign policy strategy by capturing the largely unobserved foreign policy behaviour dynamics of small states, apart from the contribution to strategic rivalry literature. Secondly, hedging is a double-edged sword requiring judicious balancing of relations when dealing with two competing rivals in order to extract benefits out of their competition, it shows the foreign policy community of Sri Lanka how hedging should be employed more effectively in ways that make its cooperation balanced and valuable for both China and India while reducing the cost of compromising political autonomy of either country.

The study concludes that among the dynamics of Indo-Sri Lanka relations from 2005-2019, cycles of change and continuity figures prominent. While the Mahinda Rajapaksa (MR) government favoured China over India for economic and political cooperation, the Maithreepala Sirisena (NUG) government shifted to preferring India over China in these areas. It is change and continuity in Indo-Sri Lanka relations which has been the predominant trend in the two states' bilateral relationships from 2005 to 2019. The Mahinda Rajapaksa (MR) regime (2005-2015), during its first tenure pursued a policy of active hedging between China and India whereas it deployed passive hedging between China and India during its second term. In contrast, the National Unity Government (NUG) (2015-2019) that followed the MR regime initially balanced India against China, but later it resorted to maintaining an equal distance from the two countries administration initially balanced India against China, but later it resorted to maintaining equidistance between the two.

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List of Acronyms

APRC:	All Party Representative Committee
BMICH:	Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall
BRI:	Belt and Road Initiative
CEPA:	Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement
CDP:	Chinese Diplomatic Person
CFA:	Ceasefire Agreement
CPEC:	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
DMK:	Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
ECT:	East Container Terminal
ETCA:	Economic and Technology Cooperation Agreement
EU:	European Union
FDI:	Foreign Direct Investment
FTA:	Free Trade Agreement
GoSL:	Government of Sri Lanka
HRC:	Human Rights Council
IDP:	Indian Diplomatic Personnel
IOR:	Indian Ocean Region
IP:	International Politics
IPKF:	Indian Peace Keeping Force
IPR:	Indo-Pacific Region

IR:	International Relations
ISFTA:	India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement
LAC:	Line of Actual Control
LSSP:	Lanka Sama Samaja Party
LTTE:	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
NAM:	Non-aligned Movement
NDA:	National Democratic Alliance
MP:	Media Personnel
MR:	Mahinda Rajapaksa
MS:	Maithripala Sirisena
MSR:	Maritime Silk Road
NSR:	New Silk Road
NUG:	National Unity Government
OBOR:	One Belt, One Road
ODA:	Official Development Assistance
PA:	Political Analyst
PO:	Political Observer
SA:	South Asia
SAARC:	South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation
SAR:	South Asian Region
SCO:	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
SLDP:	Sri Lankan Diplomatic Personnel

SLFP:	Sri Lanka Freedom Party
SRA:	Strategic Rivalry Approaches
UF:	United Front
UK:	United Kingdom
UN:	United Nations
UNHRC:	United Nations Human Rights Council
UNP:	United National Party
UPA:	United Progressive Alliance
USA:	United States of America
USSR:	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Introduction and Background of the Study

a. Introduction

In the post-independence era, Sri Lanka's foreign relations have undergone both change and continuity, reflecting the policies and ideology of the government in power and in response to domestic, regional, and international circumstances that have arisen at a given period. In this sense, the Non-aligned policy, which served as one of the key pillars of Sri Lanka's foreign policy from the state's inception in 1948, shaped much of its relations with other states, particularly during the Cold War and related rivalry in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Conditioned by its geographical location in the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka has opted to follow neutral and balanced foreign relations even in the face of the 'big brother' posture of India, its immediate neighbour. As a result, Sri Lanka has strived to attain greater and visible autonomy vis-à-vis India from the outset (Balaji, 2003).

However, at times, Sri Lanka's bilateral relations underwent fluctuations in tandem with the changes in the balance of forces in the region and beyond, particularly during the Cold War (Kodikara, 1982; Nissanka, 1984). Sri Lanka's relations with India have profoundly impacted the former's ties with other regional and extra-regional powers. Thus, the 'India factor' has always been prominent in the making of Sri Lanka's foreign policy in the post-independence era (Godage, 2015; Lakshman, 2003; Sivarajah, 1986).

Over the decades, India played a crucial role in terms of cooperative and conflictual ties (especially in paradigms related to conflict mitigation and other forms of cooperation) in Sri Lanka. In the early 1980s, for instance, India involved itself in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict due to politics in Tamil Nadu and strategic concerns vis-à-vis the pro-Western government in Colombo (Mailvaganan, 2012). In 1983, following the Sinhala-Tamil riots in the state, India started to act against the elected government of Sri Lanka. In 1987, India overtly intervened in Sri Lanka's internal affairs under the pretext of protecting Tamil interests in Sri Lanka, an intervention which led to the signing of the 1987 Indo-Lanka Accord which reshaped the state's administrative structure. Moreover, India deployed the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka without a mandate from the United Nations (UN) in 1987 (Scudieri, 1994).

Nevertheless, the negative consequences India experienced by intervening in Sri Lanka's internal affairs and dispatching its armed forces to ensure the implementation of the Accord compelled India to reverse its policy and attitude towards her neighbouring state. In the 1990s, in the context of the reorientation of India's South Asia policy (prompted by shifts in the strategic and security equation at the regional and global level), bilateral economic relations between India and Sri Lanka witnessed significant expansion, leading to the inking of the 1998 India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (ISFTA). In the meantime, India Was indifferent to the happenings related to Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict due to its own domestic constraints. Insofar as, India even refrained from officially participating in the political negotiations between the Sri Lankan government (SLG) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam (LTTE) mediated by Norway with the fullest support from the USA, EU, and Japan (Destradi, 2012a).

In brief, India remained a silent observer of the happenings in Sri Lanka by adhering to an undeclared 'hands-off' policy towards the latter's ethnic affairs (Orland, 2008). This policy continued up until 2005, when the Mahinda Rajapaksa-led United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA), which expressly committed itself to bringing forth a military solution to the national conflict, came to power in Sri Lanka (Kohona, 2017). Launching a fresh military campaign against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2006 resulted in the involvement of regional powers like China and Pakistan who supported the Sri Lankan government. In response, India too offered peacekeeping assistance to Sri Lanka, and thus made a sudden change in its stance toward Sri Lanka's ethnic problem.

In comparison, Sri Lanka's relations with extra-regional powers like China have witnessed relatively little fluctuation, and mostly remained cordial and cooperative since diplomatic ties were established in 1957. In the case of Sino-Sri Lanka relations, the scope of cooperation and engagement was limited to economic and technical assistance. The 1952 Rubber-Rice Pact, which was in effect until 1982, and the 1962 Economic and Technical Cooperation Pact, exemplify the kind of ties the two states had until 2005 (Kelegama, 2014a). However, Sino-Sri Lanka relations began to witness phenomenal growth from 2005 as China rendered much needed military and economic assistance to Sri Lanka to fight the final battle against the LTTE, which was ultimately defeated by Sri Lankan armed forces, thus concluding the 30-year civil war (Hein, 2017).

China's timely entry into the final battle, which Sri Lanka's traditional allies (India and the USA) had avoided for multiple reasons, marked the opening of a new chapter in the history of Sino-Sri Lanka bilateral ties. Replacing Japan as the single largest official development assistance (ODA) provider to Sri Lanka, China began to occupy a pre-eminent position in Sri Lanka's foreign relations, especially in the economic and diplomatic fields (Jeff, 2016). The convergence of China's thrust for economic expansion and strategic partners, and Sri Lanka's geo-strategic position in the Indian Ocean, one of the world's vital sea lanes (Ranasinghe, 2011), encouraged the former to gain a foothold in the latter. In revitalising China's economic and development cooperation with Sri Lanka, Beijing has signed several agreements with Colombo on a range of mega projects including the construction of Hambantota Port on the southern coast, the Colombo Port City Project, investment in coal-fired power stations, the development of special economic zones, and the construction of highways.

This cooperation aptly shows how China is enthusiastic to increase her involvement in Sri Lanka. Similarly, China has always extended its diplomatic support to Sri Lanka at the global fora (Asirwatham, 2018), particularly within the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) when the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) was criticised by Western powers for the way in which the final war against the LTTE was handled. As an extra-regional power in South Asia and the Indian Ocean, China's noteworthy return and major contributions during the final battle and in the postwar context evoked anxiety and suspicion in India (Bajpaee, 2016). These were mainly since, in the eyes of India, Sri Lanka appeared to be a traditional and trustworthy partner whose geographical location on a geo-strategically important sea lane and the Silk Road had always led regional and extra-regional powers along with world superpowers to engage with Sri Lanka since independence.

The recognition of the importance of Sri Lanka makes it an integral component of India's foreign, security, and strategic policy framework, making Sri Lanka a high-profile neighbour. For instance, following the defeat of the LTTE in 2009, India called for a political solution to end the ethnic conflict in the island state (Sahadevan, 2019, p.12). As a diplomatic move to give effect to the call, India voted with Western states against Sri Lanka in March 2012 at the UNHRC. China, in contrast, voted against the resolution which enabled China to make more inroads into Sri Lanka (Manoharan, 2013).

The heightened competition for influence in Sri Lanka became evident when Sri Lanka allowed Chinese submarines to dock in Colombo in 2014. India strongly protested this act. Against this backdrop, the unexpected victory of Maithripala Sirisena in the presidential election in January 2015 changed Sri Lanka's foreign policy. His first foreign visit after becoming the president was to India in February 2015. Prime Minister Modi then visited Sri Lanka in March 2015, more than 28 years after the last visit by an Indian prime minister (Sultana, 2017a, p. 229). This visit helped put the relations between the two neighbours back on track (Manoharan & Chakravarty, 2016).

In 2015, the newly elected National Unity Government (NUG) of Sri Lanka attempted to put on hold some of the Chinese-funded development projects because of alleged corruption and lack of transparency, which led to a heated argument between the Chinese diplomatic mission in Colombo and the GoSL. Adding to this situation, unlike its predecessor, in 2017 the new GoSL even declined a port call request by a Chinese submarine to dock at Colombo Port, allegedly due to pressure from India, which did not approve of the earlier docking of Chinese submarines in Sri Lanka (Business-Standard, 2017; The New Indian Express, 2017). However, following renegotiation of the terms and conditions of the agreements with Chinese authorities, the GoSL allowed the projects to continue.

As a move to balance the relationships, the NUG strove to restore Sri Lanka's relationship with India which had deteriorated during the previous regime due to its preferential treatment of China and failure to maintain diplomatic equilibrium between India and China. To keep India on par with China, the NUG opted to negotiate with India regarding the Trincomalee Harbour development projects in the east, the introduction of an emergency ambulance service, and an Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement (ETCA). The ETCA was severely opposed by the main opposition party in Sri Lanka who saw it as a trap to keep Sri Lanka under Indian hegemony (Sultana, 2017a, p. 230).

In addition, a clear shift in India's policy toward Sri Lanka could be seen during this period of time. India signalled its willingness to engage with Sri Lanka on a new policy platform that demonstrated noninterference in its internal matters including the ethnic conflict. Nevertheless, due to China's involvement in the development of Sri Lanka, India decided to relinquish its stance on Sri Lanka's ethnic issue since India's hostile stance had

antagonised the Sri Lankan leadership. This strategic move is deemed effective to an extent because India is now given due consideration when Sri Lanka enters any bilateral development ventures with China. This eventuality transpired when Sri Lanka granted the oil storage facilities in Trincomalee to India on a long-term lease in an attempt to rebalance the former's relations with the latter, which had lodged a protest at the granting of the Hambantota port facility to China on a 99-year lease (Herald, 2022; Vasudeva, 2018).

To sum up, the foreign policy behaviour of Sri Lanka in the post-independence period up until the post-civil war period (until 2009) was largely determined by the shift between the Indian and non-Indian forces dominant in South Asia, the IOR, and the global political tapestry. The ostensibly parallel engagement by China and India with states in South Asia and the IOR is the latest diplomatic development in which Sri Lanka, owing to its geo-strategic location in the Indian Ocean, is an important and inevitable participant state. Because of this, the two regional powers have striven to engage with the island state simultaneously using different strategies. Here, 'economic state crafting', meaning China's ability to convert its considerable economic resources and instruments (ex: aid, trade, investment, and financial power) into strategic influence, is prominent. China`s robust engagement, especially in the economic field through for example infrastructure development investment, underscores a new chapter in Sino-Sri Lanka bilateral ties which thus far had remained low profile. This, in turn, prompted India to improve its ties with Sri Lanka following many setbacks during the civil war. Further, India made forays to try offset China's growing influence which has made considerable inroads into Sri Lankan politics through its strategy of economic state crafting.

The Cold War and regional power rivalries for strategic dominance in the region have often eclipsed Sri Lanka's ability to conduct its foreign relations in line with its own preferences and principles. At the same time, the postwar period has apparently enabled Sri Lanka to exercise some leverage to keep regional powers at bay for its own advantage– something that is evident in the case of China and India which have become the focal point of Sri Lanka's foreign relations today. In short, China-India competitive engagement in Sri Lanka in the postwar period has moved Sri Lanka's foreign relations to a new phase where the island state seeks to maintain a delicate balance of relationship between the two major powers.

b. Problem Statement

Although the Sino-Indian strategic rivalry has a long history dating back to the 1940s, it was largely confined to India's western and eastern fronts where borders are shared with China. As Pant (2016) claims, the 1962 border clash between China and India was the first tangible instance of this rivalry. In comparison, however, China's involvement in Sri Lanka during the final battle against the LTTE and its aftermath is a new phenomenon. This was because Sri Lanka hardly had a high-profile stake in China's external relations due to the common perception that Sri Lanka falls under India's sphere of interest and influence– a perception shared by states within and beyond the region.

Similarly, in the eyes of India, Sri Lanka is a naturally friendly neighbour, a conception which constitutes an integral component of India's security and the IOR's stability (Panikkar, 1960). The void created, however, by the absence of Sri Lanka's traditional allies (mostly the West but including India as well) when Sri Lanka was in desperate need of military and economic assistance disillusioned Sri Lanka. This also changed the country's pro-Western outlook. This enabled China to intervene and prompted by China's advent into the war in Sri Lanka, India also provided the GoSL with nonlethal weapons including radar and important intelligence information about LTTE activities, relaxing its long-standing hands-off policy towards Sri Lanka's ethnic affairs. Nevertheless, the large-scale military and economic support from China which helped the GoSL to defeat the LTTE strengthened Sri Lanka's ability to defy the pressure from the West to halt its military offensive.

To further strengthen its ties with Sri Lanka, China forged development cooperation in addition to diplomatic support of which Sri Lanka was in dire need in the face of the West's allegations of human rights abuse during the war (Patel, 2021). This move resulted in the view that China is a true friend and reliable development partner for Sri Lanka, thereby entitling China to preferential treatment in Sri Lanka's development initiatives. Consequently, China has become the single largest Official Development Assistance (ODA) provider to Sri Lanka, replacing its traditional development partners and aid providers (Kelegama, 2014b; Samaranayake, 2011). India was one of the partners to be affected badly in terms of the leverage held over Sri Lanka, specifically in the political and security spheres (if not the economic sphere). Overall, this challenged India's

dominance in the IOR as well as its influence on Sri Lanka. Challenged by the increasing Chinese economic engagement in its own backyard, India attempted to countervail Chinese involvement in Sri Lanka, the crown pearl of the IOR.

As a manifestation of this attempt, an economic and development aid package was offered by India to Sri Lanka, largely for the reconstruction of the war-torn Northern Province. The aid package came with an attached condition urging Sri Lanka to limit Chinese influence in the state by turning to New Delhi for its needs and requirements. However, China's engagement in the island state appears undiminished even today. In fact, China is ostensibly moving to further its involvement with Sri Lanka, encompassing even security cooperation which enables Chinese naval ships and submarines to make port calls at Colombo harbour: acts against which India has protested vehemently.

The growing Chinese involvement in Sri Lanka, which India considers its strategic backyard, against the backdrop of the increasing Sino-Indian rivalry in the IOR poses a challenge to India's regional supremacy. Chinese involvement in Sri Lanka has triggered India to respond to the growing influence of China in Sri Lanka which was traditionally dominated by India, thereby resulting in parallel and competing involvement of the two countries. In this context, Sri Lanka, as a small state, faces the dilemma of orienting its foreign policy in alignment with the regional superpowers. This has stoked wider public discourse as to how the state deals with the emerging opportunities and challenges to take advantage of this Sino-Indian parallel involvement. Against this backdrop, the present study aims to analyse the complex phenomenon of China's involvement by focusing on its impact upon Indo-Sri Lanka bilateral ties from 2005 to 2019, especially in relation to political, economic, and security spheres.

Case Selection

Several reasons prompted the researcher to study the change and continuity of Indo-Sri Lanka relations in the context of China's increased presence in Sri Lanka. China's increased dominance and influence have impacted Sri Lanka's economic and geopolitical dynamics in various ways and shaped its relationship with India and the West in a significant manner after 2005, including its foreign policy strategies. Powerful countries

such as the UK, USA and other Western countries have long been associated with Sri Lanka in relation to political and economic affairs. Also, different governments governing Sri Lanka have maintained either a non-aligned or pro-western policy. There is enough evidence or scholarly work on Sri Lanka's relationship with the UK and the USA and its impact on Sri Lanka (Karunadasa 1992; Somasundaram 2003; Vaughn 2011).

Yet, in recent years, China's intervention, influence and expansion of presence in South Asia in general and Sri Lanka specifically remain a matter of serious concern, and it is drawing the attention of scholars of political science and International Relations (IR) (Samaranayake 2011; Wang and Ye 2019; Manoharan 2021; Jain 2022; Attanayake 2021). Further, both India and China provided extensive military and financial support to Sri Lanka during the civil war, which helped to end the war. After the war, these two countries started playing a strategic role in Sri Lanka and the Indian Ocean. The US's involvement was limited during this period as they worked with groups that condemned the Sri Lankan government in terms of war crimes and human rights violation allegations during the Rajapaksa regime, which eventually pushed the USA to maintain a low profile over Sri Lankan affairs. This facilitated increased involvement of China and India in Sri Lankan affairs.

Yet, few academic studies have explored this new development in Sri Lanka, i.e., from 2005 to 2019 in general and post-war contexts in particular. During the first tenure of Mahinda Rajapaksa as the President, he maintained a close relationship with India. During the second term, however, it took a different trajectory as Sri Lanka developed closer ties with China due to massive investments and financial support from China surpassing the former's traditional development partners like Japan, which accounted for more than 50% of the total foreign development aid it received (Attanayake, 2023; Kelegama, 2014a; Samaranayake, 2019). This pattern, however, changed during the NU government which maintained a reciprocal relationship with both India and China. Therefore, the researcher decided to study the change and continuation of these relationships and their dynamics during the period from 2005-2019, taking Sri Lanka's relationships with China and India as a case in point.

Thus, this study explores two regimes that governed Sri Lanka and their relationship with China and India. Nevertheless, China's strategic investment including

Hambantota harbour, Mattala airport, Colombo Port City project and infrastructure development have raised serious security concerns as China became Sri Lanka's closest ally during Mahinda Rajapaksa's ten-year regime. This pro-China government significantly altered the long-standing relationship Sri Lanka had maintained with India. As a result, India became a distant neighbour, especially during the second term of Rajapaksa's regime. In fact, China's influence and dominance changed the foreign policy behaviour of Sri Lanka, leading to an anti-Indian and anti-Western approach. To date, these remain unexplored developments in Sri Lankan foreign relations. Hence, it is necessary to study and document the changing dynamics of Indo-Sri Lanka relations in the context of increased Chinese dominance in Sri Lanka from 2005 to 2019.

c. Research Questions

In this context, this study poses two interrelated questions: How are Indo-Sri Lanka relations influenced as a result of China's and India's separate and competing bilateral engagement with Sri Lanka?

To study these research questions, the following specific research questions were formulated:

a) What are the salient features of Sri Lanka's bilateral ties with India and China after 2005?
b) How does China's economic engagement shape Sri Lanka's foreign policy towards India?
c) What are the dynamics of the Sino-Indian parallel involvement in Sri Lanka?
d) To what extent is the Sino-Indian competing involvement in Sri Lanka reflected the Sino-Indian strategic rivalry in the IOR?

To answer these research questions, the following research objectives and goals were formulated.

d. Goals and Objectives of the Study

The broader objective of this study is to examine the trends in Indo-Sri Lanka relations in the context of China's involvement in postwar Sri Lanka. In doing so, the study

focuses on Sri Lanka's foreign policy behaviour against the backdrop of Sino-Indian rivalry in the Indian Ocean. To achieve this objective, the study had the following specific goals:

a) To identify the nature and impacts of China's involvement in Sri Lanka after 2005 in relation to Indo-Sri Lanka ties by looking at the former's scale and scope of engagement in the economic and security spheres.
b) To examine the salient features of Sri Lanka's bilateral ties with China and India before, during, and after the civil war.
c) To analyse the dynamics of China and India's parallel economic engagement in postwar Sri Lanka in the context of the Sino-Indian rivalry in the IOR and its political and strategic implications for Sri Lanka.
d) To analyse the capabilities of Sri Lanka, as a small power sandwiched between the two Asian giants, to balance its relations with China and India as they compete for strategic pre-eminence.

To achieve the above objectives and goals, the following methodological approach was applied.

e. Methods and Methodology

The main aim of the current research was to explore the change and continuity of Indo-Sri Lanka relations in the period from 2005 to 2019. The central concern was how such change and continuity were affected in the context of China's increased involvement in Sri Lanka during this period. As it is concerned with the foreign policy behaviour of the respective governments of the day in India and Sri Lanka, the study adopted a qualitative research approach to better serve the purposes of the study in the following ways.

First, adopting a qualitative approach allowed the researcher to analyse the inter-state relations, as the present study was concerned primarily with how actors give meaning to their actions and behaviour. To this effect, by using a purposive sampling method, the study carried out semi-structured interviews with 36 participants composed of diplomats, political analysts and observers, and media personnel. The data gathered from the participants were transcribed, tabulated, and then codified. The recurrent codes were taken as themes and then analysed.

Secondly, in choosing to use thematic analysis and an interpretivist approach as its research strategies, the present study attempted to analyse the Indo-Sri Lanka relations in the context of China's involvement in Sri Lanka. In doing so, it focused on the ways by which Sri Lanka as a small state conducts its foreign policy and relations with both India and China against the backdrop of Sino-Indian strategic rivalry in the IOR. Thematic analysis in the qualitative research domain thus offered a more appropriate research strategy to study the issues of power relations, the subjective positions of actors, the choice of political agenda, and the rationality of actions in the discourses of two large states and a small, yet geo-strategically located, sovereign state— Sri Lanka. Lastly, this study analysed the actions and reactions of state actors (China, India, and Sri Lanka) in their interactions with each other. Hence, it was necessary and relevant to employ textual analysis and reviews to substantiate the arguments and conclusions via analysis. The methodology employed in this research is further elaborated in Chapter Two.

f. Significance and Scope of the Study

The significance of the study is threefold.

I. Timing of the study (its subject is an ongoing issue)
II. The approach and theoretical implications of the study
III. The policy relevance of the study

First, the proposed study on Sri Lanka's relations with India in the context of China's growing involvement in Sri Lanka was conducted at a critical juncture where Sri Lanka, as a small state, seemingly strove to maintain balanced relationships with two regional giants. Thus, the present study was able to inform its audience not only about the nature and salient features of the phenomenon under study, but also the key foreign policy challenges affecting Sri Lanka as a small state hedged between the power rivalry of regional superpowers. Secondly, as the proposed study sought to analyse the issue in question and apply established theoretical approaches such as strategic rivalry and hedging policy to draw inferences and conclusions, it provides further implications for the existing scholarship (normative and empirical) about small powers' foreign policy behaviour and foreign policy strategizing in the context of rivalry between powerful nations.

In addition, the study also contributes to the overall policy debate on issues such as the 'foreign policy dilemma' and offers fresh insights into these issues. Thirdly, the present study investigated Sri Lanka's relations with states that are prominent owing to their status as the regional powers with vested interests and great potentials. Hence, the analysis of Sri Lanka's foreign policy behaviour vis-à-vis the two regional powers uncovered policy issues which, in turn, help to set the stage for academic and policy debate on the future course of Sri Lanka's foreign policy behaviour.

Indo-Sri Lanka bilateral ties, which constituted the core of the present study, have a history of marked ups and downs throughout their existence. During the Cold War and the ethnic war in Sri Lanka, the relations between the two states became an adversarial one. In the decades following the end of the Cold War, however, there was a visible rapprochement, while the ethnic conflict continued to shape the ties between the two countries up until 2005. The change of regime in Sri Lanka in 2005 marked new changes in Sri Lanka's foreign relations in general, and with India and China in particular. It is during this period that Sri Lanka's foreign policy witnessed a remarkable shift of orientation from its traditionally Western-centred policy to an Asian-pivoted policy. In the new foreign policy orientation, Asian states such as China, India, Japan, and Pakistan occupied prominent positions.

This reconfiguration of Sri Lanka's foreign relations helped the country to strengthen its strategic position as a maritime state and prompted strategic competition between and among certain Asian powers. It triggered China and India, which were already in a fierce strategic competition in the IOR, to expand that competition to Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka's foreign policy shift after 2005, therefore, converged with the expansion of the Sino-Indian strategic competition in the IOR where the state occupies a prominent position in terms of its geo-strategic location, a factor which the two regional powers consider critical to the pursuit of their ambitions. However, to evaluate the impact of the reconfiguration of Sri Lanka's foreign policy and the rebalancing of its bilateral ties with India in the context of the increased Chinese involvement in the state, the study confined itself to the period spanning from 2005 to early 2019 (i.e., till the end of the NU government).

To be more precise, the time period chosen for the study becomes important considering the circumstances at two levels: regional and domestic. The domestic circumstances particularly refer to Sri Lanka's foreign policy under two different governments during the period covered. The regional circumstances involve the escalation of rivalry between China and India in the IOR, which some studies dubbed as contemporary or maritime Sino-Indian rivalry (Mukherjee, 2020; Paul, 2018). Thus, the rationale behind the selection of the period lies in the coincidence of events at these two levels: regional and domestic. The Mahinda Rajapaksa (MR) regime which came to power in 2005 and remained in power until 2015 pursued foreign policy in line with its domestic preferences in the face of brewing power rivalry between China and India in the IOR. This pushed the regime to strengthen its relations with certain Asian countries including India, China, Iran and Pakistan, while it was indifferent to establishing similar relations with the west.

During MR's second tenure (2010-2015) Sino-Sri Lanka relations reached an unprecedented height in the entire history of their bilateral relations while Sri Lanka's relations with India weakened. The National Unity Government (NUG), which was in power from 2015 to 2019, initiated re-orienting moves by bringing India to the centre stage, and this evoked a fierce reaction from China which ultimately made NUG's re-orienting move unsuccessful. All these occurred against the backdrop of the expanding and escalating Sino-Indian rivalry in the IOR, which thus far has primarily remained confined to the terrestrial northern theatre rather than extended to the maritime domain (See section 6.8 for a detailed discussion).

Also, the study excludes the US, which remains the world's the most powerful state and that it is arguably no longer a global hegemon. has longstanding vested interested in the Indo -Pacific, from the study as a factor for the following reasons. China's active participation in Sri Lankan government's war against the LTTE in 2008 coincided with the evolving geopolitical dynamics of the Indian Ocean as a region of strategic significance due to China's rise. It was India, the predominant security manager of the region, and not any other power including the US, which swiftly responded to China's expanding influence in its (India's) own sphere of influence. This is due to the reason that the US counts India as a potential partner in balancing the rising power of China in the South Asia and the Indian Ocean. For instance, as the construct of the 'Indo-Pacific' suggests, there are two

scenarios of rivalries at play involving the US, China and India: in the Western Pacific between the US and China and in the Indian Ocean between India and China (Das, 2019).

Hence, in the eyes of the US, India is the most powerful regional actor (at least in Southern Asia) acting in a manner that is broadly supportive of US interests which include managing and containing China's expansionist ambitions. This is to say that India helps and cooperates with the US to maintain her pre-eminence in the region-Indo-Pacific while it (US) acknowledges India's primacy in Southern Asia in which India is the key security actor. This is indeed a continuation of the acknowledgement of India's primacy in South Asia by the US during the Cold War, although India purported to side with the USSR during this period. However, in post-Cold War era, Washington views its strategic partnership with India at rooted in values and shared democratic values and commitment to the rule-based international order. For example, India enthusiastically joined the Quad which is dubbed as a grouping of democracies. Further, The US National Security Strategy (NSS) of 2017 states "a geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order is taking place in the Indo-Pacific region" (The White House, 2017:45).

It is due to these reasons that the present study sought to confine its focus only to the China-India dyadic relationships as it exhibits different and distinct elements from the US-China dyadic relationships. Word count limitations also necessitated a manageable scope and focus.

g. Challenges of the Study

The study began in November 2017 and finished in 2023 despite the challenges posed by the Covid- 19 pandemic, travel restrictions, economic crisis, and people's protests that occurred in Sri Lanka during the period of study. Thus, there were numerous challenges when conducting the study. Due to the Covid- 19 pandemic, there were restrictions and challenges in collecting primary data. Further, though foreign diplomatic missions were the key source of information for the study, they were closed, and outsider visits were restricted for several months. For nearly two years, the pandemic continued with greater or lesser restrictions.

The researcher had to face all these restrictions, which significantly delayed the data collection process. Due to the nature of the study, data collection was a daunting task.

There was not much pre-existing information on this theme, and, since the study involved both China and India, some officials at these two embassies were hesitant to talk openly about this topic. Some officials constantly declined to take part in the interviews. In some cases, the embassy officials depended on their state's willingness to provide information, and some did not even provide the necessary documents requested to facilitate the study. Moreover, increasing rivalry between China and India also negatively affected the data collection process. The author prepared a list of respondents based on their expertise and experience on the topic and reached out to them personally as well as via official channels but not all these efforts were successful. The Sri Lankan Ministry of Foreign Affairs was another important source of information for the study, but the relevant officials of the Ministry did not render their support as anticipated as they cancelled multiple appointments and declined to provide documents relevant to the study.

Nevertheless, the researcher collected sufficient data using institutional contacts and students working in international agencies (onsite archival data and data from other information resource centres). Further, as Sri Lanka is facing an unprecedented economic crisis, there have been persistent power cuts (load-shedding) across the state exceeding six hours per day. In addition, due to health issues, the researcher was unable to work at night because long hours of working at night had led to gastritis which, in turn, affected productivity in the latter months of finalising the study. Yet, despite all these challenges, the researcher was able to complete the thesis.

h. Outline of the Study

The thesis is divided into six chapters apart from the introduction and conclusion. The introductory section deals with the trends of Indo-Sri Lanka relations from 2005 to early 2019 in the context of China and India's parallel involvement in Sri Lanka.

Chapter one consists of two sections, namely, the literature review and the theoretical framework of the study. The literature review is divided into two broader themes – Indo-Sri Lanka relations and China-Sri Lanka relations. The theoretical framework of the study is based on two different but related theories – strategic rivalry theory and hedging policy of alliance theory.

Chapter two elaborates on the research methodology adopted by the researcher. It lays the philosophical foundation for the methodology and methods of the present study, presenting the overall strategies applied at different stages of the study, which includes data collection, coding of the collected raw data, and data analysis. Since this study is qualitative in nature, interpretative and thematic analyses were used to perform the data analysis. The chapter further discusses the appropriateness of the use of semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection and discusses issues relating to the study's reliability and validity, data triangulation, generalisability, research clearance, ethical considerations, anonymity, and confidentiality in relation to the methodology applied.

Chapter three comprises two main sections: Section One deals with the origin and the evolution of Sri Lanka general foreign policy and foreign affairs since the time of independence in 1948 up until 2004 prior to the beginning of China's and India's parallel involvement in Sri Lanka. In doing so, the section pays particular attention to underlying guiding principles and orientation shaping Sri Lanka's foreign policy and relations during the period in question. The Second Section concerns Sri Lanka's foreign policy toward China and India from independence to 2004. In particular, the section delves into watershed events in the course of the development of Sri Lanka's bilateral ties with both states-China and India-during the period.

Chapter four is dedicated to Sri Lanka's foreign relations with India from 2005 to 2019. In particular, the chapter presents an analysis of the Indo-Sri Lanka relations during and after the Eelam War IV by focusing on the impact of the shift in India's Sri Lanka policy on Indo-Sri Lanka relations. In doing so, the chapter sheds light onto the Indo-Sri Lanka relations under two different regimes, i.e., Mahinda Rajapaksa (MR) and Maithripala Sirisena (MS).

Chapter five provides an analysis of the development of the China-Sri Lanka ties from 2005 to 2019 and its impact on Indo-Sri Lanka relations. In doing so, the chapter examines China-Sri Lanka relations in two different settings, i.e., time and regime period– first, during the final civil war under the MR regime; and second, in the postwar period under MR and MS regimes. Finally, the chapter analyses the impact of China's economic engagement with Sri Lanka on Indo-Sri Lanka relations.

Chapter six offers an analytical account of the China-India parallel involvement in Sri Lanka in the final stages of the civil war and in the postwar context alike. In doing so, the chapter particularly draws attention to Sri Lanka's hedging between China and India and its impact on Indo-Sri Lanka relations. Furthermore, the chapter examines the rivalry effects of India and China's parallel engagement and the effects of Sri Lanka's hedging on Indo-Sri Lanka relations.

The last section of the thesis presents the conclusions of the study. It also states theoretical implications derived from the conclusions and provides directions for future studies.

CHAPTER ONE

Literature Review

1.1. Introduction

Chapter One consists of two sections. The first section provides a comprehensive review of literature under three different topics: (a) the Sino-Indian rivalry; (b) China-Sri Lanka ties; and (c) India-Sri Lanka ties. The review facilitated the identification of new and unprecedented developments and tendencies in India-Sri Lanka and China-Sri Lanka bilateral relationships from 2005 to 2019. The second section critically reviews the theory of strategic rivalry in the context of interstate relations to estimate its applicability and relevance as the theoretical framework of the study.

1.2. Sino-Indian Rivalry, China-Sri Lanka and Indo-Sri Lanka Ties: A Review

1.2.1. Sino-India Rivalry

Comparing the ability of China and India to influence the states in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region, Ranjan (2013) and Hazarika and Mishra (2016) opine that India is gradually losing the grip and influence it used to have in the IOR to China. This is because China has managed to change the age-old India-centric political calculus in South Asia (Hazarika & Mishra, 2016; Ranjan, 2013). To support their claim, they highlight that Sri Lanka's potential as a maritime state in the Indo-Pacific Region (IPR) makes it an important ally for China to bring the ambitious and aggressive expansion of its strategic presence through economic influence and engagement to fruition. Both studies (Hazarika & Mishra, 2016; Ranjan, 2013) examine the Sino-Indian rivalry through the soft power prism, which excludes a scrutiny of the hard power element of the rivalry in the Sri Lankan context. Randol (2008) does the same by examining the role of leaders' sentiments about each other in structuring the Sino-Indian rivalry (Randol, 2008). The findings of Randol's (2008) study inform a critical issue: that the hostile perception held by China and India about each other determines their policy towards each other. This finding supports the

relevance of embarking on an academic analysis of the Sino-Indian rivalry in the Sri Lankan context.

Kugiel (2012) analyses the recent shift in India's regional strategy and the impact this has had on its self-image and the image of India among its South Asian neighbours. He argues that China's charm offensive in the South Asian region has compelled India to focus increasingly on building a positive image of itself in the region, ensuring stable and cooperative interstate ties between India and its neighbours (Kugiel, 2012). Although Kugiel's study brings individual states in the region, including Sri Lanka, into the analysis, it overlooks the broader picture of the rivalry in terms of economic incentives and developmental engagement. In contrast, Naik and Ahamad (2017) examine the strategy of an alliance made by India and China in terms of their making forays to enhance their influence and thus contain each other's influence in the region.

Scott (2013), on the other hand, illustrates the growing Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean as the greatest power challenge India faces. Other scholars suggest that in strategic terms, China is keen on the Indian Ocean due to geoeconomics (energy security) and geopolitical (restraining India) ambitions (Prakash, 2011; Yoshihara, 2010). Another scholar characterizes the impact of China in the IOR as it (China) shakes up the maritime balance in the Indian Ocean. As a result, the United States and India are forging a closer alliance to engage in an act of soft balancing to counter the Chinese dominance as part of their (US and India) wider hedging strategy (Pant, 2012). Scott (2013), however, claims that India is doing enough to ensure a significant degree of presence in the Indian Ocean, and its role is growing. Suitable strategies are being applied to meet India's maritime aspirations and security concerns. Research such as above helps to show the ongoing competition between China and India in Asia in general.

Pant (2016) contends that a problematic history coupled with the systemic uncertainties caused by India and China's parallel rise is prompting the two Asian giants into a trajectory that they might find harder to follow in the years to come. Pant (2016) gives a systematic account of India's changing attitude towards China against the backdrop of China's recent rise. This study captures the simmering Sino-Indian strategic rivalry in security and military terms, which provides a platform to look at the dynamics of their parallel involvement in Sri Lanka.

Panda (2013) analyses the China-India dyadic relationship using the specific conceptual prism of the 'enduring rivalry school' and opens new theoretical avenues into the study of Sino-Indian rivalry. He points out that from the late 1940s, India and China have engaged in an enduring rivalry, and that it is not just a rivalry providing constant backdrop to an interaction between two hostile and antagonistic state actors; rather the rivalry is a dynamic phenomenon which is evolving (Panda, 2013). Similarly, Egreteau (2012) argues that the enduring interstate rivalries (EIR) are dyadic relationships based on a series of interlinked and historicised contentions (not necessarily militarised) whose succession in time makes the rivalry emerge, continue, and die in the end (Egreteau, 2012).

Rehman (2009) states that Sino-Indian rivalry focuses on the unequal aspects of the interdependence between India and China in the fields of economics, trade, and commerce to military and institutionalisation. He illustrates how, and to what extent, both India and China seek to contain each other's position and influence in a regional organisation setting within and beyond their respective regions. Conversely, Panda (2014), in examining the competitive and cooperative aspects of the China-India rivalry by looking at the dynamics of maritime complexity between the two states, argues that China's economic and maritime build-up continues to emerge as a challenge for India both in the South China Sea and in the IOR.

Analysing the nature and characteristics of the Sino-Indian strategic rivalry and focusing on Beijing's shifting strategic perception of India, Pardesi (2010) argues that Asia's two rising powers perceive one another suspiciously as they find themselves locked in a relationship characterised by an intense rivalry (Pardesi, 2010). He points out that there are several dimensions to the complex Sino-Indian rivalry and contends that Western analysts' view of this rivalry is one-sided (i.e., the view that only India perceives China as a major threat and not vice versa) has witnessed a marked change. Accordingly, China too now perceives India as a major Asian power and a fellow competitor and a potential challenger of Chinese dominance in Asia.

Fang (2014) portrays the view that there exists a perceptual gap between China and India about the threat they pose to each other as India's perception of the threat posed by China is stronger than China's perception of the threat posed by India. He considers the competitive aspect of India-China relations to be active at the regional level, and states that

"their competition in Asia is not always China-specific or India-specific" (Fang, 2014, p. 1). He further contends that, in this context, the two states' strategic niche is shaped by the extension of each other's influence (Fang, 2014). Sahoo (2013), in investigating China's economic relations with South Asian states, explains how and where China has surpassed India in conducting trade and investments by taking over places where India previously enjoyed a position of advantage. He argues that China has already captured the Bangladesh and Pakistan markets and is steadily improving its trade and investments in Sri Lanka and Nepal through various incentives and tactics, thus putting India in a defensive position (Sahoo, 2013). Further, Zhang (2015) examines the impact of China's new foreign policy under Xi Jinping in terms of its regional and global implications. He claims that China's new development-driven foreign policy has compelled the state to engage with Asian states in the economic and security spheres, which has contributed little to enhancing its political relationship with those same states. In short, China has limited soft power capability, although it has expanded the definition of national interest to include economic development as one of its core elements (Zhang, 2015).

Analysing this war for supremacy in a different angle, Brewster (2015a) adopts the security dilemma approach (SDA) to examine the nature and dynamics of the strategic competition between India and China in the maritime context of the Indian Ocean. Based on his analysis of the geo-strategic issues and challenges China faces in the Indian Ocean vis-à-vis India, he concludes that China is in a more disadvantaged position than India in managing the geo-strategic vulnerability arising from their quest for economic and political influence across the IOR. Panda (2013) has also looked at how the hostile bilateral discourse between China and India results in multilateral complexities in the regional and subregional levels— Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and South Asia.

He shows how China has slowly emerged as an effective South Asian power against the backdrop of China-India maritime rivalry and claims that China aims to undercut India's primacy in the region by maximising linkages with states like Sri Lanka through the SAARC. In fact, China has managed to make significant inroads with South Asian states using the SAARC as one of the yardsticks, and consequently, eroding India's historical influence in these states to a certain extent. He concludes that the emerging complexities between the two states on boundaries, energy resources, and the focus on building influence in different segments of Asia are sufficient indicators which make China

view India as a competitor, if not a serious rival (Panda, 2013). However, resource politics and identity politics make them engage in power politics in Asia at large.

Junxian and Yan (2016) probe the formation of China's strategy of the New Silk Road (NSR), usually known as One Belt, One Road (OBOR), the international response to it, and its benefits and risks. They argue that China's NSR strategy aims to realise China's ambition to integrate further into the global economy and to recover its past glory, i.e., the Chinese Dream3. In that strategy, littoral states like Sri Lanka occupy a key position in the NSR initiative, and India is highly suspicious and concerned about it since China tries to expand its sphere of interest in India's backyard (Junxian & Yan, 2016). Similarly, Krupakar (2017) posits how China is engaged in expanding its influence and dominance in the Indo-Pacific region by showing the apparent shift in China's strategic thinking characterised by the transition from a continental to maritime power (Krupakar, 2017).

In such a move, China's oceanic-centric thinking, a strategy aimed at building port facilities for multiple purposes in the Indian Ocean Region and undermining India's influence in the region, propels China's grand strategy for becoming a global maritime power. This strategy would ensure that China becomes the key security provider in the Indian Ocean and beyond. Dahlman (2011) shows how India's and China's rise is influencing the global economic system and geopolitical environment (Dahlman, 2011, p. 227). Accordingly, global power dynamics will be complicated further, as India and China may fight over water, energy resources, and economics, and on ideological lines.

A cursory look at the extant literature reviewed so far on the China-India rivalry would suggest that bilateral ties between China and India are interwoven in multiple ways and facets which shape the nature and dynamics of their rivalry depending on time and space. The simultaneous rise of the two states economically, for example, has pushed both states to compete for strategic pre-eminence while also bringing them into closer cooperation, at least in the field of trade and commerce. Therefore, it is discernible that power politics are at play between the two regional giants who both seek greater dominance and a more dynamic role to perpetuate their power rivalry in different forms in different locations.

1.2.2. China-Sri Lanka Ties

Samaranayake (2011), in explaining the scope and the driving force of China-Sri Lanka relations in the postwar context, argues that Sri Lanka's policy of engaging China is dictated more by its strategic and economic compulsions than by political and regional interests. Intriguingly, she approaches the issue from the small state security dilemma perspective related to a hedging policy in interstate relations. Kelegama (2014), on the other hand, analyses Sino-Sri Lanka economic ties in the context of the Sino-Indian strategic rivalry in South Asia and the IOR and reveals that there exists a triangular relationship between Sri Lanka, China, and India. The political nature of China's ODA to Sri Lanka means that the latter views China as a better development partner than India. This claim by Kelegama (2014) raises an important question: what is India's reaction to this, as it is the largest trading partner of Sri Lanka with a vested interest in the island state? This question needs to be answered to paint a holistic and complex picture of the impact of the triangular relationship.

Enumerating the economic facets of Sino-Sri Lanka relations, specifically in the postwar period, Sultana (2016) argues that Sri Lanka's increased dependence on China for financial assistance in the form of infrastructure development loan and credit facilities has made the former distance itself from its conventional development partners such as India and the West. Sri Lanka's economic dependence on China antagonises India, as China uses it to increase its influence, disregarding India's geo-strategic concerns. Sultana (2016) vividly depicts how China manipulates its financial assistance to influence Sri Lanka's decisions and stance under two different postwar regimes with different attitudes towards China's economic engagement in the state.

De Alwis (2010) provides a detailed account of the role China played in Sri Lanka's final battle against the LTTE and in the postwar context, the strategic challenges Sri Lanka faces vis-à-vis India, other regional powers, and the West. She discusses the critical military and diplomatic support China extended to Sri Lanka in defeating the LTTE militarily, how pro-LTTE groups perceived that support, and how the West sought to punish Sri Lanka for the way it conducted the war against the LTTE. Also, in demonstrating the critical role of China in defending Sri Lanka at international fora, she illuminates the vulnerable position of Sri Lanka vis-à-vis global and regional powers.

However, her account of the China factor in postwar Sri Lanka lacks balanced coverage as the analysis throws more weight on factors and aspects not related to China.

Wang and Ye (2019), analyse Sino-Sri Lanka bilateral ties in the context of China's newly launched BRI, and postulate that both China and Sri Lanka have nurtured friendly and cooperative relations on certain mutually beneficial grounds from the outset. While Sri Lanka has sought to strengthen its ties with China diplomatically and economically to maintain its national independence and development, China has appreciated the former as an important political and diplomatic partner in the Third World. Yet, the study is limited to a parochial scope of how the two states have come together as partners under the BRI where Sri Lanka occupies a crucial place due to its geo-strategic and geo economic position. Thus, the study pays scant attention to the bilateral ties between China and Sri Lanka before 2014.

It is evident that most of the extant studies on Sino-Sri Lanka relations, therefore, are concerned mainly with the postwar scenario of Sino-Sri Lankan bilateral relations. They tend to focus on economic and trade ties related to China's massive investment in development projects in Sri Lanka. With limitations in scope and particularism in perspective, the extant studies do not provide a holistic analysis of a phenomenon which is multifaceted and multidimensional.

1.2.3. Indo-Sri Lanka Ties

The extant scholarly work on India-Sri Lanka relations tends to capture a wide spectrum of issues and determinants involved in shaping the trends and dynamics of bilateral ties. Among these, the ethnic problem is the single most important one, as it continuously strained political relations.

Manoharan and Chakravarty (2016) examine the trends in Indo-Sri Lanka ties by focusing on key factors and issues affecting bilateral ties, particularly in the postwar era. They identify the ethnic question, the fishermen issue, and the China factor as the three most important issues affecting their relationships. The China factor has been more challenging for India to deal with, as the GoSL often opted to play the 'China card' against India whenever the latter pushed the former for ethnic reconciliation in the island. However, the change of regime in 2015 helped to put bilateral ties back on track, as it

ostensibly pursued a balancing policy between India and China. This study, therefore, confines its analysis of the trends in Indo-Sri Lanka bilateral ties to specific issues and thus lacks a broader picture.

Destradi (2012b), explains why India's mediation as a regional power in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict failed during the late 1980s, and demonstrates that Indo-Sri Lanka political ties had always been shaped by the ethnic conflict and its resolution. India as a powerful neighbour has had a profound impact on the trajectory of the conflict, as it tended to assume the role of regional conflict manager due to its proximity and power it wields. However, certain domestic and historical factors negatively affected India's ability to successfully accomplish the role, causing chaos in the bilateral relations between India and Sri Lanka, thereby compelling the former to maintain a low-profile role during the conflict. At the same time, during the final stage of the civil war in Sri Lanka, India once again sought to play a limited role in Sri Lanka in the wake of China's increased involvement in the war. This study, however, confines Indo-Sri Lanka relations to the civil war context, thereby failing to capture a broader picture of the bilateral ties in terms of multifaceted dimensions and factors.

In contrast, Aliff (2015) analyses the factors affecting Indo-Sri Lanka bilateral ties in the postwar period. He underscores Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict as the single most dominant factor in shaping the ties between the two states, while paying little attention to economic, trade, and other ties. Sridharan (2016), however, identifies various determinants shaping India's relations with and policy toward Sri Lanka among which New Delhi's sensitivity to certain issues such as national unity and national security figure as the prime determinants vis-à-vis pressure from the state government of Tamil Nadu.

At the same time, existing research shows that trade and commerce related ties witnessed a relatively steady growth during the civil war. Trigunayath and Siddart (2013) focus on the trade and development aspect of Indo-Sri Lanka bilateral relations after the civil war, particularly the free trade agreement (FTA). They argue that India-Sri Lanka relations are commonly characterised by a 'love-hate' relationship which has produced steady relations in trade and commerce, and the signing of India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (ISFTA) in 2000 is a case in point. Complementing this fact, Beriha (2016) claims that Indo-Sri Lanka economic ties, which remained largely neglected until the early

1990s, were strengthened with the signing of specific bilateral arrangements such as the comprehensive economic partnership agreement (CEPA) and ISFTA. However, there is an asymmetry in trade and commercial ties, as the arrangement involves a large economy (India) and a small economy (Sri Lanka).

Apart from conflict and economy related issues, the extant research has also examined the role of foreign policy as well. Elaborating on the changes in India's foreign policy approach of towards Sri Lanka specifically in the postwar period, Sultana (2017) contends that with the new Neighbourhood First policy, India managed to regain its lost leverage in Sri Lanka to a certain extent irrespective of China's engagement with Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, in her attempt to explain Indo-Sri Lanka relations, she focuses only on one single regime in India as well as Sri Lanka, which makes the study both more specific and narrower in terms of the scope and complexity of the bilateral ties.

Accordingly, it is evident that more than the ethnic issue, it is the China factor that tends to have a serious impact on the bilateral ties between India and Sri Lanka (mostly in political and diplomatic fields) in the postwar period.

As for the economic ties between India and Sri Lanka, the signing of the FTA in 1998 between the two states strengthened the bilateral ties in trade and commerce. Yet, the existing trade imbalance between the two states causes worries for Sri Lanka, as it puts the state in a disadvantaged position vis-à-vis India. Against this backdrop, the entry of China into the Sri Lankan market, with a wide variety of goods and commodities, will trigger trade competition between the two giants, which is expected to have a positive and favourable effect on Sri Lanka's economy at large.

The literature on China-Sri Lanka relations posits that Sri Lanka is making a pivot to China which India, who is a traditional development partner, views as disadvantageous to India's concerns (Sultana, 2016). On the other hand, the literature on Indo-Sri Lanka ties shows that the bilateral ties are typically of the metaphoric 'love-hate' relationship type (Trigunayath & Siddart, 2013). Therefore, the existing studies, though vast in number, pay scant attention to the emerging trends in Indio-Sri Lanka ties, particularly in the context of increased Chinese involvement in Sri Lanka after 2005. The present study, therefore, departs from the past studies on the subject in terms of the scope and the approach adopted.

Further, the literature on Sino-Indian rivalry suggests that the rivalry wields broader impacts on both states' stature in the Indo-Pacific Region. Ranjan (2013) and Hazarika and Mishra (2016), for instance, look at Sino-Indian rivalry through the soft power prism. Yet, the literature has not sufficiently examined the economic incentives and developmental engagement behind the rivalry, and thus fails to holistically capture the impacts and implications of the Sino-Indian rivalry in the economic and development fields. Also, these studies have not analysed in depth the wider impact of the rivalry on the small states in the region, as they approach the issue mostly from the small state security dilemma perspective (Hazarika & Mishra, 2016; Ranjan, 2013).

To synthesise, India-Sri Lanka bilateral ties are generally marked by ups and downs although Indo-Sri Lanka ties are the epicentre of Sri Lanka's foreign policy. While socio-cultural ties and trade and commerce related ties with India remained steady, political and security ties underwent unprecedented strain, mainly due to the ethnic conflict. Further, it can be concluded that the extant studies on Indo-Sri Lanka relations have been conducted in isolation, thus excluding the Sino-Indian strategic engagement.

1.3. Theoretical Framework

Any serious academic study must adopt relevant theory in the field in order to effectively pursue its goals and objectives. Therefore, after a careful review of the body of theoretical literature on interstate relations, the theory of strategic rivalry was deemed most promising, as it concerns primarily the dyadic and interactive relationship between states. The following section elaborates on the key aspects and components of the concept of strategic rivalry in order to devise the conceptual framework of the study. This will enable exploration and examination of the complexity of the relationship between China and India in general and in the Sri Lankan context in particular. Similarly, as the present study's prime focus is on India-Sri Lanka bilateral ties in the context of the China-India parallel involvement in post-2005 Sri Lanka, the concept of hedging is also invoked to complement the overall conceptual framework of the study.

Further, as the present study seeks to examine how China's involvement in post-2005 Sri Lanka affects the conventional India-Sri Lanka bilateral relations, the study warrants a theoretical approach which facilitates the conceptual analysis of interstate

relationships at two levels: firstly, the relationship between India and China regarding their competition for strategic interests and influence in the IOR; and secondly, as a small power, Sri Lanka's foreign policy behaviour towards China and India in the context of increasing Chinese involvement in Sri Lanka from 2005 to 2019.

Therefore, the study builds on a two-fold theoretical base – strategic and then hedging policy— to facilitate the conceptual analysis of the concepts of strategic rivalry and hedging. The sections below will provide a synthesised account of how the concept of strategic rivalry in the context of international politics is conceptually defined; what are its constitutive elements.

1.4. A Critical Review of the Theory of Strategic Rivalry

As far as the field of international politics (IP) is concerned, the relationship between individual states constitutes the core of the field. As the international system is anarchic, states, whether big or small, are free to conduct their foreign relations in ways that realise their policy objectives. However, the foreign policy objectives of states do not always converge. Rather, they often diverge to the extent that states tend to see their targets as incompatible with those of another, leading to conflict, including armed strife among themselves. Depending on states' profiles, their foreign policy objectives can vary from mere physical survival to regional supremacy to global dominance. Generally, states set their foreign policy goals in line with their capacity and capabilities on which the ultimate realisation of the goals rely. When two states with equal ability and skills seek to achieve goals that are incompatible, that incompatibility gradually leads to competition. If competition persists, it can develop into conflict and enduring rivalry. When a pair of states' views shifts from a mutual feeling of the competitor constitutes an enemy, and shifts from challenges to threat, then this phenomenon denotes the existence of interstate rivalry, a distinct type of relationship between pairs of states.

In what follows next is a step-orderly description of interstate rivalry dissecting the predominant conceptualisations of the concept.

1.3.1. Enduring Rivalry and Strategic Rivalry

In general, "dyadic rivalries are broadly categorised into two, i.e., enduring rivalries and strategic rivalries. Enduring rivalry refers primarily to a sustained and prolonged militarised interstate conflict or dispute involving intermittent armed skirmishes or clashes. Therefore, the concept of enduring rivalries addresses the problem of repeated conflict between the same set of states" (Goertz & Diehi, 1993, p. 149), whereas strategic rivalry denotes the perceptual and psychological dimension of the enduring rivalries. By definition, therefore, strategic rivalry involves a function of decision-maker's perceptions (Pardesi, 2017b). What is more, strategic rivalry is a process that originates when national decision-makers of at least one state in a dyad attribute the image of an adversary to the other as a result of such shocks (Rasler & Thompson, 2001). The concept of enduring rivalries, however, pays attention to the issue of recurrent conflict, specifically how the outcomes of crises and wars affect the probability of future conflict among the same set of states (Goertz & Diehl, 1993). As such, enduring rivalry can be understood as militarised conflict (managed rivalry) to differing degrees (high or low). On the other hand, strategic rivalries can be understood as a highly competitive relationship exhibiting actual or potential military threat (Colaresi et al., 2008)

In the field of International Relations (IR) and international politics (IP), however, the theoretical literature on interstate rivalries considers the interstate relationship among pairs of states as rivalry when the leaders of those states view each other as intimidating. For this reason, the interaction between these states typically involves "serious and repeated conflicts and disputes with each other" (Cashman, 2013, p. 252). However, unlike enduring rivalries whose characteristic feature is repeated militarised conflicts, "strategic rivalry can form even in the absence of any militarised dispute" (Pardesi, 2017b, p. 6) or any tangible conflict. Hence, strategic rivalry stands conceptually distinct from enduring rivalry, although the former is a subset of protracted conflict. In this sense, as a separate category of interstate dyadic relationship, strategic rivalries constitute intense interstate conflicts characterising three-fold features or elements, namely, competition, militarised dispute, enemy identification (Thompson, 2001). More importantly, in strategic rivalries, both sides (two states) in the dyad engage in some level of identification and recognition to distinguish them from ordinary conflicts. This is to claim that rivalries do not occur without reason. Three essential criteria create a dyadic relationship between states which

can then be called a genuine strategic rivalry. They are: (a) states in the dyad view each other as competitors (i.e., 'capable of playing in the same league'); (b) there are actual or potential threats that risk becoming militarised; and (c) the states regard each other as enemies (Thompson 2001, p. 560). As Hensel (1996) explains:

> rivals are…actors whose relations are characterised by disagreement or competition over some stakes that are viewed as important, where each perceives that the other poses a significant security threat, and where this competition and threat perception last for substantial periods. (Hensel., 1996, p. 5)

Enduring rivalries denote a dyadic relationship which is characterised by repeated disputes. This suggests that enduring rivalries are dyadic relationships grounded on a series of interconnected and historically rooted disputes whose succession in time makes the rivalry rise, live, and die (Egreteau, 2012). However, Thompson (2001) presents a slightly different notion of enduring rivalry. Accordingly, enduring rivalry requires a long history of conflict and a projection of foreseeable disputes and contradictory strategic visions (Thompson, 2001). The essential difference between enduring rivalry and strategic rivalry, therefore, is that while the former refers to the existence of long-drawn fully or partially militarised interstate conflict, strategic rivalry suggests the hostile or adversarial attitude of such recurrent and militarised conflicts, meaning the latter focuses chiefly on the intensity of such a hostile dyadic power relationship (Egreteau, 2012).

1.4.2. Types of Rivalries

Apart from the attempt to distinguish between enduring rivalry and strategic rivalry, which primarily considers the duration, intensity, and future intention of the parties in interstate dyadic relations, strategic rivalries can further be categorised into four types in terms of initiation and development: spatial, positional, perceptual and ideological. Cashman (2013, pp.255-56) and Rasler and Thompson (2000) point to a positional (principal) rivalry as revolving around competition for ideologies, military power, or political dominance, and spatial (principal) rivalries as revolving around competition for territories, commercial routes, and human or natural resources. An expanded account

covering all the major types of strategic rivalries is provided in the sub-section 1.3.5 -part (e).

Later research also (Dreyer, 2014) regards time as an important factor as rivals aim to disturb the other's future policies and ambitions. Therefore, rivalries translate from the past (because a rivalry needs a legacy of disputes or bitter accessible memories of a defeat) to the future by aiming to contest the rival's present and future position. State resources will then be utilised to stall the rival by opposing, hurting, or even crushing it. The rivalry thus becomes 'enduring' (Thompson, 1995, 2001). As Diehl contends (1998),"the rivalry approach moves the rivalry out of the research design background and places it in the theoretical explanation" (as cited by Egreteau, 2012, p. 4). Accordingly, rivalry is not an ordinary interstate relationship, it is a specific and dynamic interstate relationship.

Enriching and broadening the more recent rivalry literature, are discussions about symmetrical and asymmetrical type of rivalries. The following discussion provides an account of the key aspects and dynamics of symmetrical and asymmetrical rivalries although asymmetrical rivalries are discussed in detail compared to symmetrical rivalries as the latter category has elsewhere been discussed in the preceding sections under strategic rivalries (See section 1.3.2 -1.3.3).

There exist studies which point to the existence and importance of identifying disparities in interstate dyadic relationships to systematically understand the dynamics of such dyadic interaction. As discussed in the preceding sections, most of the earlier studies attempt to demonstrate situations that qualify as strategic competition, and so, they often focused on the rough parity of capability (Pardesi, 2017a), thereby neglecting asymmetries. This is because states compete. However, the mainstream literature's obsession with the symmetries of capability has recently begun to efface in the leading scholarship in the field, which compelled scholars to pay due attention to the asymmetric aspects. This is because the recent studies dealing with interstate rivalries have recognised the fact that major powers tend to form rivalries with other major powers although the power relationship between them may not be roughly equal. This fact has become clearer when one examines the process of the Sino-Indian rivalry which started as a roughly symmetric one, but evolved overtime into an asymmetric one (Ganguly et al., 2023). Adding to this, the impact and implications of certain ongoing interstate rivalries in the contemporary world, ex:

China-Vietnam (Womack, 2011), inflict on the general understanding of the dynamics of the strategic rivalry.

Symmetries and asymmetries in interstate rivalries can be identified in terms of multiple aspects of the dyadic interaction ranging from stages or phases of the rivalry process from rivalry initiation to rivalry escalation. As far as rivalry initiation is concerned, asymmetries are not directly germane to rivalry origination, though they may play an important role in how the rivalry plays out. Similarly, about the development and escalation of the rivalry, the asymmetries play a different role with differential scale. Mutual perception of history and statehood develop overtime into mutual suspicion among the protagonists pitting one against the other in their struggle for prevailing over military, economic and strategic domination accompanied by leadership (Pardesi, 2017a). Asymmetries in military capabilities and economic relationships may be called structural asymmetry (Pardesi, 2021), which, when coupled with perceptual asymmetry, transform the dyadic relationship into a more complex one in which the states' mutual actions lead to the escalation of the rivalry. This fact is clearly presented by Pu (2022) who elaborates on the multiple dimensions of the China-India relationship featuring competition along the trajectories of security, power, and status.

To summarise, like symmetrical rivalries which have dominated the analysis of interstate strategic rivalries for the most part, asymmetrical rivalries are also quite common in international politics. However, scholarly attention to asymmetric aspects of rivalries was partly influenced by certain contemporary rivalries among Asian powers including the China-India relationship which is a classic case for such scholarly endeavours.

1.4.3 Characteristics and Elements of Rivalries

A rivalry begins when there is competition and the perception of threat from an enemy is present. Rivalries, therefore, represent a distinctive class of conflict in the sense that rivals deal with each other in an absence of conflicts that occur in more neutral settings (Mitton, 2016). Another important aspect of rivalry is the reciprocity of actions where both parties must consider each other as rivals and behave accordingly. Identifying a party as a rival will lead to specific (emotional) reactions which can develop into path dependencies. Competitors attempt to overcome each other and there is a tendency for them to act in a non-rational manner which might "alter preference structures such that inflicting harm on

an enemy is desired above material gain or security" (Mitton, 2016, p. 74). However, strategic rivalry emerges when such distinct classes of interstate conflicts exhibit certain features such as mutual assigning of competitor status, enemy threat perception, and militarised threat where rivals are ranked in hierarchical order depending on the level of intensity of a rivalry (Thompson 1993; (Pardesi 2017b). Pardesi (2017b) is of the view that the above three features must be present for a dyadic relationship to be identified as strategic rivalry. Further, rivalries can emerge as part of a power-transition process whereby rising and declining powers will see each other as opponents.

Based on the above thread and IR field experts' accounts, three key elements of strategic rivalries can be identified.

I. Critical element

This denotes that for an interstate dyadic relationship to be labelled as strategic rivalry, it requires the creation of crises in the form of quarrels, disputes, or conflicts. Without serious quarrels in the form of verbal diplomatic criticism to full-fledged wars, a dyadic relationship cannot be thought of as a strategic rivalry. Crises do not always take the form of militarised conflicts, but the use or threat of use of force and an associated high amount of hostility are also conflicts. A specific crisis, however, and not necessarily the first one, will act "as a kind of baptism of the rivalry, crystallizing the underlying processes" (Vasquez, 1993, p. 82).

II. Temporal element

This refers to the historical aspect of bilateral conflicts through which both actors learn and react, which turns the rivalry into a 'live' one. The patterns of a rivalry change from crisis to crisis as past conflicts serve as referents in deciding the future course of action. With time, the perceptions, ambitions, and behaviours of actors evolve, along with the rivalry between them (Stinnett & Diehl, 2001). Here, the particular influence of past conflicts and policies is important because policymakers tend to learn from the positives and negatives (Leng, 1993). Strategic rivalry is, therefore, not just a series of independent disputes, but a coherent succession of interrelated ones which then reach a point where two states can have a history of conflicts. If, however, these conflicts have no connection, then there is no means to create a rivalry between them.

III. Psychological element

The subjective aspect is the most crucial of all the elements. As Maoz and Mor (2002) state, a rivalry is a long-term conflictual relationship between two states. Each rival officially or indirectly promotes a negative image of the other through various public discourses, state propaganda, and an array of popular replaying of collective memory, the manipulation and change of information, or history (re)writings. The issues associated with mistrust, fear, and hatred pertaining to the rival move the relationship beyond merely interstate competition. Some scholars in this regard have even pointed out how policymaking elites act as key producers of hostility and conflicts (Schroeder & Thompson, 1999; Thompson, 1995). Similarly, identification and recognition of rivals– competitor, challenger, or disruptor one or both states are most important for strategic rivalries to exist because this process (identification and recognition of rivals) involves the states in dyad to differentiate themselves from usual competitions.

In brief, strategic rivalries are a distinct class of interstate conflicts which occur between a pair of states competing over issues such as power, security and status that remain hard to solve, carrying distinctive goal incompatibilities. That is, both sides that are in a dyadic interaction require, or have the desire to achieve, what the other side denies and has not created a means to achieve compromise. Rivals are thought of as adversaries, and adversaries think that they have enough reasons to mistrust the other state.

1.4.4. Rivalry versus Competition

Scholars of and thinkers in the field of IR have long focused on the concepts of peace, war, and power, among others. However, the concept of rivalry began gaining considerable currency only in the 1980s. Before such attention was brought about, scholars and policy planners analysed the term rivalry in a factual manner or as an element in the background to what is considered as a dyadic relationship (Egreteau, 2012). Rivalry, therefore, was not studied as a dynamic process which was required to be studied on its own. When two states or actors are engaged over contradictory strategic goals over an extended period, they are called rivals, and their interactions are called a rivalry. Such behaviour was long thought of as an entity akin to a hostile and competitive interstate

relationship, a concept which can be used to describe and analyse war games and power struggles between emerging or declining empires or kingdoms (Kennedy, 1987).

Those who believe in and identify a threat coming from an identified or perceived enemy will begin a rivalry-type relationship and then engage in a competition with the enemy. Research has pointed out that a rivalry cannot be looked upon as a synonym for competition, because competition usually lacks both hostility and the dimensions of a threat (Goertz et al., 2005; Goertz & Regan, 1997). Rivalries can be defined as "the repeated hostile interaction of the same states over a sustained period" (Goertz & Diehl, 1993, p. 30). This definition vaguely connotes that an armed conflict is associated with rivalry to an extent. Bennett's (1996) understanding of the term rivalry points to armed conflict as a major defining feature. Such conflict happens when two or more states engage in a specified number of militarised interstate disputes (MIDs) over a defined period.

While Goertz and Diehl (1993) have stated that interstate rivalry is defined by the number of armed conflicts between two or more states, they have drawn a strong conclusion which points out that states are likely to engage in armed conflicts if they share a rivalry. Goertz and Diehl (1995a) contend that if states are involved in a rivalry, that increases the probability of their engaging in an armed conflict (Goertz & Diehl, 1995a). Further, theorists on the subject of rivalry believe that pairs (or more) of states engaging in repeated conflicts of varying nature bring forth a disproportionate scale of the world's armed conflicts (Diehl, 1985; Diehl & Goertz, 2001; Gochman & Maoz, 1984).

Therefore, the word rivalry alludes to a situation where state A and state B are hostile towards each other and are engaged in fierce competition. This situation can quickly escalate from competition to a long- drawn, serious rivalry.

Moreover, Goertz and Diehl (1993) argue that the notion of rivalry is also used to mean pretensions and claims along with efforts by two or more actors to outdo and overcome one another (Goertz & Diehl, 1993). The fundamental distinction between competitors and noncompetitors is that rivals are engaged in some form of competition or hostile behaviour. Vasquez (1993) further iterates that a rivalry between political entities is characterised by a long-drawn, mutually contingent hostile interaction. What differentiates a rivalry from a healthy conflict is that issues are looked upon or defined not

in terms of what is known as value satisfaction, but in terms of the gain or loss of a stake and what that would mean to one's opponent.

Vasquez (1993) also discusses the role played by competition in a rivalrous relationship and iterates that competition is the fundamental precept that drives rivalry and produces hostility. As conflict recurs, the opponents tend to be more interested in hurting or denying their competitor than achieving their own value satisfaction. Thus, hatred becomes deep-rooted and evolves beyond levels generally associated with a healthy conflict (Vasquez, 1996). Another important part of rivalry is the reciprocal relationship between two opponents where they both must consider each other as rivals. Rivals must call each other as such and act accordingly (Thompson, 1995). Thompson (1999) defines rivalries in terms of decision-maker perceptions (Thompson 1999). This is by subscribing to Jervis' (2017) research on perceptions (Jervis, 2017)1. Thompson has furthered Gochman and Maoz's (1984) analysis by highlighting threat perceptions. Perceptions of hostility, threat or danger, together define a 'principal' enemy leading to the 'principal rivalry' definition (Cashman, 2013; Thompson, 1995, 2001). Each actor engaged in a rivalry knows who the opponent is and can identify them, which is not seen in situations where there are diffused interstate competitions.

Medcalf and Townshend (2013) state that strategic rivalry is a form of interstate competition in regional and/or global contexts where protagonists attempt to gain political influence in third-party states. Here, strategic rivals consider one or more of their fundamental national interests to be threatened by each other. Finlay, Holsti and Fargen (1967), when discussing dyadic rivalries, underscored the fundamental difference between interstate competition and rivalry by bringing to the fore the notion of threat perception. Those who see and identify threats from an enemy would be ready to initiate a rivalry-type relationship rather than engage in a mere competition with it (Egreteau, 2012). Novel research has pointed out that rivalry cannot be taken as a synonym for competition, because the latter lacks the hostility and vital threat dimension of which a rivalry boasts (Goertz et al., 2005; Goertz & Regan, 1997).

1.4.5. Rivalries: Origination, Escalation, and Termination

Research on rivalries has revolved around the beginning and ending of rivalries (Bercovitch & Diehl, 1997; Goertz & Diehl, 1995a, 1997); the evolution of conflicts that

are repetitive in nature (Goertz & Diehl, 2000; Hensel, 1996); the management of conflict in long drawn-out rivalries (Bercovitch & Diehl, 1997; Leng, 1993); dynamics pertaining to enduring rivalries (Diehl, 1998; McGinnis & Williams, 1993; Thompson, 1999); arms races; and the escalation of rivalry in long drawn-out rivalries (Cioffi-Revilla, 1998; Diehl & Crescenzi, 1998). Goertz and Diehl (1997), in particular, emphasise the importance of looking at a rivalry as a concept to understand interstate security relations.

a. Origination of Rivalries

How would a relationship escalate to a rivalry? Disputes over various territories between states are often a starting point for an enduring rivalry (Dreyer & Thompson, 2012; Senese & Vasquez, 2008). Reiterating this, Thompson (2022, 2015) posits out how boundaries and territorial contiguity influence the initiation of rivalry between states. In particular, he opines that "border disputes increase the risk of both spatial and positional rivalry simply because contiguous dyads are likely to be rivals" (Ganguly et al., 2023, p. 57). However, this empirical account fails to paint a complete picture of rivalry origination as it overlooks social-psychological variables. This material variable-centred approach to rivalry origination has led some scholars to assert there is a need to complement it via an emphasis on the importance of non-material and intangible variables. This will allow an improved understanding of rivalries. In this regard, Pardesi (2017b) puts forward a more nuanced and convincing analysis which moves the power transition perspective to the back seat. Accordingly, like any other variables of rivalry initiation, social-psychological variables tend to influence rivalry formation, evolution, and escalation.

Strategic rivalry, therefore, emerges when the top decision-makers in one state or both states need to identify their opponent as such. In this sense, classifying one's competitor perception and psychology can also influence interstate relationships to eventually become rivalries. This is particularly the case when the central decision-makers are engaged in image formation and enemy ascription to one another although mass level image formation has trivial importance and influence. This is because, as Pardesi (2017b) argues, "rivalry initiates only when the states ascribe the image of an enemy to another state as a consequence" (p. 14). He identifies four basic types of enemy images: expansionist, hegemonic, imperial and peer. As he claims, his theorization of 'enemy image' enables scholars to ascertain whether a given interstate dyadic relationship qualifies

as a strategic rivalry or not. To this end, the central decision-makers' strategic image of another state needs to be evaluated to analytically assess whether that state is a strategic rival. Therefore, like any other rivalry initiation variable, psychological variables such as image formation and ascription also have a significant impact not only on formation of rivalries but also on their evolution and escalation.

Moreover, Christensen and Snyder (2009) argue that rivalries often begin as part of a power-transition process whereby, as stated earlier, ascending, and descending powers are likely to view each other as antagonists. They further claim that states that are hostile towards each other could be pulled into rivalries through alliance commitments to a third party, getting 'chain-ganged' into conflict (Christensen & Snyder, 2009). However, structural factors alone cannot explain the rivalry escalation in this dyad. Stinnett and Diehl (2001) point out that rivalry evolution is influenced by the actions of the potential rivals during their early conflicts and their initial conduct which will determine their future interactions. In reinforcing this claim, Hensel (1999) posits that after the states are dragged into a rivalry, the rivalry interaction between the two states seldom shifts. He further notes that when a rivalry begins, it will automatically become a part of the internal politics and foreign policy of the states concerned (Hensel, 1996b).

What is more, studies iterate that it is not issues per se that bring forth rivalries, but how they are handled between states (Rasler et al., 2013). For example, states whose leaders primarily adopt *realpolitik* approaches to international politics tend to be more associated with the start of strategic rivalries than states that value international institutions as a means to solve global issues (Valeriano, 2013). Therefore, rivalry initiation should be considered mainly in terms of four variables: territorial dispute, power transition, competition and alliance commitment, and strategic (enemy) image. However, there is no sequential order of which variable precedes which, although the four variables tend to influence the rivalry formation in significant ways and scale.

b. Escalation/Consolidation of Rivalry

Studies point out that shifts in the external environment can worsen rivalries among already competing states which will generate strategic instability whilst raising the probability of a conflict (Levy & Ali, 1998; Thompson, 2001; Tir & Diehl, 2000; Young & Levy, 2011). A few studies have also analysed how exogenous shocks can create rivalries (Goertz &

Diehl, 1995). States, however, will show an extensive range of competitive behaviours when the origins of the competition are positional rather than territorial (Goertz & Diehl, 1995b).

Territorial rivalry refers to the persistent interstate conflict which involves tangible boundaries (whether land or a maritime space), and the issue of land disputes (and irredentist claims) is one of the most important components of the formation of interstate disputes (Bremer, 1992; Diehl, 1985; Rasler & Thompson, 2000; Rasler & Thompson, 2006). Whereas, positional rivalry, also known as rivalry over status, is formed and often developed in relation to contestation over ideas/ideologies, military power, and/or political domination. Positional competition is triggered by intangible factors like ambition to establish a dominant position in a region or at the global stage. Latent rivals' choice to act at the time of shock, for instance, determines how they progress along the rivalry spectrum. Goertz and Diehl (1993) have pointed out that "rivalries only periodically escalate to the level of militarized conflict and can persist in the absence of such conflict for a significant period" (Goertz & Diehl, 1993, p. 156). Hensel (1996) contends that armed engagements between states that are in conflict can sustain rivalries if the original issue was not solved through military action.

W. R. Thompson, a leading global authority in the field of strategic rivalries, focuses on the asymmetric variables of interstate rivalries to account for the rivalry development, if not rivalry origination (Thompson, 2022, 2015). He posits that asymmetric rivalries are quite common in international politics where major powers tend to form rivalries with other major powers. However, in some cases, "states compete in world politics without elevating their competitors to the status of enemy, though these competitors may pose a threat" (Thompson, 2022, p. 27).

c. Termination of Rivalry

As is the case with many other situations of conflict, the termination of rivalry requires overcoming the hostility and mistrust between the states accumulated over time. As Bennett (1996) argues, states should end one competition before they can, in reality, engage with a new enemy. He further notes that some rivalries will end if the rivals begin to face shared external security threats; in effect, the arrival of new competitions with negative links to extant rivalries pushes old rivalries aside. Likewise, Kupchan (2012)

observes the end of rivalries and the creation of peaceful relationships as a process which involves several steps, i.e., unilateral accommodation, reciprocal constraint, societal integration, and identity change. 'Strategic predicament', a situation which prompts a state faced with multiple simultaneous rivals to choose to accommodate one enemy in order to deal with the other, can be at the forefront of these steps. In such contexts, a state might be compelled to prioritise one enemy to deal with over others.

Cox (2010) emphasises the resource pressures that originate from numerous rivalries and argues that resource strains due to multiple competitions create failures in domestic policy, as the government tends to spend a lot on external concerns rather than internal requirements (Cox, 2010). Another factor directly associated with the termination of rivalry is political shocks. Goertz and Diehl (1995b) claim that political shocks are indeed necessary conditions for the rivalries to end. Political shocks can occur at the system level, with world wars and significant shifts in power among various actors. They might also take place within either of the rival states and/or with civil wars and regime change which will create a possible space for the termination of rivalries.

e. Major Issues in Rivalries

Several issues have been identified and attributed to the emergence and existence of strategic rivalry although some issues garner more attention than others in the analyses of the sources and causes of strategic rivalries. Goertz and Diehl (1995) see rivalries created over lands as particularly dangerous since the chances of militarised disputes taking place within them are much higher than rivalries triggered by other territorial conflicts.

Function \ Rivalry type	Spatial	Perceptual	Positional	Ideological
1. Rivalry initiation	✓		✓	
2. Rivalry evolution			✓	✓
3. Rivalry escalation	✓	✓	✓	✓
4. Rivalry dormant/termination	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table1. 1 The Structure of Strategic Rivalry: rivalry types and functions

Source: Author (2024)

As depicted in Table 1.1, interstate rivalries can be categorised into four major types in terms of the primary sources of rivalry initiation and escalation: they are, spatial/territorial, positional/status/prestige, perceptual/psychological, and ideological rivalries. Each of these categories tends to have similar yet varying roles and functions in the process of interstate rivalries in their different stages/phases, i.e., initiation, evolution, escalation and termination of rivalries. For instance, disputes over territory and resources between contiguous states, especially, are more likely to initiate rivalries (Thompson, 2022). Also, such disputes can function as rivalry escalation leading to dormancy or termination of rivalries.

However, any (enemy/competitor/challenger) perception held by the top/central policy makers of the states in a dyad about each other plays an important role particularly in rivalry evolution and escalation rather than its initiation (Pardesi, 2017). Compared to all other sources and factors of rivalry initiation, however, position/status/prestige at the regional or global level tends to have a significant influential role in rivalry initiation (Thompson et al., 2022) even though the chances of influence may vary between territorial and positional rivalries. In contrast, ideological factors do not operate intrinsically or by themselves, although ideological differences were like in major power rivalries (Thompson et al., 2022). Instead, they tend to operate along with material capabilities and

intentions. Therefore, ideological factors play only a complementary role, and that too, is after rivalries have emerged for the other reasons.

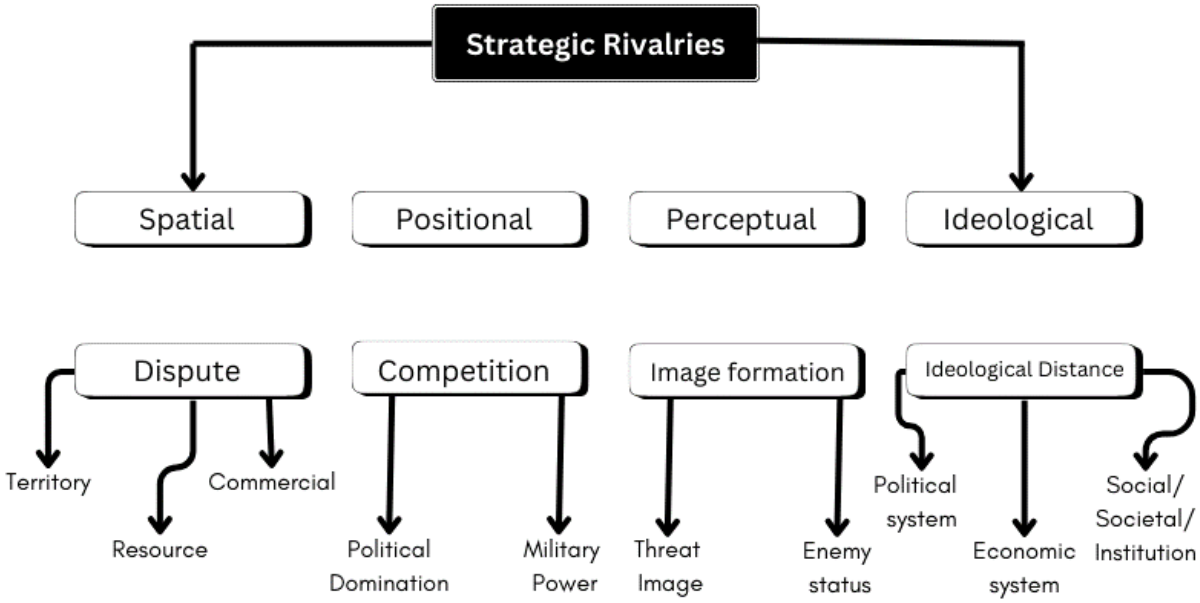

Figure 1. 1 The Structure and Types of Strategic Rivalry

Source: Author (2024)

As Figure 1.1 depicts, the structure of interstate strategic rivalry is generally built around four core issues which are treated as rivalry dimensions in this study: spatial, positional, perceptual, and ideological. Depending on the type of core issue at the centre of the rivalry driving the dyadic relationship, the character of rivalry varies from interstate conflict (intractable and protracted) to interstate rivalry. For instance, when the underlying source of rivalry is territory, then the rivalry tends to take the character of a dispute and ensuing conflict, whereas when the source involves position or status, then rivalry assumes the character of competition which can be labelled as strategic competition. Rivalries can arise from either of the issues (spatial or positional) at any time or may involve both problems at the same time. The perceptual and ideological core of the rivalry, on the other hand, tend to influence the sustenance, evolution, and escalation of the rivalry than its initiation (Pardesi, 2017b). See Figure 1.1 and its description for the details of other two rivalry types.

Spatial rivalry is directly based on spatial competition in relation to capturing territory, taking control over commercial routes, and capturing resources. Struggles between states for territory or resources have long remained important factors accounting for war and conflict. When a conflict arises in relation to a boundary (whether land or a maritime space), the association of land is one of the most important components of the formation of state disputes (Bremer, 1992; Diehl, 1985; Rasler & Thompson, 2000; Rasler & Thompson, 2006). Data show how land borders have been a fundamental source of interstate tensions throughout history (e.g., Alsace-Lorraine, Kashmir, or the Spratly Islands). For Vasquez (1996), geographical closeness functions more like a necessary precondition for war, where neighbours turn to enemies rather than friends. Most of the time, actors involved in land or spatial disputes are willing to undertake risk in the form of resources and time to solve long drawn-out issues, an approach which is against rational choice policies (Bennett, 1996, p. 160).

In contrast to spatial rivalry, positional rivalry, also known as rivalry over status, is formed and developed over a contest for ideologies, military power, or political domination. Because of their character, rivalries fought on positional lines are more often related to intangible issues that implicitly influence the spatial rivalry if the rivalry is also positional at the same time. Sometimes, commercial or ideological competition between the rivals is simply the manifestation of a historical or long-standing conflict between them.

Unlike the two previously mentioned types of rivalry, which are more behaviourally oriented, perceptual rivalries involve a psychological aspect where top-decision makers of a state ascribe an 'enemy image/branding' to another state. (Pardesi, 2017). According to Pardesi (2017),"strategic rivalries begin when a political elite of at least one state in a dyad consciously attributes enemy image to competitor state" (p. 254). More specifically, perceptual rivalry precedes the other three types of strategic rivalries when the components of strategic rivalry, i.e., competition, threat, and enmity, are present. Meanwhile, perception also provides an alternative for analysing the structure and process of strategic rivalries vis-à-vis dispute-density approaches (Lanza, 2021).

Moreover, ideology plays a central role in a great power rivalry (Haas, 2005). Ideological rivalries pertain to intense competition involving state adversaries motivated

by divergent belief systems about how best to organise their political-economic affairs (Thompson et al., 2022). Apart from its influence on rivalry initiation, ideological difference is also connected to the lethality and sustenance of rivalry as ideologically different rivals are likely to have deeper disagreement than ideologically similar states. This is because ideology tends to play a key role in increasing the salience of conflict, causing the rivalry to become severe and intense (Thompson et al., 2022), although ideological rivalry has a less significant impact on rivalry dynamics compared to other three types of rivalry (spatial, positional disputes, and perceptual rivalries).

f. Conceptualising Interstate Rivalry

The academic literature on interstate dyadic interaction shows that there are two major ways of conceptualising interstate rivalry, although several sub variants can be identified under each of the major approaches. The conceptualisation varies from the essential dimensions of rivalries to detailed accounts of characteristics of rivalries. Thus, we can identify two major approaches of rivalry conceptualisation in terms of their focus on identifying rivals and rivalries.

i. Dispute-density approaches
ii. Strategic rivalry approaches

Of the various approaches to conceptualising interstate rivalries, dispute-density approach and strategic rivalry approach are prominent (Dreyer, 2017). In an attempt to provide a conceptual framework for the present study, the two approaches mentioned above are assessed comparatively so that the most appropriate approach can be chosen for conceptualisation.

Dispute-density approaches are employed to identify cases and instances of rivalry (Bennet 1996, 1997; Gochman & Maoz 1984; Maoz & Mor, 2002). In doing so, the approaches pay attention to recurrent engagement in militarised conflict over a prolonged period of time. As such, the dispute-density approaches seek to conceptually define an interstate dyadic relationship as an enduring rivalry along three aspects- spatial consistency, duration, and intensity of conflict (Diehl & Goertz, 2001). Scholars who employed dispute-density approaches to rivalry research often relied on quantitative data to operationalise and measure the phenomenon-rivalries. As a result, the approaches enable elimination of

subjective determinations in identifying cases of rivalry while discouraging, in depth data gathering and analysis. However, dispute-density approaches have their own drawbacks, most of which emanate from the anchor on repeated engagement in militarised conflict to identify cases of rivalry. As Dreyer (2014) posits, conceptual militarisation is not a necessary dimension of rivalry (Dreyer, 2014). At the same time, inclusion of militarisation in defining rivalry miserably fails to explain conflict which is one of the dimensions of rivalry (Dreyer, 2017; Thompson & Dreyer, 2012). Having said that, dispute-density approaches are useful in many ways. First, it opens up avenues for the objective study of interstate rivalry by systematic operationalisation followed by coding. Second, it allows researchers who are interested in doing comparative assessment of rivalry cases to examine the dynamics of rivalry initiation, escalation, and termination. Third, the measure that dispute-density approaches use to code rivalry cases along longevity and intensity has a high level of reliability.

Strategic Rivalry Approaches (SRA), unlike the dispute-density approaches which focus on recurrence, intensity, and longevity of rivalries, seek to identify rivalry relations by paying attention to the perceptual and psychological aspects of the dyadic interaction of rivalries. As such, rivalry is the state of mind embedded in perceptions of oneself and of some other that may cause behavioural manifestations such as engagement in conflict (Dreyer, 2017, p 8). At the same time, we need to keep in mind the fact that it is difficult to measure perceptions using objective criteria as long as they remain a perception. However, by carefully detecting symptoms of rivalry present in the forms of conflict and hostile reciprocity, it is still possible for us to identify rivalry and rivals.

In the meantime, identifying strategic rivals also requires distinguishing between competitors and rivals so that contest and confrontation present in ordinary conflict can effectively be eliminated in the identification process. This entails evaluating whether competitors adequately threaten one another in order to count as rivals (Rasler et al., 2013, pp. 3-4). As such, all rivals are competitors but not all competitors are rivals, though both contend over issue/s. Contextualising this into China-India competition in Sri Lanka, we need to invoke Rasler's (2013) observation that asymmetric states are only considered rivals if a weaker state can legitimately compete with and threaten a strong adversary (Rasler et al., 2013, p. 4). The case of the Sino-Indian rivalry, however, exhibits multiple asymmetries. The strong position of China as an emerging economic and military power

in Southern Asia (Indian Ocean and South Asia) poses a threat to the latter as the existing dominant power in the same region. At the same time, this relative power position allows India, which is weak vis-à-vis China, to disrupt China's strategic moves in the region including in Sri Lanka, where the two countries are engaged in strategic competition.

It is this theoretical and contextual considerations under which the conceptualisation of strategic rivalry is embarked on. Accordingly, strategic rivalry is conceptually defined as a form of interstate competition in which rivals view each other as threatening competitor and enemy in their attempt to gain a strategic preeminent position in a third-party state/s. This idiosyncratic way of conceptualising contains the essential elements of strategic rivalry captured by the seminal scholarly work on interstate rivalry (Colaresi et al., 2007; Thompson, 2001; Thompson & Dreyer, 2012). Also, it allows for identification and recognition of rivalry relationships in the context of China-India parallel involvement in Sri Lanka. Arguably, SRA better capture the essence of interstate rivalry, especially the asymmetric ones. As far as the Sino-Indian rivalry is concerned, it is basically an asymmetric rivalry economically, militarily, and even perceptually (Ganguly et al., 2023; Pardesi, 2021). Also, the conceptual definition of SRA provides a clear set of criteria and guidelines on how to identify rivalry relations by observing the behavioural manifestations of the rivals in dyadic interstate interaction (Thompson, 2001). In this regard, SRA lay out parameters which pretty much serve as their (SRA's) measure of which leaders' recorded statement, public speeches and other public behaviour are worthy to be noted. As for the method of analysis, too, SRA sharply differ from dispute-density approaches in that the former identify rivals through qualitative historical analysis, whereas the latter depends on quantitative data and analysis (Dreyer, 2017).

Therefore, the conceptual definition of SRA adopted by the present study allows using rivalry to explain conflict dynamics of the China-India competition in Sri Lanka.

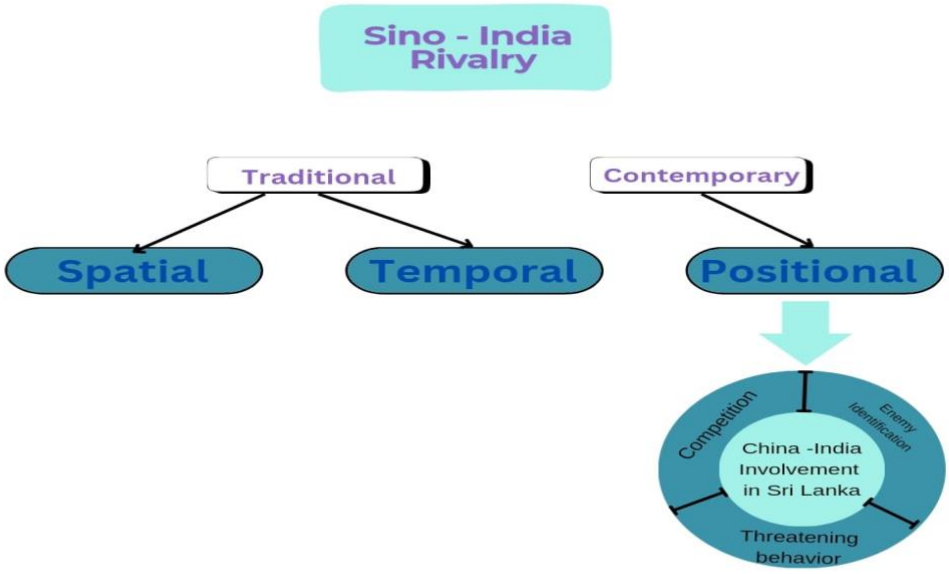

Figure 1. 2 Conceptualisation of China-India Competition in Sri Lanka

Source: Author (2024)

As illustrated by the above figure, the present study conceptualises the Sino-Indian rivalry as the interstate strategic rivalry with spatial, temporal, and positional dimensions, and which is coded as traditional Sino-Indian rivalry. Similarly, the China-India involvement in Sri Lanka is conceptualised as a phenomenon associated with the traditional Sino-Indian rivalry. Unlike the traditional Sino-Indian rivalry, the China-India involvement in Sri Lanka, coded as contemporary Sino-Indian rivalry, is rooted more in positional dimension of the strategic rivalry. Thus, the China-India involvement in Sri Lanka exhibits competition, threatening behaviour, and enemy identification— the three constitutive elements of strategic rivalry.

1.4.6. Situating Strategic Rivalry within Major IR Theoretical Approaches

As a particular kind of relationship between two states, strategic rivalry informs its theoretical or conceptual niche within the three major strands of IR theory, namely, liberalism, realism, and constructivism although the niche belongs more to the latter two theoretical strands than the former. The following sections briefly elaborate each of the

three IR theories in isolation and compare them wherever appropriate to derive a rationale for selecting one particular strand of IR theory for the purpose of this study.

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a. Liberalism

Liberalism is one of the two most basic approaches to IR (Cashman, 2013, p. 170). As a theoretical approach liberalism builds on domestic politics and economics with ramifications for international politics. The philosophical and intellectual bases of liberal thinking can be found in the writings of political thinkers such as Adam Smith, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant. Liberalism is associated with Immanuel Kant's republican liberalism, John Locke's institutional liberalism, Adam Smith's economic liberalism and Woodrow Wilson's idealism known as liberal institutionalism. Woodrow Wilson, a modern liberal thinker whose ideas emerged after the end of World War 1, spoke about liberalism in its idealist form. Immanuel Kant, through his *The Perpetual Peace* (1795), stamped his intellectual contribution to the liberal thinking. His idea of 'democratic peace' based on ''republican constitution" of states was a watershed renders theoretical advancement of the liberalism (Spindler 2013, p160). As liberalism posits, the conduct of states in the international system is the outcome and reflection of the scale of interstate conflict and cooperation featuring the nature of state preferences. Liberal accounts of international relations posit the existence of patterns of contradicting or compatible state choices. Liberalism, however, identifies war as one of the major negative issues in international politics (Meiser, 2018). To deal with the issue of war, liberals push democracy as the foundation for peace and stability in the international arena (Gomichon,

2013). To this effect, liberalism promotes the idea of the 'Democratic Peace Theory' arguing that democracies do not go to war against other democracies (Brown et al., 1996).

Like realism which focuses on the distribution of power and influence among states to explain interstate conflict, liberalism pays attention to the power distribution within states to do so (Wolf, 2002). As such, liberals tend to anticipate harmonious relations between two states if a state's policy and preferences converge or are compatible with other states or are easily adjustable through bargaining. Similarly, on the other hand, if the ruling elite's policies are incompatible, liberals predict antagonistic relations between the two states. Therefore, the dispersal of capabilities among states does not influence the emergence of interstate conflicts but may only impact on their outcome. According to liberal theory, in external relations, domestic power dynamics play a major role as national political leadership is more concerned with maintaining their personal influence rather than prioritising their state's power position in the international system. In other words, democratic states with wider representative institutions are usually more concerned to avoid costly external conflicts than their authoritarian counterparts. Another equally important institutional feature identified by liberal theory is the centralisation of authority. To pursue a coherent foreign policy, states need to have institutional mechanisms which potentially moderate foreign policy behaviour by suppressing parochial demands for power sharing at the centre. Therefore, the interaction and interplay of internal distributions of power and influence tend to greatly impinge on the interstate rivalries than the international distribution of capabilities as the realist theory posits.

Strands of liberal theory of international relations

Republicanism: This strand of liberalism is based on the belief that the external behaviour of a state is crucially influenced by its political and constitutional make-up (Heywood, 2011, p. 64). That is, liberals see democracy as guarantee of peace and thus by expanding the area of democracy across countries world peace can be achieved (Fukuyama, 1991, p. 51).

Liberal institutionalism: Liberal institutionalism refers to the liberal's belief that the chief external mechanism needed to constrain the state's ambitions is international organizations

(Heywood, 2011, p65). To this effect, liberalism especially neoliberal institutionalism, look to such bodies as League of Nations and the United Nations Organization to establish a rule-based international system. For instance, John Ikenberry (Ikenberry, 2005, pp. 137-140), a prominent neoliberal institutionalism thinker, posits how the post-World War II liberal international order, in which certain binding institutions like UNO, IMF and WB followed by WTO play key role, helps reduce anarchy in the international system by restraining the behaviour of states.

Interdependence liberalism: Viewed as an alternative theoretical model to realism (Heywood, 2011, pp. 62-63), this version of liberalism rests on the ideas about trade and economic relations. Free trade between states draws them into an economic interdependence, meaning the material costs of interstate conflicts so great that warfare is barely thinkable. Interdependence liberals, therefore, believe that certain qualitative changes have taken place in the international system which substantially modify the impact of anarchy, self-help and security dilemma, creating an irresistible tendency toward peace, cooperation and integration (Rosenau, 1990).

Essential elements

a. Human nature: unlike realism, liberalism views humankind as basically good, rational and peace-loving and thus optimistic. Likewise, it holds that human condition is generally harmonious as there exists mutual trust and recognition of shared interest.
b. Behaviour of states in international system: conduct of states in the international system is analogous to the relationship between individuals within human communities. That is, conflict can be resolved through the use of law, administration of good government, democratic procedure such as negotiations, diplomacy and mutual adjustment.
c. International politics is anarchic: the lack of central authority at the global arena to control and regulate states' behaviour renders the international system anarchic. It doesn't, however, mean there is constant condition of war. Instead, cooperation between states is still possible even under the condition of anarchy.

d. International politics is mix of conflict and cooperation: Liberalism, unlike realism, sees the state of nature more as 'troubled peace' than every one's civil war against everyone.

   As a result, it sees (global) peace as normal and war as the abnormal in interstate interaction. And, war can be avoided through the trade and economic interdependence.

e. Outcome of international politics: Liberals do not see international relations as zero-sum game of cooperation as realism claim through 'relative gain'. Rather, it(liberalism) sees it as a non-zero-sum game or 'absolute gain' where all parties make mutual benefit.

In a nutshell, anarchic nature of international system due to lack of overarching global authority to keep the peace make the liberal thinkers to support international organizations. Creating international regimes based on legitimate norms and international law, and ultimately attainable world governance as a solution to the problem. Similarly, liberals recognize international anarchy but do not perceive it as a source of interstate conflict. If conflict exists it stems from government policies, not controlled by societies (Bloor, 2022, p. 15).

Key premises

The premises of liberalism are based upon set of core assumptions.

1. The first core proposition concerns the nature of the international system. Liberals see the international system by default to be anarchic although the anarchic nature can be turned to an ordered one where states enjoy peace, stability, and cooperation (Oye, 1985).

2. The second proposition holds that states' behaviour is shaped by multiple factors and dynamics operating at multiple levels or settings. In other word "the interaction among states and the surrounding including the transnational society in which they operate have the ability to critically mould state behaviour by affecting the social purpose driven by state preferences" (Moravcsik, 1997, p. 517).

3. International system is a constellation of sub-systemic structures characterized by a configuration of independent state preferences. This configuration of state preferences shape interaction among states (Spindler, 2013, p. 165).

4. Individuals and private groups are dominant actors in international politics. That is, neoclassical liberalism holds that the most relevant structures are intrastate or unit level structures understood as the structures of the state-society. And anarchy is not the dominating structure influencing state external behaviour (Spindler, 2013, p.164; Moravcsik, 2008, p. 236-237).

5. State behaviour in the international system doesn't fully resemble its foreign policy assumptions because international system to a large degree, shaped its external behaviour, like in interdependencies with other states, adopting to the preferences of other states.

6. Foreign policy reflects societal interest or preferences, and thus domestic political institutions serves as a transmission belt for the creation of foreign policy. This is because state actions are influenced by the convergence and divergence of preferences.

In conclusion, the liberals assume that "what states do is determined by what they want" is a position that has enticed attacks particularly from realists. Liberalism as an approach to international politics helps understand the nature and outcomes of interstate strategic interaction from actor-centric as opposed to realism's structure-centric perspective. In so doing, it focuses on factors and dynamics principally at state level and dyadic level. Therefore, liberalism can be said to seek to civilize international relations by other means -through institutionalization (international cooperation and trade) and socialization (norms and values).

b. Realism

The realist theory of IR was the dominant theory until the end of the Cold War is once again an extremely influential theoretical approach given the return of Great Power Competition. It explains the nature and structure of international politics to which interstate rivalry is closely related. Realist theory in general seeks to explain interstate interaction in an anarchic international system in which states are rational and self-seeking actors. That is, the anarchic nature of the system encourages states to behave in the way that realises their self-centred national interests over the collective or common interest of the international society. This structure of the international system encourages states to adopt self-help in order to take care of themselves in the absence of a central authority which can regulate the conduct of states (Waltz, 1979). In their attempt to accumulate power for survival in the system, states seek to attain a favourable power balance and compete for

influence. This in turn leads them to engage in rivalry in its various forms - competition, conflict, and anarchy etc. (Lanza, 2021). The distribution of power among states and its ongoing or anticipated shifts largely determines a state to become an ally or rival. If only two great powers exist at the end of a great power conflict, they are likely to become rivals.

Another important assumption held by realist theory is that the uncertainties that flow from the anarchic nature of the international system cause a state to use short-term measures to ensure its security in the face of unknown future intentions of other states. This claim is particularly held by offensive realists who argue that the international system is so hostile that uncertainty about future intentions of the adversary coupled with extreme worst-case analysis have led great powers to adopt offensive strategies and pursue regional hegemony (Mearsheimer, 2006, p. 120). Adding to this, the dilemma between anarchy and ensuing security force states into a conflictual relationship which leads them maximising their security by maximising power as they perceive each other as adversaries. The continuation of the conflictual relationship over time pushes the states into a more intense competition and threatening rivalry. As offensive realists posit, great powers can secure themselves only by maximising their own power (Mearsheimer, 2006).

Therefore, realism argues that conflict among state actors in the international system is a norm and thus not an exception. Because anarchy compels states to compete with each other (Choi & Eun, 2018). Meanwhile, states come into conflict with one another over incompatible material interests and goals influenced by the unequal distribution of power in the international system. In pursuit of their overlapping interest and goals, states engage in competition which makes states to be inclined to protect their vital interests against external threats by balancing power with power. Lastly, IR realists describe IR as a product of a continued conflict triggered by states' need to accumulate material power to ensure their security in a self-help world.

Neoclassical Realism

Neoclassical realism (NCR) is a variant of realist theory of international relations and foreign policy introduced first by Gideon Rose through his *World Politics* review article in 1998 (Rose, 1998). As an approach, neoclassical realism builds on neorealism or structural realism by integrating domestic factors such as state's political, economic and social configurations and leaders' foreign policy choices. However, unlike neorealism

which throws all the weight on the systemic or structural factors and dynamics, neoclassical realism niches itself both in systemic and domestic factors to explain foreign policy choices. In this sense, neoclassical realism while acknowledges the systemic structure such as the distribution of power among states is paramount important, the unit level (within state) variables intervene how states respond to systemic pressures.

Hence, as a theoretical approach, neoclassical realism offers a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of foreign policy by broadening the causal process to cover both structural and unit -level variables. Consequently, neoclassical realism figures as a new paradigm to think and theorize the states' external behaviour in the context of the deterministic nature of the international system. Insofar as classical realism focuses on human nature, and neorealism is preoccupied with the structure of international system, so neoclassical realism concentrates on intervening factors at unit (domestic) levels. Therefore, neoclassical realism primarily seeks to explain what shapes the states' responses to systemic pressures by addressing domestic variables such as state structure. By doing so, the proponents of neoclassical realism claim that this theory can fill in the gaps found in other versions of realism, especially with respect to previous failures in explaining and predicting foreign policy choices. To this effect, neoclassical realism holds that we can make sense of the actions of a state in the international system by paying attention to the structure of interaction between international environment and domestic climate at the given point in time.

As the proponents of neoclassical realism posit, foreign policy of states is driven by factors operating at two-levels - systemic and unit thus causing the system and units to constantly come into contact with each other when the system signals incentives and constraints for unit(states). Therefore, foreign policy of states is neither shaped exclusively by the individual leaders as classical realism argues, nor by the international environment as neorealism holds. Rather, foreign policy of states is primarily moulded by set of intervening variables both at international and domestic levels. For instance, the distribution of power capabilities among states refers to system (international) -level variable, whereas perception of systemic pressures and other states' intentions, and societal actors that affect the power and freedom of action of the foreign policy decision-makers.

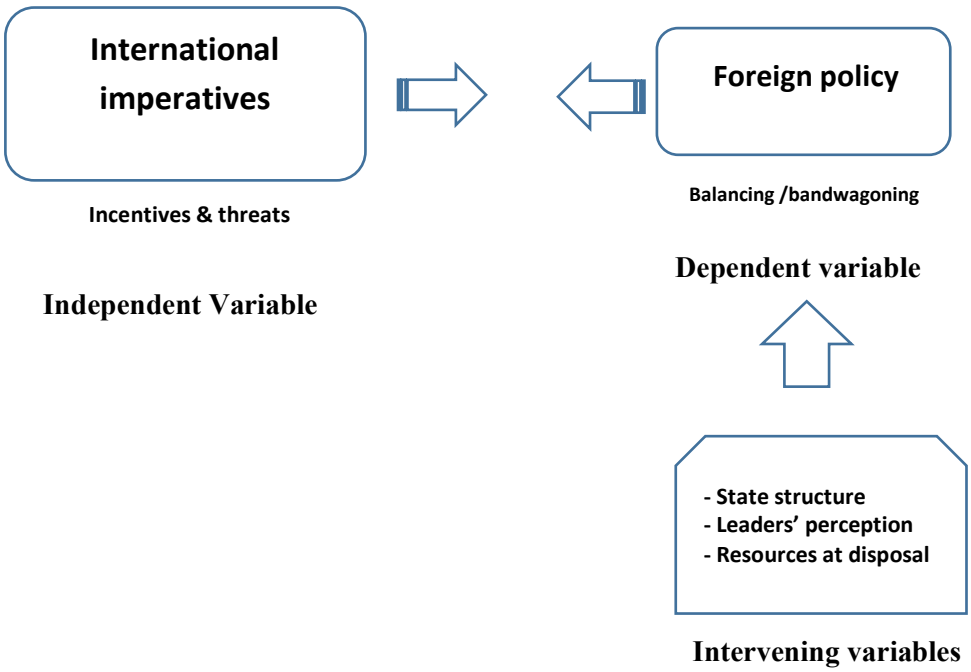

Figure 1.3 Complex relationship between systemic and unit-level variables in shaping foreign policy

Source: Author (2025)

As the diagram depicts, state's foreign policy is shaped by the process in which systemic pressures in the form of incentives and constraints are translated into foreign policy choices. In that, unit-level variables such as state structure (presidential/parliamentary governments), leaders' perception and resources at disposal intervene between the system (international & regional system) and units in their interaction. This interaction moulds the ultimate foreign policy choices of states as it is influenced by the unit-level variables such as threats/incentives, identifying viable strategies and extracting and mobilizing societal resources to implement and sustain those strategies. Thus, foreign policy choices of states are not just moulded solely by international system variables, as structural realism holds. Rather, it is crucially shaped by the unit-level variables within the states in response to systemic pressures – constraints and incentives. As neoclassical realism holds, the intervening function of the unit-level variables (national/domestic) in response to system's pressures shape the state's foreign policy options in a manner similar to "transmission

belt". Accordingly, neoclassical realism seeks to address the process in which unit-level variables intervene to translate system pressures into foreign policy choices.

Core thesis

Looking at neoclassical realist argument held by its proponents, it is apparent that neoclassical realism seeks to extend structural realism by factoring systemic(pressures), cognitive(filters) and unitary (foreign policy executive) variables. As NCR argues, the extent to which a state response to systemic constraints depends on foreign policy executive's ability to extract resources from society within a given domestic institutional setting. This means, foreign policy decision makers do not have sudden access to societal and non-societal resources to conduct their foreign policy (Rodriguez, 2024, p. 7). Moreover, NCR sees extracting and mobilizing domestic resources as the central component of state capabilities which is essential for the state's intervening role in response to the systemic imperatives. To put it succinct, the more autonomy foreign policy decision makers enjoy, the more room for leveraging to conduct preferred foreign policy and dedicate resources to those purposes and vice-versa.

The central claim that NCR holds, therefore, is that there is no direct transmission belt from the international system to foreign policy formulation and implementation. And the interaction between system and unit is affected by ideational and institutional intervening variables.

Key assumptions of neoclassical realism

a. Politics is a perpetual struggle among different states for material power and security in a world of scarce resources and pervasive uncertainty.
b. Scope and ambition of a state's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by the state's relative material power.
c. International system structures and constrains the policy choices of states.
d. Systemic forces create incentives for all states to strive for greater efficiency in providing security for themselves.
e. Leaders' perceptions, military technology, geopolitical positions or international economy pressures are the structural modifiers which mitigate or intensify the likelihood of conflict.

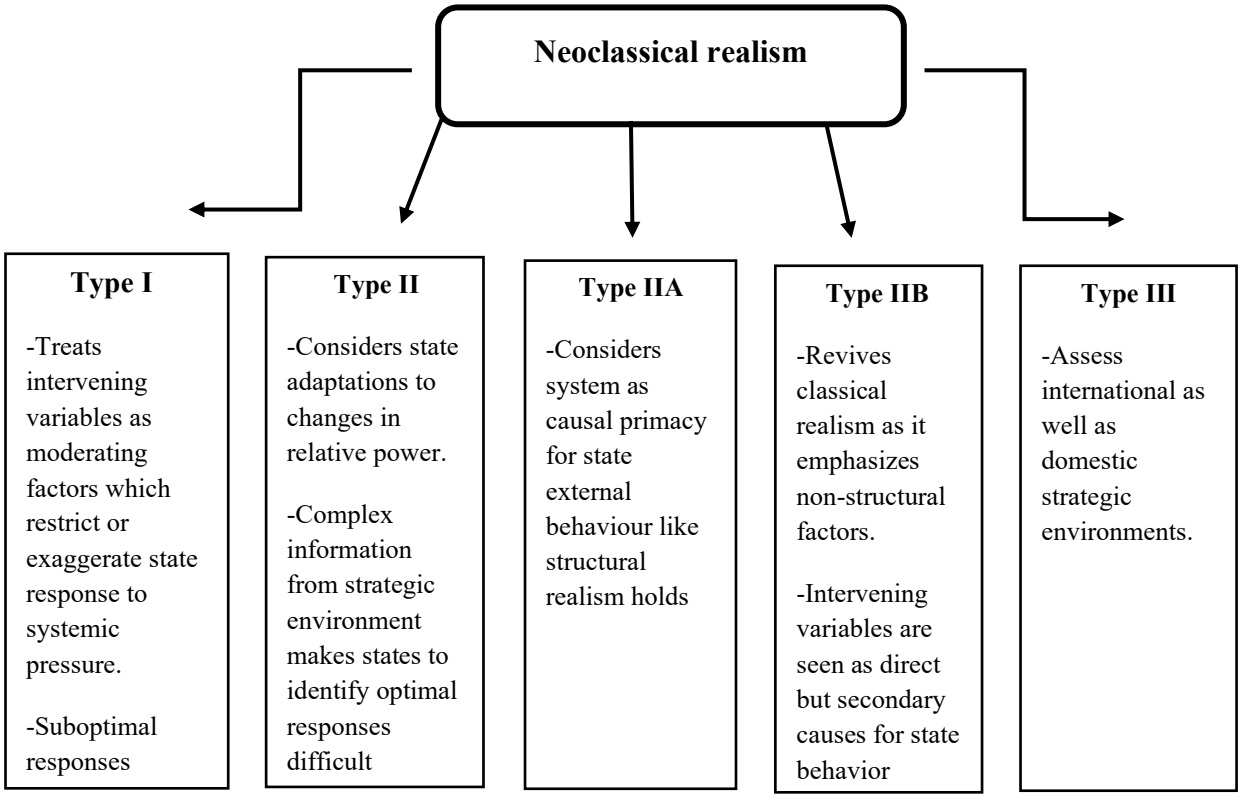

Figure 1.4: Types of neoclassical realism

Source: adapted from Federman Rodriguez 2024

Table shows the different ways in which neoclassical realism evolved to link system pressures and domestic factors to explain state external behaviour. Type I approach seeks to explain why the best foreign policy choices are not always achievable directly. That is, it is the foreign policy executive who act as intervening variables by deciding the courses based on their perceptions of the strategic environment. As this approach tends to explain what regards as the best foreign policy options based on structural realism baseline, it is called as orthodox approach to state external behaviour. Type II approach attempts to explain why states cannot adopt one best optimal foreign policy choices among range of options as an adaptative response to the strategic environment. In this regard, those who advocate this approach grant causal primacy to the structure than unit's decision-making leaders. Type II A approach places itself type I and II by acknowledging the causal primacy

of system structure while not turning to intervening variables to explain maladaptive behaviour of states. Type II B seeks to re-introduce classical realism by looking at non-structural factors such as geo-politics, state's historical interactions, leaders' perceptions about their counterparts' future decision. However, proponents of type II B acknowledge the analytical importance of systemic imperatives while introduce a powerful understanding of strategic environment as the drivers of foreign policy. Type III provides a refined conceptualization of international and domestic strategic environment by assessing state behaviour in terms of decisional context and choices and system's structure change.

Selection of Type III of Neoclassical Realism (NCR) as the Analytical Approach

As stated above, neoclassical realist theory provides distinct approach to international relations and foreign policy. Especially, type III approach allows analyst to provide different types of thorough accounts of state behaviour by treating intervening variables not only as explanatory factors but also as sufficient causal process explaining foreign policy. The study therefore adapts and adopts type III of NCR theory in the following manner.

As NCR seeks to elaborate variation in the foreign policies of the same state over time or across different states facing similar external constraints, using NCR as the theoretical approach to the study will help explain the foreign policy choices made by Sri Lanka over time – from 2005 -2019. In particular, by drawing particular attention to the diplomatic, economic and security responses of Sri Lanka under different governments to systemic imperatives at regional level- Indian Ocean and South Asia. This choice of NCR as the theoretical approach is further warranted by for it privileging domestic strategic environment over the international strategic environment to account for the external behaviour of states at a given time period. In so doing, NCR particularly acknowledges the importance of strategic culture in terms of ideational intervening and institutional intervening variables. In operationalizing ideational intervening variables, they are broken down into leader images/perceptions and strategic culture. Institutional intervening variables are split into state-society relations and domestic institutions.

Conclusion

Neoclassical realism as a school of foreign policy theory seeks to explain about the intervening role of the state. Unlike other variants-defensive and offensive- of the realist theory which assume power maximization or security seeking as pre-fixed state goals, NCR theory is interested in explaining different state foreign policy preferences. In so doing, it provides a thorough explanation of drivers of foreign policy (dependent variable) by distinguishing independent and different types of intervening variables involved in the causation of states' external behaviour. In this process, NCR links systemic pressures and foreign policy, and mutual constitution between strategic environment and agents using the concept of "transmission belt".

Finally, according to Teliaferro et al. (2009), NCR defines its mission largely in terms of building theories of foreign policy rather than the theories of the system within which states interact.

c. Constructivism

Constructivist theory, which emerged in early 1990s as a non-systemic analysis of international relations, staunchly criticises the dominant IR theories, i.e., liberalism and realism. The constructivist approach, as expounded by Alexander Wendt (1992), assumes that identities play a crucial role in international relations as they determine the content of state interest thereby the way they will act in global politics. As such, when two states perceive that they hold a shared identity, then that shared identity makes them see compatibility of their interest. Because identities construct a particular set of interests or preferences with regard to a course of action in dealing with other states. Therefore, conflict between states involve more than material interests. A state's prevailing mindset coupled with its historical experiences define its identity and concomitant interest, which in turn shape how it conducts itself in the international system.

In other words, the manner in which a state identifies itself and wants to be identified by other states ultimately define its external dealings especially in issues involving security and status. For instance, notions of who we are and what we value influence particular ways of viewing where threats to those values come from, what forms they take, and how they might be dealt with. In this sense, interstate conflict denotes the

relational identity of the self and the other (Wendt, 1992, p. 397). A contested status can become a symbol of past history and present identity. To situate this within the constructivist account of anarchy, we can identify two different types of anarchy-anarchy of friends, anarchy of enemies-both at global and regional settings (Wendt, 1995). To be more elaborative, let us invoke the scenario as Alexander Wendt (1995) posits. That, why the US feels less threatened by 500 atomic weapons in the UK than 5 nuclear weapons in the possession of North Korea (Wendt, 1995, p. 73). This is because the US perceives the UK as sharing the same identity, and therefore, the former sees convergence and compatibility of interest with the UK.

In addition to identities, state external behaviour is also shaped by norms. Expectations of appropriate or legitimate behaviour by states in line with their particular identity renders their interaction with other states friendly and hostile. This is to say that dominant ideas about what constitutes appropriate behaviour for the key members of international society encourages them to form a security community thereby avoiding conflict among them. Therefore, constructivist approaches emphasise the importance of social and ideational factors to better account for a state's behaviour in the direction of conflict and cooperation in the international system.

Therefore, the mainstream theoretical perspectives in the IR field discussed above shows that IR theory can, separately and in concert, provide useful insights into the interstate rivalry/competition. In particular, it facilitates the understanding why states engage in conflict, competition, and rivalry, and what causes or encourages states to behave in cooperatively and conflictual manner.

Constructivism's Emergence as an alternative Paradigm of IR

Constructivism emphasizes on the strong understanding of "structure" than do the preceding two approaches- liberalism and realism (Nye & Welch, 2013, p. 69). In this sense, unlike realist theorists, constructivist scholars argue that the actors in the international system have agency to make their own choices based on their experiences, history and meanings they attribute to the social world around them. As Alexander Wendt (1987) posits, agents have three specific capacities; theoretical understanding of their capacities, reflexive monitoring and the potential to adapt their behaviour, and the capacity to make decisions. Constructivism rose in the backdrop of the abrupt fall of Soviet Union

followed by the end of the Cold War and the post-Cold War reproachment and cooperation between and the US and post- Soviet Russia. As a result, constructivism was primarily concerned with accounting for the change and transitions in international politics which were taking place since then. For instance, constructivist scholars were particularly focused on explaining the transition from the Cold War to the post-Cold War era, or from conflict to cooperation (Megan, 2024, p. 61). For constructivists, the mainstream theoretical paradigms of realism and liberalism was not capable to explain some of the shifts that were taking place in the international system towards the end of the twentieth century.

Major Assumptions

Constructivism builds on the broader assumption that international system is a social realm in which beliefs, norms, values and identities play fundamental role in the construction of social reality (Megan, 2024, p. 61). Hence, it is predominantly concerned with the unobservable subjective features of the international system that constitutes the agents and rules of interaction in international politics. Constructivism, therefore, adopts ontological perspective of the social world as "intersubjectively and collectively meaningful structures and processes. On the other hand, as an alternative paradigm of international politics, constructivism challenges the assumptions of an unchanging reality of international politics by arguing that anarchy is not an unavoidable feature of international system (Zehfuss, 2004, pp. 3-4). The mental image, as constructivism argues, we have about the world out there shape our understanding of others including the very international system of which states are one of the key constituents. These foundational understanding of who we are relative to others are shaped directly by our experiences and the meanings we attach to them.

Propositions

- Change and transition within international politics can be explained based on historical context and social reality change with international system can be explained by combining material and ideational factors. Therefore, material factors alone cannot do that.
- Actors within the international system do not just 'act' but rather interact with others. All actors and decisions within international politics are shaped by social reality and imbued with meaning.

- Norms, values, morals, institutions and identities determine appropriate standards of behaviour in international politics. Accounting for why states behave the way they do therefore warrants analysis of the social meaning states attribute to the world around them. In short, identity shapes state behaviour in international politics.

Key arguments

Constructivism, in explaining the process of international politics, underlies set of argument and proposition. They are as follow;

- States are not simply strategic actors who think rationally but are social entities. State preferences are not therefore pre-determined by the anarchic structure of the international system but are socially constructed through the process of social interaction and constituted by norms, values, ideas, beliefs and identities.
- Actors-state and others- in the international system are shaped and motivated by an awareness of appropriate behaviour moulded by ideas, values and social interaction (Katzenstein, 1996, p. 5). That is, states within the international politics become socialized to following certain social norms and rules.
- Constructivists argue that agency and structure are mutually constituted, which implied that structures influence agency and that agency influences structures (Theys, 2017, p. 13).
- States can have multiple identities that are socially constructed through interaction with other actors. It is the identities which signed state interests and constitute their action.
- Constructivism holds that interaction between agents and structures are always mediated by "ideational factors" (beliefs, values, theories and assumptions) (Heywood, 2011, p. 72). This hints that state behaviour is determined by how states view anarchy-anarchy of friends and anarchy of enemies- and not by the anarchic structure of the international system as realist argue. While some states may view anarchy as dangerous and threatening others may see it as the basis for freedom and opportunity.

Role of norms and identities in shaping state's action and interaction

As constructivists hold, norms and identity play a crucial role for states to define who they are and what they value the most. For constructivists, states may be self-interested, but they continuously define and re-define their interests along with the change of their identity based on history and experience (Zehfuss, 2004, p. 14). Further, identities are not only developed and maintained in interaction with others, they also profoundly determine what kind of anarchy or security environment will prevail. It is therefore possible for states to reinvent their identities and consciously transform their international role and subsequently change the world order (Nugroho, 2008, p. 86). Similarly, norms help interpret situations and hence influence state's external behaviour in a remarkable way. For constructivist scholars, the world in which we live is not something as observed by neorealist and neoliberal perspectives. Rather, the world we live in is an interactive process with embedded social meanings.

Thus, norms play a pivotal role in shaping state interests and actions. In this regard, three types of norms can be identified; regulative norms, constitutive norms and prescriptive norms (Theys, 2017, p. 38)

Strands of Constructivism

Basically, scholars of constructivism fall into two different categories in terms of the question they are concerned with.

1. Conventional constructivists: they are concerned with questions like what causes an actor to act. They are interested in discovering the relationship between actors, social norms, interests and identities. Conventional constructivists believe that actors act according to their identity and that it is possible to predict when this identity becomes visible or not. When an identity is seen to be undergoing changes, conventional constructivist inquest what factors caused which aspects of a state's identity to change.
2. Critical Constructivists: these types of constructivists, on the other hand, are interested in asking questions like how actors come to believe in a certain identity. Unlike the conventional constructivists, who are not interested in the effect of

identity has, critical constructivists want to reconstruct identity. In this process, s they believe, language plays a pivotal role as it constructs social reality.

Conclusion

Compared to realism and liberalism, constructivism is relatively new so to the extent that it is purely formal approach to international politics. Unlike other approaches dealt in this section, constructivism makes no strong assumptions about human nature thus it cannot make any claims about how actors behave. The main focus or concern of constructivism is therefore commonly geared toward understanding how norms are constructed, as well as how common rules, identities, institutions and practices have the potential to shape and even change action and behaviour within international politics. In this way, being an alternative paradigm for analysing international politics, constructivism sees the international system as socially constructed. Not only the distribution of material power, wealth and geographical conditions that can explain state behaviour but also ideas, identities and norms. Finally, constructivism's emphasis on the role of intersubjective meaning which makes it stand in different position from neorealism and neoliberalism. Overall, constructivist analysis highlights the missing dimension to the 'structure-agent' debate in international system.

1.4.7. How Major IR Theories Help Analyse the Dyadic Interaction between China and India

As posited above, the three major IR theories offer divergent insight into the same phenomenon– interstate dyadic interaction. For instance, liberalism, while recognizing the centrality of the anarchic nature of international system, proposes ways and modalities for friendly and peaceful relations between states. In that, institutionalised cooperation and economic interdependence are important. Hence, liberalism is premised on the belief and emphasis that conflict which stems from the anarchic character of the international system can also be the source of cooperation. This implies that even in the presence of anarchy, interaction between states can lead to cooperative relationship as long as their interaction— conflictual or rivalrous— remains managed. For a long time, Sino-Indian rivalry remained an enduring rivalry before developing into an open and intense one in the recent decades.

When applying liberalism to Sino-Indian rivalry, it is evident that the liberalist perspective only partially serves to analyse the structure and dynamics of the Sino-Indian dyadic interaction. Over the past seventy years, the Sino-Indian rivalry has exhibited both conflict and cooperation, though conflictual elements were more dominant than the cooperative elements.

However, interdependence between China and India for trade and investment has always mitigated their conflictual interaction at the bilateral level (Yoder & Bajpai, 2023). Also, both China and India have valued the importance of participating multilateral institutions together, thus rendering their rivalry to a "managed one". However, the realist approach best fits the case in point compared to the liberalist paradigm as the contemporary China-India relations, especially their sea-borne competition in the Southern Asia, reflects more of status/positional rivalry.

Considering the psychological dimensions of the China-India bilateral relations, their rivalry becomes a multi-dimensional one encompassing all the main aspects of an interstate rivalry-spatial, positional, and temporal- if not ideological. Since the time the countries engaged in border conflict in 1962, they, over time, began developing an enemy identification which was consciously (at least by India) maintained throughout by employing a mutual containment policy in countries located in between them. Therefore, like every other interstate rivalry, the Sino-Indian rivalry exhibits strong social-psychological content besides the other dimensions-positional and spatial. However, the rivalry was almost non present elsewhere in the region-South Asia and the Indian Ocean, although it was initially confined to India's northernmost frontiers. However, the contemporary episode of the Sino-Indian rivalry which is the focus of the present study was ignited by China's economic and military rise in the early 2000s. India became insecure at China's economic development which gave military and strategic advantage to China in India's own sphere of interest and influence, i.e., South Asia and IOR. Against this backdrop, India, as defensive realism posits, is compelled to preserve the *status quo* of what it considers its legitimate strategic space, which is being threatened by China's incursions.

Therefore, the realist paradigm of IR appears to be best suited when the other two dominant paradigms - liberalist and constructivist - are considered for possible adoption.

This is because the realist paradigm's relative efficacy, especially the neoclassical realism, (NCR) as the framework for analysis helps capture the dynamics of the Indo-Sri Lanka relations. In doing so, NCR facilitates a concerted analysis of the systemic (the Sino-Indian rivalry) and unit factors (Indo-Sri Lanka relations) in the context of the Sino-Indian rivalry in a third-party state like Sri Lanka.

This in turn facilitates exploring the fluctuations in the Indo-Sri Lanka relations in the context of the Sino-Indian rivalry which reflects defensive- India and offensive- China variants of realism. For instance, with the rise of China, the power balance between China and India in Southern Asia has changed in China's favour. The offensive realism paradigm will explain this as it seeks to explain the ascendency of a great power to a dominant position in the regional or global system. Similarly, defensive realism is in a position to account for India's moves aimed at countering China, thereby making sure that the prevailing *status quo* in the region-Southern Asia remain intact.

1.5. An Integrated Theoretical Framework

The present study builds on the realist theory of international relations (IR), especially the neoclassical realism variant, as the overarching theoretical framework composed of two related components: strategic rivalry and hedging strategy. However, the overarching problem of the study, i.e., how and to what extent do Indo-Sri Lanka relations were affected by China-India engagement in Sri Lanka, warrants two levels: regional (systemic) and domestic (unit) level observation and analysis. First, the trends of Indo-Sri Lanka relations in the context of China and India's parallel engagement in Sri Lanka. Second, Sri Lanka's foreign policy responses toward China and India. For this purpose, a two-part theoretical framework is devised based on strategic rivalry theory and an alignment theory called hedging. Strategic rivalry theory is deployed specifically to capture the rivalry dynamics of China and India's engagement in Sri Lanka against the backdrop of the Sino-Indian rivalry in the IOR.

In doing so, neoclassical realism's major premise that foreign policy of a state is shaped by both structural (international/regional level) and domestic (unit level) variables— is used to analyse the foreign policy behaviour of Sri Lanka in the context of the Sino-Indian power struggle in the IOR. The Sino-Indian rivalry manifests important

features of the strategic rivalry involving significant perceptual, positional and temporal dynamics, apart from the features of asymmetric rivalry. For instance, there exists a strong dyadic interaction in Sino-Indian bilateral ties, even though only one protagonist in the dyad (India) exhibits rivalrous actions and attitudes. As Pardesi (2017) posits, in the threat hierarchy between China and India, China ranks the first in India and India ranks below the USA and Japan at the top of China's hierarchy (Pardesi, 2017b).

To elaborate, it is the asymmetry of capabilities in military and economic terms which constrains India in some respects. At the same time, this bolsters China's standing vis-à-vis India. This point clearly illustrates that the asymmetric dynamics tend to affect the dyadic interaction between China and India in that India seeks to occupy the central position while China assertively pursues revisionist ambitions. This variation in state behaviour in dyadic interaction informs how the same system may produce contrasting outcomes for different individual state units. As neoclassical realism asserts, state behaviour is conditioned by both the distribution of power at the system (regional and international) and the intervening domestic factors like leaders' perception, domestic institutions and elite consensus. That is, constraints and opportunities of the system (regional and international) are filtered into tangible foreign policy by the agency of the intervening state(domestic) level factors.

Therefore, the present study treats the Sino-Indian rivalry as a system-propelled constraints and opportunities which are filtered by the above-cited intervening variables at unit level-Sri Lanka.

To add conceptual clarity and theoretical precision, 'system' here is conceptualised as Southern Asia which consists of South Asia and the IOR. In Southern Asia, especially in the IOR, Sri Lanka and the Maldives are the two most important maritime candidates due to their critical geo-strategic location which attracted the attention and engagement of great powers (regional as well as global). This makes China a new arrival at the scene. The deployment of the neoclassical realism variant of the realist theory, which concern the behavioural pattern of states in an anarchy, helps to examine why and how the engagement of China and India in Sri Lanka is fuelled by the Sino-Indian rivalry in the IOR, and its impact on Indo-Sri Lanka relations. The use of neoclassical realism fits the above purpose

well as it seeks to account for the foreign policy dynamics of a state in response to the constraints and opportunities arising from regional power rivalry.

As scholars in the field of IR observe (Brewster, 2016; Sutter, 2006), China's rise as an economic and military power poses a serious threat to the hitherto rules-based order in Asia including the IOR. Besides these distinct features underlying the Sino-Indian rivalry, there are also some common features which make the rivalry fall within typical interstate rivalry. That is, the Sino-Indian rivalry which has continued to remain militarised ever since their border clash in 1962 despite the conflict being confined to their norther-most frontiers. This feature of the conflict not only perpetuates it, but also makes it an enduring rivalry. In sum, neoclassical realism offers an explicit insight into the causal mechanisms of Sri Lanka's foreign policy in the context of escalating China-India strategic competition, and thus provides a way of making sense of the foreign policy strategy Sri Lanka employed in navigating the two regional giants.

Hedging strategy, which is rooted in the realist approach to IR, constitutes the second part of the theoretical framework, and is used to exclusively explore Sri Lanka's foreign policy behaviour in response to China and India's competing engagement. The realist theory's core assumptions, that states are rational actors which respond to incentives and threats (Schmidt & Wight, 2023), lay the initial analytical foundation to analyse and understand their external behaviour. This claims in realist theory paves the way for hedging which is an important foreign policy option for small and moderate powers to navigate the uncertainties stemming from a rising great power which directly challenges the established power in the same global system or regional sub-system.

Sri Lanka, which is wedged between China and India, has tried to maintain strategic autonomy through its longstanding pursuit of a non-aligned policy since 1956. This is particularly so when Sri Lanka sees threats and incentives stemming from China-India engagement. When China offers incentives to Sri Lanka, India perceives this as a threat and vice versa. Thus, in the context of Sri Lanka, hedging is understood as cases where political leaders seek to strike a balance between Indian and Chinese influences without committing to either side. As such, the central goal of hedging is to retain strategic autonomy, allowing Sri Lanka to shift positions between balancing and bandwagoning depending on how the geopolitical balance evolves. This reflects a pragmatic balanced

orientation to Sri Lanka’ s) traditional non-alignment orientation embedded in ideological neutrality.

Another way in which hedging is used and useful is that it has its theoretical and conceptual underpinnings within alignment theory which distinguishes hedging from the other two forms of alignment strategies: balancing and bandwagoning (Marston, 2024). Considering its long-held tradition of neutrality pursued under the banner of a non-aligned policy since 1956, the way Sri Lanka employs foreign policy options stands as classic test case for the utilisation of hedging strategy in a small state context. The way Sri Lanka pursued foreign policy vis-à-vis China and India from 2005 to 2019 illustrates that Sri Lanka’s employment of alliance strategy changed from hedging, to bandwagoning to balancing in different situations. This shift is chiefly reflective of the policy or ideology of the administration in power and its positioning of Sri Lanka in response to the escalating Sino-Indian strategic competition in the Indian Ocean Region and the competitive engagement of China and India in Sri Lanka. Hence, for Sri Lanka, hedging is more of a goal than a means, which means that different political regimes tended to prioritize foreign policy goals and objectives. For instance, during his first tenure (2005-2010), MR was focused on ending the civil war through military victory. During his second tenure (2010-2015), his government was preoccupied with regime consolidation. Moreover, the National Unity government’s (2015-2019) foreign policy revolved around making Sri Lanka a pivotal hub in the Indo-Pacific region. Hence, it sought to pursue balanced foreign relations characterized by multi-alignment, especially during its latter phase.

Hedging, therefore, is conceptualised and operationalised as a foreign policy strategy preferred by small states to enhance their security and economic gains while striving not to compromise its autonomy. It is used in the present study as a strategy representing (prime variable/measure) foreign policy behaviour of Sri Lanka in the face of competing engagement by China and India in Sri Lanka. To be precise, Sri Lanka, as a small state, employs hedging to navigate uncertainties of the Sino-Indian strategic competition in the IOR in a way that maximizes gains and offsets the risk of siding with either the power. Hedging in the context of Sri Lanka can take two disparate forms, i.e., ‘active hedging’ and ‘passive hedging’ (See Section 1.7.1.6. for more details on the conceptualisation and operationalisation of hedging)

Conceptualisation and operationalisation of hedging will help strengthen the theoretical framework and offer a systematic understanding of the alignment choices of small states in the face of the shifting balance of power and emerging bipolar pressures (ex: from China, and India and its strategic partners). As the below diagram shows, hedging theory intersects strategic rivalry theory as they build on the key assertion of realism—that states are rational, self-centred actors (regardless of their size) whose actions and decisions are driven by cost-benefit calculations. This helps the formulation of an integrated analytical framework which best suits the analysis of two-level variables and dynamics shaping Sri Lanka's foreign policy strategies.

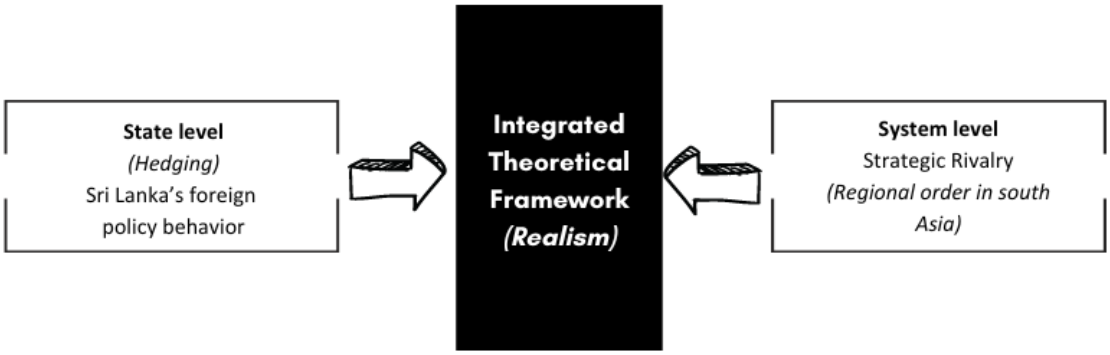

Figure 1. 5 Graphical depiction of the theoretical framework

Source: Author (2024)

Therefore, as the above diagram depicts, the theoretical framework of the present study is based on the respective major assumptions of the two-tier theoretical approaches—strategic rivalry and hedging strategy. Accordingly, strategic rivalry usually involves only great powers, and therefore, middle and small powers are left out of the game. Hedging, in contrast, provides opportunities for small states to navigate the uncertainties of the great power rivalry to maximize their gain in economic and security terms while offsetting risks. This indicates neoclassical realism's emphasis on the intervening role of domestic-level variables in shaping state foreign policy in response to regional or international systemic pressures.

1.6. Relevance and Rationale of the Theoretical Framework to the Present Study

Given the qualifying criterion for an adversarial interstate interaction is strategic rivalry, the dyadic relationship between China and India, especially in recent decades, strongly shows the salient features. These two states are consciously playing out their strategic ambitions in such a way that they overlap and challenge each other's very status as a regional power even though China is unwilling to admit that India's status places it as in the same league of great powers is China itself is in.

China, however, has now symbolically recognised the status of India as a rising major power in the region. The 'Act East' and 'Strengthened Neighbourhood' policies of India have led to a strong and renewed political-economic engagement with the states in South and Southeast Asia. In this respect, India has forged strategic partnerships with Afghanistan and Bangladesh in South Asia and with Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam in Southeast Asia. Given the fact that the present study is conducted against the backdrop where China and India fiercely compete for strategic pre-eminence in Sri Lanka, which is India's strategic backyard, the theory of strategic rivalry was chosen as the theoretical framework of the study. The theoretical framework adopted will serve in answering the key questions critical for a systematic and nuanced analysis of Indo-Sri Lanka ties against the Sino-Indian parallel engagement in Sri Lanka.

a) Do China and India view each other as rivals in general and in Sri Lanka in particular?
b) Are they in an intense competition with one another in the IOR in which each side's foreign policy actions are undertaken primarily considering the foreign policy of the other side and not simply because of factual considerations?
c) Do they both perceive each other to be pursuing regional leadership in the IOR, that is, trying to reach a position in which one can exert more influence on economic and political decisions than the other?
d) Does Sri Lanka's foreign policy behaviour, from 2005 to 2019, constitute the salient attributes of hedging behaviour in the wake of China and India's competing engagement.

1.7. Hedging Policy as a Component of Alliance Theory

Scholars have pointed out that the alliance theory brings forth the notion of hedging which is often employed by small states. In relation to small states, hedging refers to a continuing alliance with traditional security partners while aligning themselves in the sphere of economics with an ascending power. Katzenstien (1985) iterates that "states that are generally thought of as less powerful usually have the ability to preserve their political autonomy while integrating into the global economy" (Katzenstein, 1985, p. 203). Tessman (2012) points out that hedging will create a space for a small power that is interested in immediate gain to offset risks and improve its condition in relation to the rising power while avoiding confrontations with existing alliances (Guzansky, 2015).

In recent years, hedging as a concept has gained currency in the discourse surrounding IR. Hedging is often distinguished from concepts such as balancing or bandwagoning to depict the alternative strategies available to, and deployed by, small states facing foreign policy challenges stemming from regional great power competition for influence and dominance (Ciorciari & Haacke, 2019). The notion of hedging arose mainly when scholars attempted to examine the new dynamics of international politics in the post-Cold War period. Chong finds the existing theoretical approaches inadequate to explain the behaviour of small powers in pursuing their foreign policy goals in the context of conflict and competition among regional and global powers (Chong, 2003).

For theorists, hedging attempts to address important questions about the theory and practice related to contemporary IR such as how states will respond to rising powers which might challenge their economic and security interests and how decision-makers on foreign policy will attempt to cope with the security challenges which may arise in uncertain international environments. Traditional security approaches and strategies such as balancing and bandwagoning were unable to answer these questions convincingly because their focus is on how states will, or might, respond to identified threats (David, 1991; Walt, 1990). As such, those theories have been unable to capture and analyse the behaviour of small states facing uncertainties stemming from regional power competition.

Therefore, theorists put forth the notion of hedging to fill this vacuum. The foremost studies conducted in relation to hedging revolved around the Asia-Pacific region, including analyses of Sino-US relations (Foot, 2006; Medeiros, 2005) and Southeast Asian

relations with China, a rising power (Goh, 2005; Kuik, 2008, 2016). Theorists since then have used hedging to understand the behaviour of states in Europe and Eurasia, East and South Asia, the Persian Gulf, and elsewhere (Boon, 2016; Koga, 2018; Korolev, 2016; Toje, 2011).

1.6.1. Differential Conceptualisation of Hedging

Hedging remains a highly influential as well as contentious concept in IR (Ciorciari & Haacke, 2019; Lim & Cooper, 2015). The broad agreement among scholars is that hedging can capture various minute novelties in IR, as meant the term has now become widely used in the literature. Nonetheless, the employment of the term still remains loose and blurred in certain important respects (Chong, 2003; Gerstl, 2020). A critical scrutiny of the extant literature on hedging reveals the following varied ways in which the concept was understood and applied by scholars and commentators of IR.

1.6.2. Hedging as a Mixed Strategy

Hedging as a strategy is sometimes confused with a balancing strategy, though there is a fine line between hedging and balancing. Several studies have presented hedging as a mixed strategy where governments engage and drift away to a major or rising power both economically and diplomatically while relying on fallback security measures as a form of insurance (Kuik, 2008; Medeiros, 2005; Tunsjø, 2017). In that sense, hedging involves a two-pronged strategy used to navigate between an existing power and an emerging power in a region or on the international stage.

1.6.3. Hedging as Security Strategy

Some of the leading scholars of hedging tend to argue that the centrality of hedging lies in its security strategy as it aims to mitigate security risks in uncertain strategic conditions (Ciorciari & Haacke, 2019; Kuik, 2021, 2023). However, there are other scholars who look at hedging as strategy seeking security assurance subscribed to by small states or middle powers, quite often when they seek to navigate through complex triangular relations with China and the United States (Goh, 2005; Tessman, 2012).

According to Boon (2016), hedging lies in the attempts a state makes to insure itself against specific pre-identified, undesirable, and dangerous outcomes in an uncertain

environment (Boon, 2016). As a strategy, hedging enables states to deal with uncertainties by falling back on a set of policy tools which, while aiding further bilateral cooperation. This also entails competitive facets designed to prepare states against potential security threats which they will have to face because of their partners. The various policy-related tools include things like limited bandwagoning, binding engagement, economic pragmatism, dominance denial, and indirect balancing (Kuik, 2008).

1.6.4. Hedging as Alignment Behaviour

Theorists dealing with alignment politics contend that states tend to hedge in a context where they pursue limited or ambiguous alignments vis-á-vis one or more major powers (Ciorciari, 2010; Kuik, 2016; Lim & Cooper, 2015). Hence, hedging entails a form of security alignment where small states seek to forge limited or ambiguous relations with and between great regional powers (Lim & Mukherjee, 2019).

However, this understanding does not represent all the important properties of hedging as an alignment choice, since it narrows the focus to mere alignment practice which is just one of many typical aspects of hedging.

1.6.5. Hedging as a Strategy to deal with Vulnerabilities

According to this approach, hedging is an act on the part of states to address specific strategic and economic vulnerabilities stemming from certain circumstances. For example, states might look for means to curtail possible ways their energy supply might be curtailed or cut off (Salman & Geeraerts, 2015; Tessman & Wolfe, 2011; Tunsjø, 2013). Several theorists have presented this aspect in their work. Goh (2005) claims that hedging can be a set of strategies aimed at avoiding a situation where states make a straightforward decision on choosing alternatives in terms of balancing, bandwagoning, and neutrality. In Goh's (2005) definition, middle powers would usually tend to avoid explicitly supporting one side so as to avoid the risks of antagonising the other. According to Le Hong (2013),"as a policy instrument, hedging generally includes four major elements: economic pragmatism; direct engagement; hard balancing; and soft balancing" (Le Hong, 2013, p. 344).

1.6.6. Why do states hedge?

Among the widely held rationales for hedging behaviour, the means to optimise between economic opportunities and strategic protection constitute the foremost rationale, specifically when it comes to small and middle powers. Le Hong (2013) has further categorised the hedging types of middle-skills into soft hedging, hard hedging, and double hedging. Soft hedging, for instance, occurs when middle powers attempt to increase their influence on great powers and promote regional stability by using other great powers. However, there are other potential reasons why states seek to hedge between two competing major powers. Of these, the perceived security threat or risk and protection, and enhancement of domestic government or regime legitimacy are worth mentioning (Kuik, 2008; Lim & Mukherjee, 2019). In particular, in the recent past, scholars and commentators on hedging have highlighted the importance of domestic sources of hedging in analysing the foreign policy of small and middle powers (Murphy, 2017).

1.6.7. Does Hedging entail a mix of Balancing and Bandwagoning?

While certain studies state that the concepts remain mutually exclusive, others indicate balancing to possesses a military component. Balancing in that sense becomes a wider hedging strategy which also contains economic and diplomatic engagement. This is to say that as a foreign policy strategy hedging encompasses a range of approaches adopted by a (small) state to maximize the gains out of the competition between two hostile states/powers. In turn, becomes a wider hedging strategy which also contains economic and diplomatic engagement. Some analysts describe Japan and Australia as hedging vis-á-vis China (Dittmer, 2012; Matsuda, 2012) although their continuous involvement in strong military alliances with the United States is aimed mostly at controlling and curtailing Beijing. A thin line separates hedging from bandwagoning. This line would disappear if hedging were deemed to encompass any strategy that mixes cooperative and self-protective elements.

The literature on alliance theory brings forth the idea that there is a possibility for small states to employ a policy of hedging. For instance, Tesman (2012) argues “in order to offset risks and improve its situation concerning the rising power while avoiding a major confrontation (with existing alliances) hedging allows a small power, interested in immediate gain” (Guzansky, 2015, p. 120). In this sense, hedging is not something that is

akin to ‘fence sitting’ when faced with the dilemma where two simultaneously rising rivals compete for influence and domination. Also, it is not opportunistic where benefit-maximising occurs at the expense of strategic autonomy of small states. Rather, hedging is an act of navigating between two rising rivals by effectively and skilfully employing both the approaches of limited bandwagoning and balancing almost at the same time.

In short, bandwagoning is employed to extract benefits from an economically ascending power, while balancing is used to keep the other rival power’s long-standing vested interest in the small state unaffected. In brief, hedging’s operational definition remains rather loose and ambiguous though hedging has been now defined extensively as a concept. Thus, further analytical studies are necessary to assess how hedging has been used in relation to small states’ foreign policy behaviour.

1.6.8. When is Hedging Preferable?

As a method, hedging is best applicable to a state system which is anarchic (Ilievska & Zhao, 2023), because it provides an opportunity for middle and small powers interested in immediate gains (Guzansky, 2015), to curtail risks and improve their standing in relation to rising powers whilst avoiding major conflict or confrontation. This strategy is different from what is known as pure opportunism; a strategy that focuses on the state’s survival. When a weak state subscribes to hedging strategy, its ability to influence its senior partner is secondary as opposed to the level of security gained against the adversary. However, some theorists argue that smaller powers should try to use either balancing or bandwagoning strategies when conducting their relations with bigger powers to ensure their own security (Kuik, 2008). Others suggest that small states may adopt a hedging strategy to secure themselves against a bigger power or a potential challenger (Guzansky, 2015).

To sum up the above discussion, the concept of hedging has extensively and to some extent excessively been researched over the past three decades from different and disparate points of view. This has culminated in many forms of understanding, application, and eventual theorisation of the concept rendering it to become like a ‘sponge’ that absorbs anything under the label ‘hedging’. Multiple factors are responsible for the different conceptualisations of and approaches to hedging (Telci & Rakipoglu, 2021). First, the hedging strategy is used in different ways by different states. Second, there are different

purposes for states to deploy hedging depending on the context (regional and interstate), the capacity of the state using it, and the goals to be achieved. For instance, while some (Goh, 2005) conceptualise hedging as essentially a balancing act, others (Le Hong, 2013;Koga, 2017) see it primarily an expedient act (i.e., a more fluid act shifting between balancing, bandwagoning, and neutrality). The divergence becomes even more complicated when the extant studies explain the aim and objectives of hedging. For instance, Goh (2005) and Kuik (2021;2023) view hedging from perspectives of security threat and posit it as a strategy of crisis management or risk mitigation.

1.6.9 Hedging as a Concept and Strategy in this Study

As conceptually understood and empirically analysed, hedging in general connotes a middle position foreign policy choice pursued by states facing uncertain circumstances due to great power competition. In the context of Southeast Asia where many of the post-Cold War studies on hedging such as Boni, 2021; Lim & Mukherjee, 2019; Shahid & Sakib, 2023 treats hedging as an engagement strategy pursued by small or weaker states to navigate between China and the US for disparate purposes. In the case of China, it has economic benefits while the latter (US) has security needs.

As such, hedging per se is a neutral and non-alignment-based policy aimed at optimising economic benefits by cooperating with rising powers while counteracting against the rising powers by cooperating with established powers in matters related to security. Therefore, small powers opt to use hedging as an alternative option or policy to the traditional security strategies of balancing and bandwagoning (which might imply supporting either of the two competing powers). As a rational actor, small states are more likely to hedge only when opportunities and threats coexist and the absence of any one of the two is an insufficient incentive for small states to hedge. The risk-gain duality of the geopolitical uncertainty therefore drives small states to maintain an equidistance between two competing powers by prudently signalling ambiguity about their cooperation.

Therefore, as a foreign policy behaviour by a rational state actor in a specific strategic situation of great power competition, hedging is contrasted with balancing and bandwagoning in two major ways as illustrated in Figure 1.4. First, balancing and bandwagoning as security strategy entail two straight forward positions or choices pursued by both small and great powers especially when they are faced with security threats and

economic opportunity. In the case of Sri Lanka, with the country faced political threats and pressures. Second, while balancing entails strategies and policies of push back to the challenging (rising) power by cooperating with the reigning (established) power, bandwagoning refers to the opposite act of riding coattails with the rising power.

Thus, as stated before, one distinct and important denominator of these two strategies is 'taking sides' between two competing powers as opposed to hedging which is akin to neutral engagement (cooperation). As some theorists contend, no state pursues a purely balancing or bandwagoning policy and small states dislike being in such situations (Kuik, 2021; Lim & Mukherjee, 2019). Rather, they (states) often pursue partial balancing and bandwagoning (Kuik, 2023). Hence, hedging is a novel and disparate foreign policy strategy distinct from the two often confused and interchanged security strategies that have been in use for long.

Applied to the case at hand, Sri Lanka, a small maritime state situated geo-strategically in the Indian Ocean, is affected by the Sino-Indian competition in the IOR which extends to the parallel engagement of China and India in Sri Lanka. In response, the GoSL had deployed hedging to create and carve out a middle path which would allow Sri Lanka to avoid depending on any one regional power. This strategy, particularly enabled Sri Lanka during the final civil war to avoid any major confrontation with China and India whilst maximising economic and security relations with the two regional rivals.

In particular, the parallel rise of China and India has significant implications for Sri Lanka as it has re-ignited their decades-old rivalry to a new height, engulfing India's sphere of influence-South Asia and IOR. In fact, the Sino-Indian power rivalry in IOR and Sri Lanka's proximity to India, which considers Sri Lanka as its strategic backyard, has doubled the prospects as well as challenges for Sri Lanka in the field of foreign policy. Thus, Sri Lanka's geostrategic location once again has reached high significance at the outset of the Sino-Indian power rivalry in the IOR.

However, after the end of the civil war, Sri Lanka sought out credible and capable partners for development and diplomatic support, which introduced new foreign policy challenges. These challenges significantly affected Sri Lanka's war time hedging policy in that the MR regime shifted from its earlier policies and strategies concerning relations with China and India. For instance, Sri Lanka was able to get both China and India to both

support its military campaign against the LTTE from 2005-2009. But Sri Lanka was unable to maintain this equilibrium after the civil war. These developments indicate a clear departure from Sri Lanka's conventional foreign policy behaviour characterised by bandwagoning with either of the two ideological camps at the height of the Cold War in the South Asian arena.

As Korolev (2019) argues, small states and middle powers generally have more room to hedge in a relatively unipolar system featuring peace among the major powers (Korolev, 2019, p. 420). The present study was conducted within a system of evolving multipolarity featuring peaceful relationships among major powers with intermittent territorial, trade, and climate-related disputes and disagreements. The China-India engagement in Sri Lanka appears to be linked to the Sino-Indian rivalry which was activated due to China's economic rise at the turn of the twenty first century. China's assertive posture and quest to be viewed as the pre-eminent power in Asia, and thus more influential and powerful than India and other Asian powers like Japan, has come to be viewed as threatening the rules-based order, and shifted it onto a collision path with these powers.

Japan, along with India and Australia, are the principal powers in the IPR seeking individually and collectively to contain China. India feels more threatened by China's rise and resultant belligerent posture on its north and southern theatres in which Sri Lanka occupies a vital place geo-strategically, on the one hand. On the other hand, compelled by post-war imperatives for development and reconstruction amid severe international pressure for accountability on war crimes allegations, Sri Lanka was left only with the choice of engaging China and India which were already competing for dominance elsewhere in the region.

Further, almost all the studies dealing with small states' hedging behaviour vis-à-vis China have focused more on the risk-threat aspect. But, in fact, hedging is a foreign policy response to the uncertainty in the global or regional order emanating from power rivalry involving great powers usually accompanied by opportunities and challenges for small states in the region. For instance, Sri Lanka, which is witnessing the brewing Sino-Indian power rivalry, views the rivalry more as an opportunity than a threat given its economic and political imperatives during and after the civil war. Further, the absence of

effective regional institutional arrangements in Southern Asia to deal with regional issues like geopolitical shocks tends to make the situation even more complicated. In particular, states like Sri Lanka are more vulnerable in such circumstances due to their smallness and geo-strategic location.

Against this distinct backdrop, the study charts to examine the foreign policy behaviour of Sri Lanka as a small state wedged between China and India, two regional giants geared to compete for strategic primacy in South Asia and the IOR. In doing so, the study draws attention to foreign policy options Sri Lanka adopted in response to the China-Indian parallel engagement under two different regimes (MR and NU) from 2005 to 2019. Besides, hedging policy will be deployed to explore Sri Lanka's foreign policy behaviour within the parameters of the arguments of the realist school. Accordingly, states (regardless of their size and capability) are viewed as rational actors acting in an anarchic system. When they are faced with uncertainty created by rising great powers, they should choose between the rising great power and the established great power. This means that states either choose to balance or bandwagon to survive in the system (Waltz, 1979). However, given the case specificity and the assertion of empirical literature on hedging, the present study is anchored in the mainstream argument and understanding by Lim and Mukherjee (2019) and Kuik (2021; 2023) for conceptualisation and operationalisation.

Lim and Mukherjee (2019) propose that small states tend to pursue hedging strategy in such cases (in the absence of identified threat in the form of military and security) to maximise their gains in terms of economic benefit and autonomy to best serve their purpose (Lim & Mukherjee, 2019a). To support their assertion, they have specifically focused on Sri Lanka and the Maldives to show how have these two small states have striven to manage their relations with China and India (see Figure 1.4), while forging positive relationships with each major power and taking countervailing measures to guard their autonomy.

However, Kuik (2021; 2023) examining the strategic behaviour of the Southeast Asian states, seeks to refine the existing understanding of hedging. In defining hedging, he equates it to an act of insurance sought by small or weaker states to mitigate risks emanating from the power rivalry between a rising and an established power at the regional or global level. In particular, he defined the characteristic elements or features of hedging

as an alignment strategy used by small or weaker states. Accordingly, hedging entails (a) not taking sides among competing powers; (b) adopting opposite and counteracting measures; and (c) using the mutually counterbalancing acts to preserve gains and cultivate a "fallback" position (Kuik, 2021, p. 302). Thus, hedging entails a neutral but counteracting act or approach directed toward preparing for the best while expecting the worst.

The lack of consensus among the scholars of IR about how hedging should be defined and applied coupled with the vague theorisation of its dominant understanding (Jones & Jenne, 2022) warrants a cogent understanding of Sri Lanka's alignment behaviour. To this end, hedging is subject to (re)conceptualisation and operationalisation based on the understanding held by mainstream studies including Lim and Mukherjee (2019) and Kuik (2021; 2023) on hedging and its core elements.

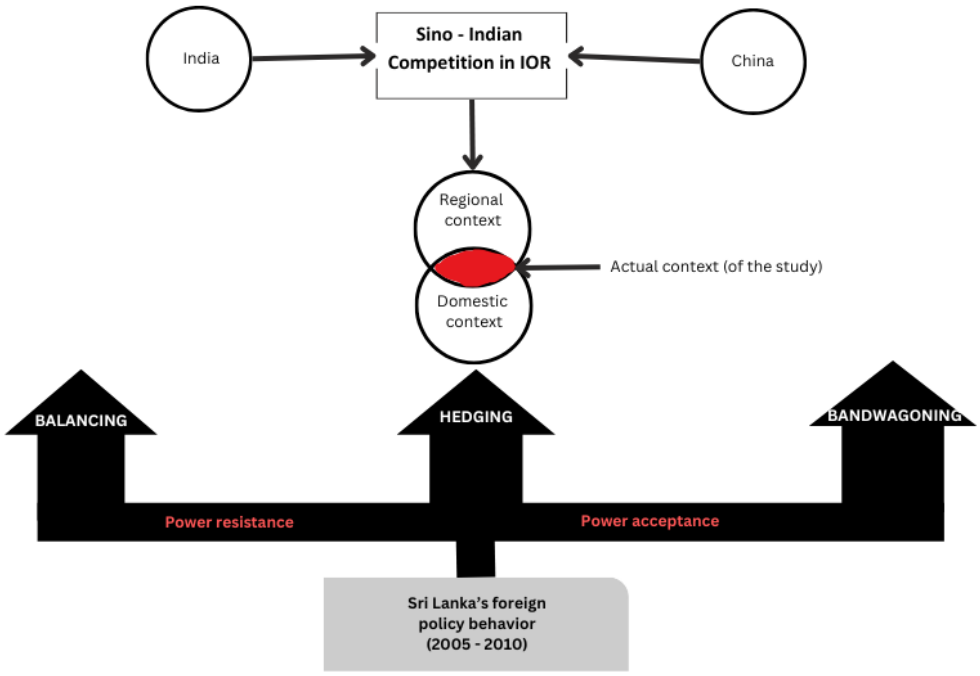

Figure 1. 6 Conceptualisation of Context Specific Scope Conditions

Source: Author (2024)

As the Figure 1.4 illustrates, hedging is defined as a 'middle path foreign policy' between the two extremes of balancing and bandwagoning driven by a mix of calculated and instinctive behaviour. Meanwhile, hedging entails the hedger's neutrality and cooperation toward competing powers. It is also an opposite act aimed at maximising benefits while reducing risks resulting from big power competition.

In that sense, hedging entails a tightrope balance between rising and reigning powers by cultivating an equilibrium aimed at avoiding direct and active balancing and bandwagoning to better serve the hedger's foreign policy goals. This form of hedging is coded as active hedging. Similarly, when hedging features flexibility and expedience, it is coded as 'passive hedging'. This flexibility and expedience can take two opposite paths. The first is the dominance-acceptance path by which the hedger seeks to ride coattails with the rising power for the purpose of optimising political, diplomatic, and economic benefits. Dominance-resistance, the second path, aims at creating a balance of influence to reduce pressure from the challenging power through non-military means. This means that hedging may take the form of both limited balancing and bandwagoning featuring selective engagement and limited resistance. Therefore, hedging and bandwagoning in their both active and passive forms connote a non-military means of engagement.

In the context of South Asia including Sri Lanka, the alignment strategy basically entails the above three policies: hedging, balancing, and bandwagoning in varying degrees (Gamage, 2017; Kandaudahewa, 2023; Lim & Mukherjee, 2019). In the case of Sri Lanka's interaction with China and India during the period in question, all the three alignment policies were discernible in different and distinct forms.

When operationalised, hedging is measured to be not only a middle or neutral position but also an opposite position of cooperation with two concurrently competing powers. In that sense, as a middle position, hedging has two choices – benefit-maximising and risk-minimising. Benefit-maximising choices form the central activity aimed at increasing economic, diplomatic, and political benefits from a positive relationship with a major power (Lim & Mukherjee, 2019). However, the risk-minimising choices are intended to reduce pressure in an undesirable situation. A hedger state would commonly pursue these options simultaneously so that their effects would reverse each other. Opposing measures, therefore, are followed by the goal of displaying an image of not

tilting with or against any power, thus avoiding the risk of betting on a single horse when the regional order is plagued by uncertainty (Kuik, 2021, 2023).

Lastly, as mentioned above, balancing signifies the act of containment against a rising power by siding with the reigning power through enhancing hard power abilities both internally and externally (Lim & Mukherjee, 2019). In the context of South Asia there exists no formal military and security alliances among the states, and the Sino-Indian rivalry in the region means different things to different states. For instance, Sri Lanka views China's entry in Sri Lanka's final civil war and the aftermath not as a threat but as a window of economic and political opportunity. Therefore, balancing is to be observed and measured in the study in relation to its political and economic sense alone.

The above conceptualisation and operationalisation of hedging is applicable to small states' foreign policy behaviour under specific circumstances; a region with two or more major powers competing for dominance or primacy. In the case of China-India engagement in Sri Lanka from 2005 to 2019, it is an extension of the Sino-Indian rivalry for strategic primacy fought elsewhere in the region. The expansion of the Sino-Indian rivalry in the Indian Ocean in the early 2000s took place when China, a rising great power, made a strategic entry in the IOR where Sri Lanka's strategic centrality and geographic proximity to India, an established the most powerful regional actor, was faced with great foreign policy challenges. This complex nature of Sri Lanka's hedging behaviour is shown in Figure 1.5.

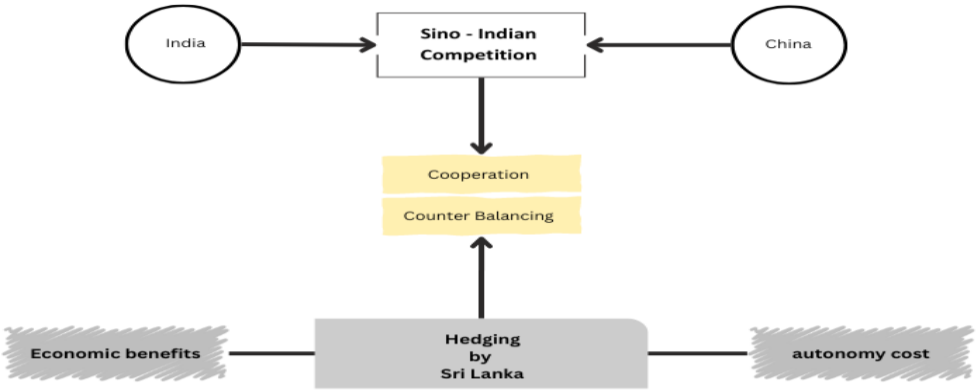

Figure 1. 7 Conceptualisation of Sri Lanka's Hedging Behaviour

Source: Author (2024)

1.8. Identification of the Dependent and the Independent Variables

The independent variables (IVs) of the present study were identified through theories pertaining to strategic rivalry and hedging policy. These IVs were derived from secondary literature and were customised to suit the present research context. For example, resources and commerce bands were amalgamated to create the variable entitled parallel involvement by India and China. The hedging policy was used to create the two variables entitled 'active hedging' and 'passive hedging'. The larger variable entitled political ideology found in the theory of rivalry was adapted as the change of regime type. Political dominance, military capabilities, and related variables were combined to create the variables dealing with geo-strategic interest. Military expansionism in the form of power projection and other associated variables were combined into geo-strategic significance.

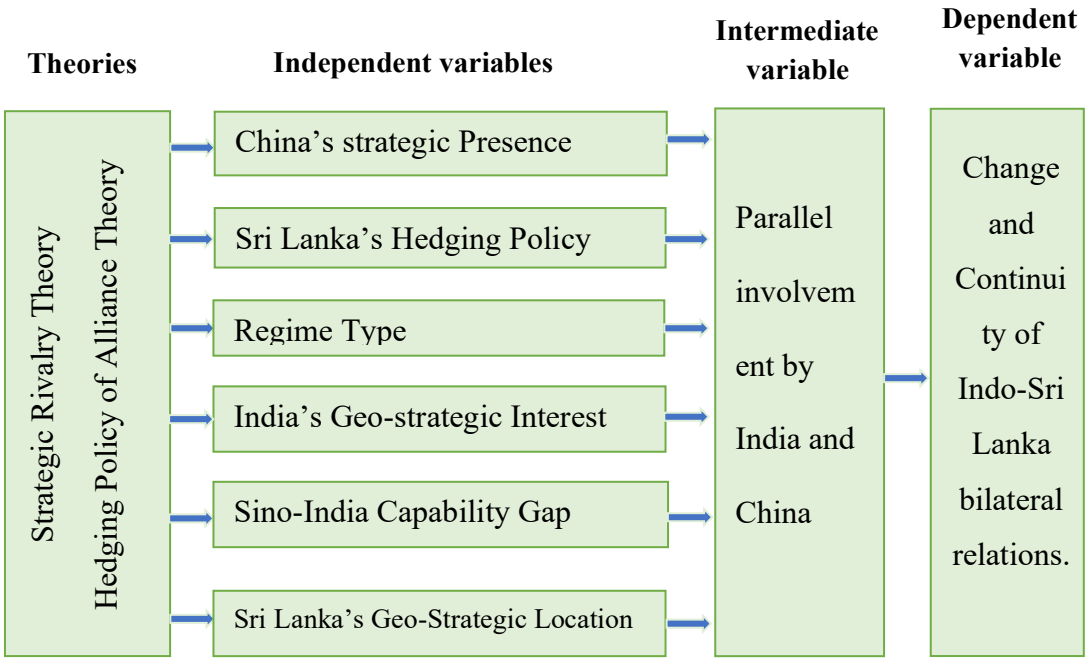

Figure 1. 8 Independent and Dependent Variables of the Study

Source: Author (2020)

1.7.1. Operationalisation of Variables

Dependent Variable: Fluctuation of Indo-Sri Lanka Bilateral Relations

Fluctuation comprises two aspects. One is positive and the second is negative. Positive fluctuation refers to deepening and widening existing bilateral relations. Deepening refers to strengthening existing relations on traditional or conventional areas of cooperation like socioeconomic (trade and commerce) and cultural ties. Widening means incorporation of a wide array of fields and areas into bilateral relations such as strategic cooperation, strategic investments, and security cooperation. The term negative fluctuation refers to phenomena other than socioeconomic and cultural ties. These are the rest of the bilateral ties which are put under strain and friction from time to time. This variable then becomes the variable which is dependent on a host of other independent variables.

1.7.2. Independent Variables

Based on the theories of strategic rivalry and hedging policy, the following IVs were identified and formulated:

a. Parallel involvement by India and China

Fluctuation of Indo-Sri Lanka bilateral relations is dependent on how close China becomes to Sri Lanka. When there is a parallel involvement of China and India in Sri Lanka, Indo-Sri Lanka relations tend to change.

b. China's economic statecraft

Through its economic statecraft, China creates its strategic space and that directly has a bearing on Indo-Sri Lanka relations. With the inception of the BRI, this variable became more relevant in affecting Indo-Sri Lanka ties over time.

c. Active hedging and passive hedging.

Sri Lanka's hedging policy/strategy forms an integral component of IVs though not of DV. However, it displays "fluctuation", which is a characteristic of DV. Active hedging refers to acts of cooperation and counteracting with both China and India concurrently using ambiguous signalling. This is most relevant to the final civil war period. With the rise of China as an alternative development partner, Sri Lanka leaned towards China, while drifting away from India, the traditional development partner of Sri Lanka. Passive hedging by Sri Lanka refers to the idiosyncratic deployment of hedging by distinctively blending, balancing, and bandwagoning in an attempt to countervail China against India or vice versa. Hence, these independent variables have a direct bearing on Indo-Sri Lanka relations and shaping the nature of the relationship.

d. Change of regime type

The political regime changes between UNP and SLFP-led governments meant change of ideology as well as foreign policy towards China and India. Therefore, this variable directly correlates to the fluctuation of the Indo-Sri Lanka bilateral relations.

e. Geo-strategic interest

India considers the IOR including Sri Lanka as its strategic backyard. This attitude compels India to maintain its own sphere of interest and influence in the region and over Sri Lanka, which affects Indo-Sri Lanka ties at a larger level.

f. Geo-strategic significance

Sri Lanka's geographical position in the middle of the Indian Ocean bestows various opportunities and challenges on Sri Lanka. These opportunities and challenges have become more significant over time considering the Sino-Indian relationship. Likewise, these opportunities and challenges, and China's growing influence affect the relationship between India and Sri Lanka.

To analyse the interrelations between variables, a customised methodology is applied (see Chapter Three).

1.9. Summary

In this chapter, the two main components of the study were discussed: the theoretical framework of the study, which consists of two components, i.e., strategic rivalry theory and the hedging policy of alliance theory; and Sri Lanka's relations with China and India. The review of the large volume of literature on strategic rivalry and hedging policy demonstrated the fact that the two theoretical approaches fundamentally deal with state behaviour in an external context. Strategic rivalries involve a complex and competitive interaction between roughly equally capable states striving for a pre-eminent position economically, militarily, and ideologically, whereas the hedging theory involves the foreign policy behaviour of small and medium powers in the face of regional or great power rivalry for domination.

Moreover, the main section— strategic rivalry and hedging policy— was further divided into several subsections. As for the strategic rivalry, it was discussed under several subheadings such as its characteristic features, followed by the relevance and rationale of the usage of the theory for the present study. Likewise, hedging policy is principally conceptualised as a foreign policy strategy which small states utilise to navigate their foreign relations in the face of competition between two powers that are competing against each other. In doing so, key characteristics of hedging as a strategy were examined under several subheadings including hedging as a mixed strategy of balancing and bandwagoning. A critical review of the existing theoretical literature both on strategic rivalry and hedging was conducted which, thereby, provided ample room to build the present study on how Sri Lanka as a small power with remarkable geo-strategic importance

conducts its foreign relations, especially with its two competing neighbours (India and China).

In summary, India-Sri Lanka bilateral ties are generally marked by ups and downs although Indo-Sri Lanka ties form one of the cornerstones of Sri Lanka's foreign policy. While social and cultural ties along with trade and commerce remained steady, political and security ties underwent strain in this context. The next chapter presents the methodology employed for conducting the study.

CHAPTER TWO

Methods of Inquiry and Research Design

2.1. Introduction

This chapter explains the methodology employed in this study. The philosophical foundation of this research will be explained at the onset of this chapter. Further, it covers the strategies employed in selecting the research design, deciding the data sources, collecting data, and the coding and analysing of the collected raw data. The present study's research questions were formulated with a view to identifying the significant associations in relation to the change and continuity of Indo-Sri Lanka relations in the backdrop of China's increasing involvement in Sri Lanka. Hence, for the analysis of the Indo-Sri Lanka relations in the context of China's growing involvement in Sri Lanka, the qualitative methodology was used.

Data collection methods were employed to obtain both primary and secondary data, and these were analysed using thematic analysis. This chapter discusses the rationale behind the selection of a qualitative methodology for the present study. The chapter also discusses the appropriateness of using semi-structured interviews and case studies as tools to collect data. Finally, the chapter addresses concerns regarding the reliability and validity of data, data triangulation, generalisability, research clearance, ethical considerations, anonymity, and confidentiality in relation to the methodology applied. Thus, this chapter can be considered the blueprint of the research process employed in the study.

2.2. Philosophical Foundation and Choice of Methodology

Research methodology is associated with the process of studying a particular phenomenon and the interrelated stages on which a claim for knowledge is based. Saunders and Lewis (2009) claim that research is a multistage process (Saunders et al., 2009). A research study is carried out with a view to understanding social phenomena (Creswell, 2003) and it particularly involves the choices a researcher makes about the cases to be

studied and methods of data collection and analysis that need to be employed in the process (Silverman, 2004, p. 2).

Researchers see the reality of the world from different perspectives depending on their discipline. Thus, they employ various theoretical and empirical viewpoints in interpreting the world. These perspectives or viewpoints eventually build the conceptual framework used to examine the research problem. In fact, the method answers the question 'how should I go about the research problem?' This is known as the 'world view' or the perspective, thinking, or set of shared beliefs that underpin the meaning and interpretation of the research. Kuhn (1963) refers to this as the philosophical process of thinking employed in the research? or the research paradigm.

Uyangoda (2015) claims that we choose to explore the world based on our philosophical assumptions related to ontology and epistemology. "In forming the researcher's view of the world, the above assumptions as well as methodology becomes very important" (Uyangoda, 2015:17). As such, a research project should have a research design which captures the process and intentions of the research, which could include testing theories or hypotheses or building theory. Creswell (2003) has categorised research design into three distinct groups such as qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods design. This study employs a qualitative design with different knowledge claims, strategies of inquiry, and methods of data collection and analysis.

Methodology plays a crucial role in scientific research. The research problem and questions must be answered scientifically by applying the most appropriate methodology and associated methods. The validity and reliability of findings in any research depend upon the methodology in the data collection and data analysis. The methodology connects empirical data to the research problem(s) through which ultimate conclusions and recommendations are made (Yin, 2009). The researcher's ability to form and examine research problems depends on their ontological and epistemological perceptions.

Creswell argues that research is situated within the philosophical position, strategy of inquiry, and research methods (Creswell & Clark, 2011). "Knowledge claims' refer to the philosophical presuppositions the researcher has about knowledge. The researcher views the world and reality based on these presuppositions and makes assumptions about the nature of the world and reality– this process defines their ontology" (Creswell,

2018:20). Similarly, the assumptions that we make on the best means of investigating the world and reality forms our epistemology, in which, the values embedded in the process form our axiology, and the way of studying this reality defines our methodology (Uyangoda, 2015). As such, three distinctive discussions on knowledge claims are used to rationalise different methodologies employed in research. Those are positivism/post-positivism, interpretivism/ constructivism, and pragmatism (Creswell, 2003, 2007; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Uyangoda, 2015).

Ontology refers to the assumption of how one understands or tends to understand what exists and shares it as knowledge to others (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). A researcher's decision on where to situate themselves in relation to the ontological and epistemological paradigms has direct implications on the study's methodology. Therefore, methodology refers to 'how' one attempts to understand human society. Given the nature of the present study, the researcher has looked at reality as a social creation, one that is constructed through language, thus, aligning the study's ontological and epistemological positions with social constructivism.

In social science literature, two general research approaches are widely applied, namely, quantitative and qualitative approaches4 (Berg, 2007; Brewerton & Millward, 2001; Bryman, 1989; Creswell, 2003, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This study employs the qualitative research methodology for several reasons. First, doing so allows the researcher to adopt a more comprehensive, realistic, and critical perspective in analysing interstate relations. A qualitative methodology enables the study to explore how actors give meaning to their actions and behaviour. This is ideal when analysing the relationship between India and Sri Lanka, which has been quite close at times, and severely strained at other times, not only due to third party rivalry, but also because of disparities in political ideologies of the two governments.

Furthermore, to make a consistent framework for the study and obtain a clear understanding of the outcome of the interest fluctuation in Indo-Sri Lanka bilateral relations, an analysis of theoretical writings related to the field was done. This enabled the researcher to identify hitherto under researched areas, and clearly identify the research gap for the study. This was possible as the study employed a qualitative approach.

Therefore, the semi-structured interviews were selected as the strategy of inquiry in this study. Thus, interview questions were structured in line with the research questions of the study while allowing space for respondents to express their independent views.

2.3. Research Design and Strategy

A research design is a blueprint that stipulates the process of the research and sets the framework for the study. The present study is aligned towards social interpretivism/constructivism, which is the systematic analysis of sociopolitical action or behaviour or real-world life through the direct observation involving people in natural settings, done with the view to understanding and interpreting how human beings construct meanings from social phenomena (Neuman, 1997). The interpretivist approach, or constructivism, is the dominant philosophical base used in qualitative research. This approach enables the researcher to interpret evidence from different perspectives and construct meanings from data, texts, expressions, or archives. This study uses the interpretivist approach to study the Indo-Lanka relations from 2005 to 2019 in the context of China's increasing presence in Sri Lanka's politics, development, and economy.

Creswell (2003:43) claims that "qualitative researchers are primarily concerned with processes and meaning making. Thus, qualitative researchers study how people make sense of their lives and experiences and provide meanings for lived experiences in a social setting." In fact, the qualitative method enables the researcher to conduct an in-depth study of the particular issues/social phenomena (Patton, 1990). Here, "the researcher is directly involved in the process of data collection and analysis which often requires extensive fieldwork. Hence, the qualitative approach tends to be descriptive, and the researcher is extensively involved in its process – a key feature of the inductive approach" (Creswell, 2003:44).

The qualitative methodology comprises an array of research designs. The researcher has the freedom to choose the most appropriate design for their study. Furthermore, in a qualitative study, the researcher establishes a rapport with the participants which enables them to gain a comprehensive understanding of the realities studied. Additionally, a qualitative approach enables discussion between the researcher and the participants, which helps the researcher to gather insights to better understand the

themes under study from the participants' point of view. The researcher can encourage participants to speak openly and express their ideas, assumptions, experiences, and opinions on the different aspects studied in the research (Berg, 2007; Bryman, 1989; Creswell, 2003, 2018).

A qualitative data analysis best suits this study as it focuses on the relationship maintained by two sovereign states (Sri Lanka and India) in the backdrop of the increasing influence of a third powerful sovereign state (China). The complexity of this relationship increases due to the ongoing geopolitical rivalry between India and China. Hence, given the complex and dynamic nature of the phenomenon, which involves dyadic (China-India) and triadic (China-India-Sri Lanka) relations, it is appropriate to use a qualitative data analysis for the study. The data collection methods employed in this study are presented below.

2.3.1 Primary Data: Sources, Methods, and Coverage

Primary data plays a crucial role in research, forming the core of the thesis. Secondary data on the other hand, has the potential to provide solid evidence in the process of presentation, interpretation, and conclusion of data. Thus, the careful triangulation of both primary and secondary data enhances the reliability and clarity of the key arguments while providing insights into the phenomenon studied. Moreover, primary data contributes immensely by;

1. facilitating a systematic and nuanced analysis of the issue in question, that is, how Indo-Lanka bilateral ties are affected by China's involvement in Sri Lanka in the postwar period, in particular.
2. assisting to position the data analysis between normative and empirical arguments and evidence, thereby bridging the gap which exists in the academic literature on the trends of Indo-Sri Lanka relations from 2005-2019.
3. complementing the source and base of the analytical framework of the study by capturing the fluctuations in China-India and China-Sri Lanka relations.

The primary data was gathered from 36 respondents who were experts in the area under study. They included state officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, diplomats, university academics, political observers/commentators, and media personnel.

Respondents were selected using the purposive sampling technique, which was deemed the most appropriate method of data collection as the respondents had to have an expert knowledge on the political, economic, and sociocultural developments of the three states under study. The purposive sampling method is a common technique used in qualitative research to gather reliable, rich, and relevant data. As such, in this study, I selected the respondents purposively under the above-mentioned category. Thus, I used my personal contacts to reach out to media personnel, political observers, and academics who are most relevant to my study. At the same time, I used my institutional affiliation to meet diplomats, namely, the relevant officials in the Indian and Chinese diplomatic missions to gather relevant and necessary data. Likewise, their expertise, exposure, and their experience related to the subject under study was taken into consideration.

A semi-structured interview guide was designed to facilitate in-person or virtual interviews, depending on the preference of the interviewee. For instance, the officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and diplomats based in Colombo and Kandy were interviewed using virtual platforms, due to the constraints caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Similarly, political observers and media personnel were interviewed either physically and virtually depending on the individual respondent's convenience and availability. Table 2.1 provides an overview of the key informants of the study.

Categories	**Background of the study participants**	**No. of participants**
IDP	Indian Diplomatic Personnel	04
CDP	Chinese Diplomatic Personnel	04
SLDP	Sri Lankan Diplomatic Personnel	04
PA	Political Analysts	06
PO	Political Observers	06
MP	Media Personnel	12
Total		36

Table 2. 1 List of key informants of the study

Source: Author (2019)

Further, a questionnaire was sent to political observers and media personnel, and they were given time to prepare detailed answers for each question. Another questionnaire was used for diplomats and government officials attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In general, interviews were carried out in English, with the exception of some being done in Sinhalese or Tamil. Interviews done in local languages were translated into English without distorting the meaning of the statements. Two independent translators were employed for this purpose.

The diplomats mostly justified their respective state's position in matters concerning the region of the Indian Ocean, while political analysts, political commentators, and media personnel presented critical viewpoints on the increasing presence of China and India in Sri Lanka and on India's influence on Sri Lanka's socio-economic and political matters. Diplomats of the Embassy of China in Sri Lanka were rather hesitant to discuss political matters regarding Indo-China relations. When questions were posed regarding the impacts of the increasing presence of China in Sri Lanka, they mostly declined answering, remained silent, or skipped the questions stating that they were uncomfortable answering such questions as diplomats. A similar situation was observed among Indian diplomats, but they were able to answer most of the important questions of the study.

Sri Lankan diplomats also expressed reservations when answering questions on sensitive matters. They expressed concerns of facing issues from their superiors. This sense of caution was commonly visible among diplomats. Hence, the researcher used various methods such as interviews through formal channels, information gathering to collect the relevant data from the staff members of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Although 12 media personnel were interviewed for this study, most of the data gathered from them was irrelevant. Hence, so I decided to incorporate only the most relevant quotes and information obtained from the media personnel are included in the study. In the context of this study, 'political observers' refer to individuals from think tanks who study and publish reports on the political developments of the region. They keenly observe the presence of China and India in Sri Lanka and study their impacts on the Sri Lankan political, economic, and social arenas. Some political observers attached to these institutes were interviewed for the study.

Additionally, several political analysts who are academics from different universities in Sri Lanka were interviewed. They enabled the researcher to gather critical views on the topic under study. Data gathered was coded in line with the research questions to enable an adequate and systematic analysis of the research questions during the data analysis stage. The data analysis, therefore, progressed through a step-by-step process. This was helpful given the dyadic and triadic nature of the interactions between China, India, and Sri Lanka from 2005 to 2019. Moreover, the researcher was careful to preserve the original meanings of the respondents' claims, and to minimise any possibilities of exaggeration, distortion, and misquoting. Also, archival data and evidence were gathered from selected virtual and physical information resource centres using process tracing techniques.

Next, a cross-data analysis was done, and it composed data presentation, interpretation, and iteration based on both primary and secondary data. This method used for data analysis provided meaning to the concepts employed in the study and served to discover common as well as specific dynamics of the relationship between the three states under consideration. To ensure an exhaustive data analysis, the study employed the strategy of question compression for overlapping and interconnected questions in the questionnaire.

2.3.2 Data Collection Techniques

Interviews

As previously stated, research methods determine how the researcher collects and analyses data. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected actors from the three states (China, India, and Sri Lanka) who were residing in Sri Lanka at the time of data collection. The interviews were based on an interview protocol (See Appendix 4 and 5). Two different questionnaires were used to gather data from two different groups of informants such as career diplomats and general respondents including political observers, political analysts, media personnel. Three rounds of interviews were carried out. First, an attempt was made to contact the political leadership of the three states under consideration, and they were interviewed exploring their outlook on the issues studied. Secondly, policymakers from all three states were approached through both interviews to obtain their analysis of the triangular engagement between China, India, and Sri Lanka.

Finally, the researcher, after completing the interview, engaged in informal discussions with political analysts and media personnel who actively follow the relations between these states, all of which enabled me to gather some more data.

The selected media personnel, some of whom were international correspondents based in Colombo, had extensive experience working and writing on the relations between these three states. They were asked to share their views on, and critical assessment of the phenomena studied. The questions focused on the nature, dynamics, and trajectory of the China-India involvement in Sri Lanka. The interview guide addressed the broad areas defined by the objectives of the study. Further, semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to gather useful primary data from 36 political,diplomatic and media personnel in the three states (Sri Lanka, India, and China), and to explore their perceptions and interpretations of the phenomena studied.

According to Marshall and Rossman (2014), semi-structured interviews are useful to collect qualitative data and to explore the thoughts, experiences, insights, observations, knowledge, feelings, and beliefs of the participants regarding a particular social phenomenon which in turn helps to explore sensitive and challenging issues in detail. Thus, semi-structured interviews were useful in exploring the ideas of a wide range of respondents (such as career diplomats, journalists, civil society activists, political observers, and academics) involved in this study. Although some guiding questions were prepared beforehand, they did not restrict the response from the interviewees. Consequently, they freely and independently expressed views on many issues related to Indo-Sri Lanka relations and the influence of China. (Marshall & Rossman, 2014)

As Kvale & Brinkman (2009:2) point out, “semi-structured interviews could entail a few predetermined questions and many unplanned or probing questions or triggering questions. In the present study also, several probing questions were asked during the interviews, which triggered healthy discussions with respondents and generated rich qualitative data.”

Further, this research employed an inductive approach to data analysis. The inductive analysis, being a form of thematic analysis, was ideal for the present study as it allows the themes to emerge from the data. Since this study explored the dynamics of Indo-Sri Lanka relations in the backdrop of the Chinese influence through a qualitative data set

(obtained via interviews, social media profiles, media reports of diplomatic agencies, mainstream media, government documents) it involved many views, opinions, and experiences of the respondents. The researcher closely examined these data to identify common and repetitive themes and patterns, thus employing an inductive approach to data analysis.

To this end, the popular 'six-step process' involving familiarisation, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up was employed (Naeem et al., 2023). This helped to prevent bias in the data analysis process to test the validity and reliability of the interviews (i.e., the primary data collection tool), three pilot interviews were carried out and, based on the responses, the interview guidelines were revised. All the interviews were transcribed, tabulated, and codified to identify recurrent themes for analysis. The following section discusses the process of sample selection for the study.

Sampling and Sample Size

A sample refers to a selected group of respondents that represent the entire population. In the present study, the purposive sampling technique was used to select participants. Further, an effort was made to create a maximum variation in the sample, a process where a heterogeneous sample is selected, with a view of studying the commonalities among its members. Table 2.2 provides a breakdown of the sample.

Categories	**Positions**		
1. Diplomatic and foreign ministry officials	High-ranking Indian diplomats to Sri Lanka (4)	High-ranking Chinese diplomats to Sri Lanka (4)	High-ranking Sri Lankan officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (4)
2. Political analysts and observers	Political analysts and observers on international affairs related to India (5)	Political analysts and observers on international affairs related to China (3)	Political analysts and observers on international affairs related to Sri Lanka (4)

3. Media personnel	Media personnel covering international affairs related to India (4)	Media personnel covering international affairs related to China (4)	Media personnel covering foreign international affairs related to Sri Lanka (4)
Total	**13**	**11**	**12**

Table 2. 2 Sample of Key Informants: Officials, Experts and Personnel Who Are Currently Residing in Sri Lanka

Source: Author (2019)

Before the interviews, the interviewees were given an introduction of the researcher followed by an explanation of the purpose of the study. Next, an informal conversation followed, with the intention of creating a cordial and cooperative relationship between the researcher and the interviewees. The interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix 4 and 5). In addition to interviews, the study collected a large volume of secondary data which included statements made by leading political figures of the three states, their stances on interstate affairs, as well as other writings on interstate affairs. These were gathered from journal articles, books, parliamentary research papers, periodical reports of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, media reports, press releases of the embassies of China and India, social media posts, and online library reports written on Sri Lanka-India-China relations. As Bryman (2001) has noted, secondary sources reveal the reality of the context studied to a certain extent. As such, the secondary data explains how the three states positioned themselves in the region, how their relations were maintained, and how Indo-Sri Lanka relations were reshaped with the involvement of China in the region.

Thus, this research used several materials, including reform proposals, annual reports, parliamentary Acts, consultancy reports, working papers, newspaper articles, ministerial documents, and various speeches as secondary data. Although the study relied broadly on politically pertinent data and evidence, it used its primary data to substantiate the data analysis and the follow-up discussion. In addition to the primary data (collected through fieldwork), secondary data becomes central to building the analysis chapter of this

dissertation. Triangulation of both primary and secondary data was done during the data analysis. This ensured a degree of reliability and validity when discussing the general phenomenon of Indo-Lanka bilateral ties in the context of increased Chinese involvement in Sri Lanka.

Theme	Source	Venue/location	Mode
Indo-Sri Lanka relations	Archives, libraries, and information resource centres	National Archives–Colombo; Libraries –University of Peradeniya, University of Ruhuna; American Centre–Colombo; Indian High Commission–Kandy Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute Regional Centre for Strategic Studies Institute of National Security Studies	Virtual and on-site
China-Sri Lanka relations	Archives, libraries, and information resource centres	National Archives–Colombo; Libraries– University of Peradeniya, University of Ruhuna; Path Finder–Colombo; Chinese Embassy– Colombo China Study Centre Confucius Centre, University of Kelaniya	Virtual and on-site
Sino-Indian relations	Archives, libraries, and information resource centres	Embassy of China–Colombo; Embassy of India–Colombo	Virtual archives

Table 2. 3 Secondary Data Collection

Sources: Author (2019-2020)

Table 2.3 shows the sources of the secondary data collected. The data was collected from different locations and institutions under the above-mentioned themes. The secondary data enabled a comprehensive understanding of the changing dynamics of the Indo-Sri Lanka relations at a time when the presence of China in the region was increasing in a significant way.

Methods and Techniques of Organising Secondary Data

Since the phenomenon studied here (i.e. the Indo-Sri Lanka relations) is essentially a process, the process tracing approach was used to collect and organise secondary data and evidence. To increase the accuracy and reliability of the secondary data and to facilitate the 'outcome' of the study, a coding technique was used.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

It should be noted that analysing qualitative data could be done in a variety of ways, depending on the nature of the study, the problem studied, and the social context within which the study is carried out. As such, this research used a combination of the interpretivist approach and thematic analysis to analyse the data. According to Kvale and Brinkman (2009:205), "there are several technique choices that could be used when interpreting the data collected through primary and secondary sources." It is evident that some researchers make a distinct choice of data analysis techniques, while others refrain from making any explicit choices. Kvale & Brinkmann, (2009:207) "suggest selecting the most suitable technique based on the research questions to be answered and the empirical and theoretical evidence to be analysed." Hence, there seems to be no definite method for analysing qualitative interviews.

In this study, the researcher has adopted an empirical and theoretical analysis of the interview data, because the main objective of the study is to understand the change and continuation of Indo-Sri Lanka relations with the increasing presence of China in Sri Lanka since 2005. The data analysis mainly presents the researcher's opinions on the collected data, the ways in which the data can be understood, and the researcher's interpretations of the data (Creswell, 2003). This process needs to be theoretically supported to increase its validity and reliability. An accurate data analysis is, therefore, vital in properly interpreting the results of the study.

According to Marshall and Rossman (2014:26-7), "qualitative data analysis entails seven phases \as organising the data, immersion in the data (which tends to be time consuming), coding the data, generating themes in line with research questions, giving interpretations through a rigorous analysis, searching for alternative understandings, and writing the report." These steps were faithfully followed in the data analysis process. In a qualitative study, the researcher must summarise extensive and varied raw data and establish a clear link between the research questions and findings derived from the data. Hence, this involves multiple readings of the raw data and the subsequent development of themes and patterns into a thematic framework.

As the first step, interview data was transcribed into text. This provided an overall picture of the data available to decide the best method of organising the data. After reflecting on the transcriptions, coding and categorising of data was done. This process was carried out with the research questions and study objectives in mind. Once the coding and categorisation was completed, the data analysis was done. To provide an in-depth analysis of the strategic rivalry between India and China, triangulation of primary and secondary data was done. Tables and graphs were used where necessary, to clarify certain points in the analysis, and statements made by respondents were quoted to substantiate the claims and arguments made by the researcher.

As such, the discussion in the thesis captures the participants' own words. The researcher has also listed out the notable statements, ideas, and attitudes expressed by the participants on each topic explored in the study. The researcher made comments on the interview transcriptions regarding statements, views and information which required further clarification. This enabled the researcher to form follow-up questions on matters that either were controversial or needed clarification. Such questions and issues helped design the questions for the subsequent set of interviews. Thematic analysis was employed to identify common themes and patterns in the interview data. Braun & Clarke (2006) define this approach as a useful method to identify, analyse, and report patterns in the data (p. 79).

It should be noted that thematic analysis is a flexible method of data analysis with no clear agreement on how it should be carried out (Tuckett, 2005). In this study, an inductive thematic analysis was done using the open-coding approach suggested by

Tuckett (2005). The open-coding approach starts with identifying the codes followed by categorising and labelling the study participants' direct statements, which will later be organised in a more theoretical form (Gioia et al., 2013). Thus, the researcher firstly familiarised themselves with the data to generate preliminary codes, and next did the development of themes. After that, the themes were reviewed and were given conceptual meanings.

The second-order themes were developed in line with the theoretical viewpoints of the study, which included, rivalry theory, alliance theory, and hedging policy. First-order codes were developed by reviewing interview transcripts. The study attempted to analyse how, being a small island, Sri Lanka's foreign policy operates on matters concerning both India and China against the backdrop of Sino-India strategic rivalry in the Indian Ocean. Thus, major recurring themes concerning the nature and dynamics of Sri Lanka's relations with China and India were found.

As was mentioned already, the study employed thematic coding (done manually) to interpret the increasing influence of India and China on Sri Lanka. This was done by analysing the interview data line by line and assigning codes to them. Afterwards, themes and subthemes were extracted from them after a careful word-level and sentence-level analysis of the data. Next, the themes were categorised, and the most common ones were identified. Figure 2.1 below provides an overview of the recurrent themes identified from the interview data. These themes were identified in line with the major objective and research questions of the study. Figure 2.1 presents more details on the process of thematic analysis. Chapters five and six present a detailed analysis of these themes.

Interpretivist analysis is a common methodology used in qualitative and quantitative research in analysing and interpreting texts, and the contents and meanings of published works. Written documents such as books, newspapers, periodicals, government documents, websites, forums, social media posts, interviews, and conversations that relate to the study's social and political context can be studied through the interpretivist analysis. As such, through an interpretivist analysis, previously produced material such as newspaper articles, interviews, books, journal articles, and archives that discuss Indo-Sri Lanka relations in the context of the increasing presence of China in Sri Lanka were analysed.

When performing an interpretivist analysis, the researcher should be sensitive to the purposes and effects of language used in the written documents or the secondary evidence and interpret language in relation to the study's social, political, and historical context (Elbardan et al., 2017; Elliott & Timulak, 2005). Elbardan et al., (2017) suggested that the following steps are followed in interpretivist analysis: understanding the context of the texts or material, preparing the material for analysis, coding documents or texts, understanding the structure of the text, collecting, examining broad statements in the documents, interpreting the data, and presenting findings. Thus, these steps were followed in interpreting empirical data.

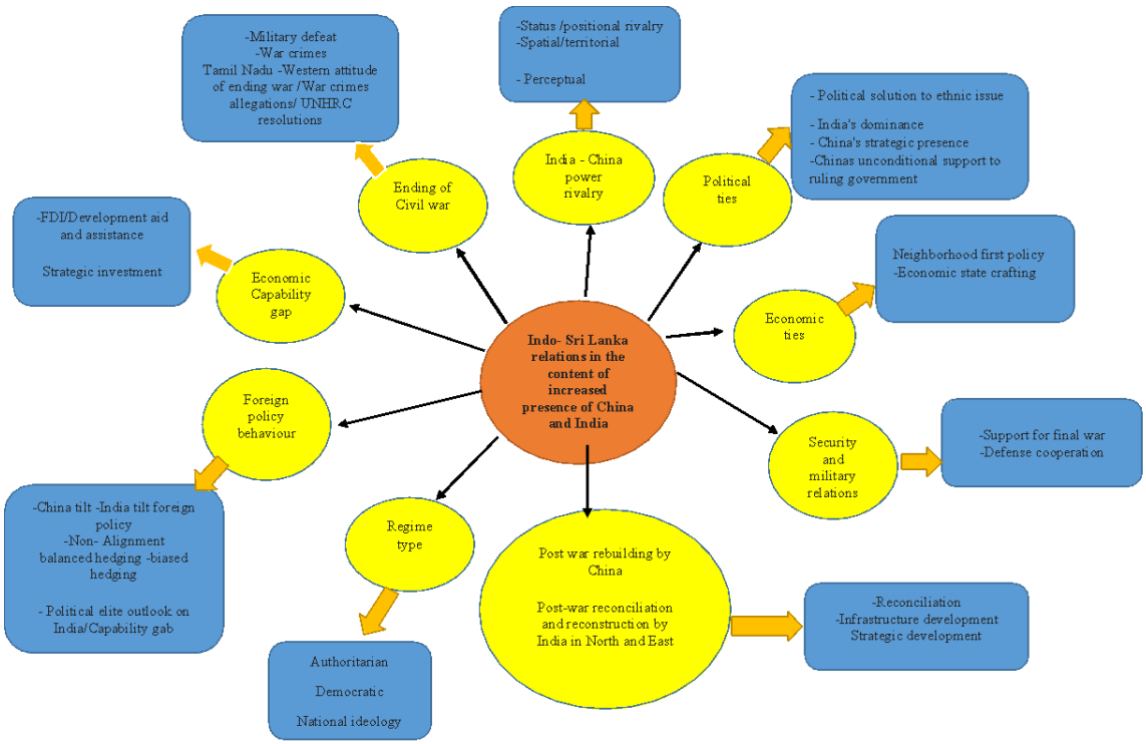

Figure 2. 1 Thematic Map of Data Analysis

Source: Author (2024)

Reliability and Validity

It is imperative for any academic research study to maintain its validity and reliability. In the context of qualitative research, which deals with subjective data, ensuring reliability and validity is very important. Therefore, it is the obligation of the researchers

to take measures to maintain the validity and reliability of their research findings. Reliability refers to consistency, i.e., the possibility for the research to produce the same result if repeated. As a means of increasing reliability, researchers tend to rely on literature, theories, and concepts from previous studies. Kirk and Miller (1986) claim that reliability concerns whether the researcher follows scientific methods to document the research procedure. As stated before, reliability depends on "the extent to which measurement tools used in a study provide the same results whenever it is carried out" (Kirk et al., 1986, p. 348). According to Yin (2003), ensuring reliability minimises bias and errors in the research process, especially in the contexts of social research or the behavioural sciences where human errors remain a challenge.

Therefore, all the steps taken before fieldwork, during fieldwork, and during report preparation were documented. Also, the research was conducted on a timeline to ensure consistency as well as reliability. Following such a process helped in minimising bias and errors. Furthermore, the data collection instruments were evaluated prior to the fieldwork.

Validity refers to the accuracy of the research findings and the appropriateness of the chosen tools, processes, and data to be studied. In the social sciences, validity also refers to the extent to which the findings of the study are consistent with the aims of the study, i.e., the broader research problem and questions of the study. To ensure validity in the current my study, the researcher used two important data sources which included a thorough literature review and primary data collected through interviews. According to Flick (1992), triangulation of data collected through different sources increases the validity of the study. In the present study, triangulation enabled the researcher to identify inconsistencies and incoherent points in the data, leading to the opportunity to get such information clarified. Furthermore, the researcher used previous studies to derive concepts, meanings, and operational definitions of theories ensuring the validity and reliability of the study.

Data Triangulation

Data triangulation, where data from multiple sources (such as interviews, Focus Group Discussions, Observations) are combined, is a common practice employed in qualitative research to prevent biases and inadvertent or unforeseen errors in the research process (Patton, 1990). At the outset, triangulation helps improve the validity and

reliability of research findings through the convergence of information from various data sources while reviewing the existing studies and in the data analysis process. As the current study requires an analysis of horizontal and vertical factors, and the dynamics of the phenomenon in question, it was necessary to triangulate data obtained from various sources such as interviews, observations, secondary documents, and archival records.

However, in the present study, triangulation was done for the sole purpose of accessing data sources to address any gaps and thereby increase the validity and reliability of the research findings. For instance, textual data such as speeches, writings, narratives, and other recordings that seemed incomplete or inaccurate were cross-checked with other data sources such as archival records. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were used in addition to documents to provide support for claims made in the study. In brief, triangulating data from multiple sources greatly improved the quality of the research findings and of this thesis.

Generalisability

Generalisability refers to the extent to which the findings, conclusions and recommendations of a study conducted on a sample population can be applied to a larger population. Generalisability also refers to the external validity of the research findings and conclusions (Bryman et al., 2008). Arriving at generalisable findings in social science research is challenging. In qualitative research, there are inherent limitations such as the nature of the study, sample size, researcher bias, and social setting that impact its external validity. In qualitative social science research, the issue of generalisability is not fully resolved due to the absence of a consensus on how to assess the quality and robustness of research findings (Leung, 2015). Thus, achieving or establishing generalisability and transferability in social science research becomes a challenge. Most of the time, generalisability is not expected of qualitative research findings due to a variety of reasons.

A pragmatic approach to evaluating the generalisability of findings of qualitative studies is using unbiased sampling with less errors, triangulation, cross checking the findings, performing an unbiased analysis of secondary evidence, and the using multidimensional theory. In other words, the research study should be clear of ambivalent issues such that the research question is designed to obtain the expected results, and the research design answers the research question, and the design follows a valid methodology

(Creswell, 2003). It will also make the sampling techniques and data analysis methods relevant and eventually will ensure that the findings and conclusions are valid which would ultimately increase the chances of generalising the research findings.

Thus, this study adopted analytical generalisation, as it employed an exploratory design. Further, research questions in the interview guide, which consisted of 'why' and 'how' questions, also increased the external validity of the research design. In fact, collecting a large amount of data from various sources increased the external validity of the study. The main objective of the study is to expand and generalise and contribute to existing theories, namely rivalry theory and hedging policy of alliance theory. Figure 2.2 illustrates the measures adopted to ensure external validity in the present study. Further, the findings of the study are useful for the policy community and other concerned parties to understand the positive and negative aspects of foreign policies of small states when dealing with major powers.

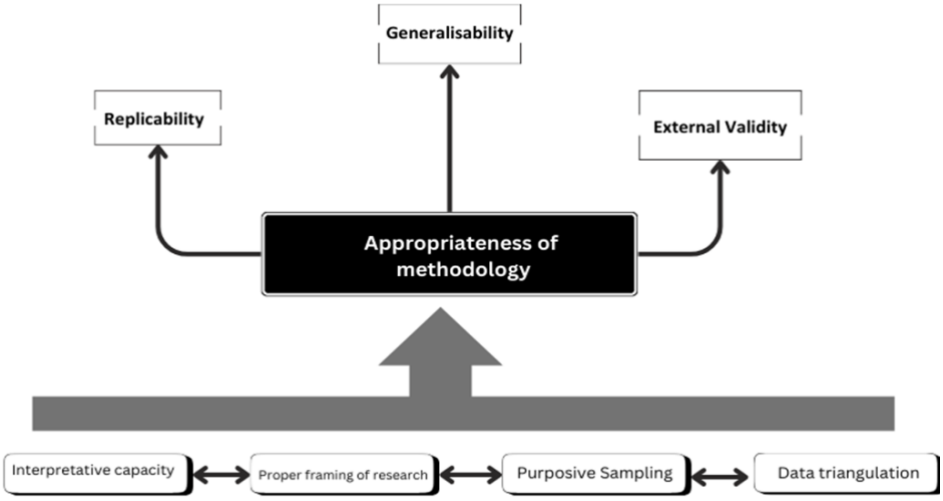

Figure 2. 2 The Process of Generalisability

Source: Author (2022)

2.4. Research Clearance and Ethical Considerations

Obtaining research clearance is essential in maintaining research integrity. It also ensures that the research is conducted adhering to ethical standards. In social science research, ethics clearance plays a major role. The ethics review committee at the university studies the research objectives and methodologies of the study to ensure that it is conducted

in line with the ethical guidelines of the university. This committee ensures that the research protects the study participants' dignity, rights, freedom of expression, and security and safety. The committee also evaluates if the research design is ethical and if it would provide the expected results. In addition, obtaining ethical clearance increases the acceptability of the research findings within the research community. Such legitimacy is important for the policy community and other concerned parties or stakeholders who would use the study outcomes for decision making.

In designing the data collection methodology of the present study, the researcher paid special attention to the key principles of research ethics that were observed in academic research studies, with the view of improving the validity and reliability of the study. More importantly, Israel & Hay (2006:20-21) suggest that "abiding by ethical principles enable the researcher to (a) obtain informed consent from the participants of the study, (b) to minimise the potential risk or harm that could be caused to participants, (c) protect participants' anonymity and confidentiality, (d) avoid deceptive practices, and (e) ensure the right of the participants to withdraw from the research at any time at their discretion." After taking all these ethical concerns into consideration, potential participants were accessed to obtain informed consent. Then, a group of research participants who fitted a particular profile was interviewed and observed to generate the primary data. Interviews were conducted while strictly observing the necessary codes of conduct recommended for interviews. Besides, in the process of transcribing and reporting, steps were taken to minimise potential harm to participants, while protecting their anonymity and confidentiality.

In the present research, the researcher fulfilled all the ethical requirements and considerations set by the University of Waikato: D-ALPSS Human Research Ethics Committee. As per the guidelines, the researcher obtained due approval from the Division of Arts, Law, Psychology & Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee before commencing data collection from the informants of the study. At the beginning of the data collection process, the informants were provided with the documents detailing the information about the study (Appendix, 01), the participant information sheet (Appendix, 02), and the consent form (Appendix, 03).

2.5. Anonymity and Confidentiality

Anonymity and confidentiality remain important ethical principles in research. As per Crow & Wiles (2008:426), "recommended that researchers take all possible measures to assure participants that all the necessary actions are taken to ensure that the information they share cannot be traced back to their sources." Further, preserving anonymity and confidentiality is done through various methods (Wiles et al., 2008). With this requirement in mind, the present study took many precautions to protect the participants' identity. Anonymity was achieved by concealing the participant's job title, age, gender, ethnicity, social background, and profession, and by anonymising their strongly expressed opinions. Further, the identity of the research participants belonging to the diplomatic and policy community was masked by concealing their organisational, unit, and group affiliations.

Confidentiality also relates to the protection of the data collected. Taking proper measures to safeguard the privacy of participants and their information from unauthorised access, use, disclosure, modification, manipulation, and theft is the goal of maintaining confidentiality. Respecting confidentiality, in this sense, becomes critical in social science research where data is generated through primary sources such as interviews and discussions. As the present study required generating primary data from one-on-one (semi-structured) interviews, proper steps were taken to protect the identity of the participants. This was done strictly for participants from diplomatic and policy communities. The researcher secured the records of interviews under lock and key. Other information given by participants were secured in password-protected files and encryption was used when sharing information using the internet. Furthermore, all possible efforts were made to report only aggregate findings, thus preventing individual level data from being accessible to the public.

2.6. Summary

This chapter gives an overview of the research design and methodology employed in the present study. In doing so, methods and strategies of data collection and analysis were discussed at length, focusing on the philosophical and methodological justifications for choosing a particular method and design for the present study. Based on the research questions, it is argued that methods drawn from the qualitative research design would yield

more reliable and valid data and results, provided the process of data collection and analysis is carried out scientifically without personal bias and interests. Therefore, methods such as interviews and secondary data were employed for obtaining valid data for this study. In addition, existing literature and other written documents connected to the subject were consulted to ensure the accuracy of the findings. Qualitative analysis is used as the data analysis method of the study. Finally, the chapter notes that it is imperative to observe ethical considerations when doing research.

CHAPTER THREE

Foreign Policy of Sri Lanka from 1948 to 2004: Principles and Orientation

3.1. Introduction

Since gaining political independence, one of the challenges faced by Sri Lanka as an independent state was to anchor its foreign policy in such a way as to accomplish its national interests whilst ensuring national security from outside threats. Three factors have been key determinants in shaping its orientation toward an autonomous foreign policy: change of governments with different political ideologies; change of national interests as per the government policies; and changes taking place at the global level. Despite the intensity of these factors, Sri Lanka aims to maintain an intense, independent, powerful, and unitary foreign policy, with the intention of striving to form friendly and peaceful relations with all states. In a then rapidly changing world, it was an essential precondition for a state to have a viable foreign policy to cope with emerging challenges and explore new opportunities. In this regard, Sri Lanka decided on adopting a policy of progressive engagement with the rest of the world embedded in realistic scrutiny of the bilateral and multilateral geopolitical and economic landscape.

This chapter provides the background and the manner in which Sri Lanka's foreign policy originated in 1948 and how it evolved until the year 2004. By doing so, the chapter focuses on outlining the principles and orientations of the foreign policy of Sri Lanka under different political regimes. The guiding principles of Sri Lanka's foreign policy have always been an extension of its domestic policy (Senanayake, 2014) where it has attempted to further its political, social, and economic philosophies. The orientation of the foreign policy thus contains the broad methods and strategies adopted to further its philosophies.

The first section of the present chapter analyses the type of political leadership which is mostly inclined towards a liberal and Western orientation, also sometimes criticised for adopting an India-phobic foreign relations, in its political ideology. The second section analyses the geopolitical landscape and the growth of India's and China's perception of the rivalry towards each other, which caused Sri Lanka to balance its

relationships with these states. The chapter concludes with a discussion regarding how Sri Lanka handled its foreign policy in times of domestic and regional crises. Here, the concern is with two major issues Sri Lanka faced, i.e., the ethnic conflict which led to the involvement of the outside world in the state's internal affairs, and the ensuing tension among India and China owing to the border dispute, which threatened Sri Lanka's relationship with each state.

3.2. Sri Lanka's Foreign Policy (1948-1977): Origin and Evolution

During this period, the political landscape of Sri Lanka was signified by constant and periodic changes of power between political parties who had based their ideologies on different political and economic stands. This fluctuation ultimately caused change to the guiding principles and orientation of the foreign policy of Sri Lanka.

3.2.1 Reliance on the UK Foreign Policy until 1956

Sri Lanka, formally and famously known as Ceylon, remained a British colony until 1948, after which it gained independence from Britain. During its 150 years as a British colony, Sri Lanka was introduced and exposed to a myriad of avenues in terms of politics, culture, education, and economy, which transformed the state from being a traditional kingdom into developing a modern tradition related to governance (Manorathna & Silva, 2021). However, it is astonishing that Sri Lanka did not have an independent foreign policy for several years after gaining independence (Mendis, 1994). The political and economic systems along with the education system which was influenced by the British had a long-lasting influence on the trajectory of Sri Lanka. Despite having a stable economy based mainly on the plantation agriculture of tea, rubber, and coconuts, the state's major economic partner was Great Britain. Moreover, Britain was the leading importer of agricultural production from Sri Lanka and played a tremendous role in ensuring naval security in the Indian Ocean Region. When Sri Lanka was removed from colonial bondage and was granted political independence by the UK, as were many states in the region, Sri Lanka faced three major challenges. They were:

1. Sustaining economic development and stability;

2. Securing naval protection and the internal security of the state (this was a challenge since there was a lack of military personnel); and
3. Embracing industrial economic initiatives (this was a challenge due to the state's overdependence on an agricultural economy).

The state had been a British colony for well over 100 years and was granted the status of a British dominion territory on 4 February 1948. Therefore, the origins of a foreign policy in an independent Sri Lanka centred partly around the UK was not conducive for economic development or national security. When Sri Lanka got independence, the United Kingdom (UK) agreed, if requested by Sri Lanka, to make its diplomatic representatives available in the states where Sri Lanka did not have diplomatic representation (Kodikara, 1973, p. 1121). Hence, Sri Lanka's foreign policy, since independence until 1972, was handled under the discretion of the prime minister.

Don Stephen Senanayake, the first premier of independent Sri Lanka, adopted an anti-communist approach to the foreign relations of the state. He was not concerned with foreign affairs (Jennings, 1954; Kodikara, 1973) and left it to the care of the British (Barnes, 2022). Due to the influence of America, many states did not formally recognise the new People's Republic of China (PRC) created by Mao after the Chinese Revolution. Though India and Pakistan were the first countries outside the Soviet bloc to establish diplomatic relations with the new China, the then prime minister, D. S. Senanayake did not accept the new China.

In 1974 , through the three pacts on security, external affairs, and membership of the Commonwealth signed between Britain and Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka sought to mitigate the threat from its big neighbour, India (De Silva, 2008). Due to these pacts signed with Britain, Sri Lanka remained the only independent state in the Commonwealth with no formal institutional structure or mechanism to carry out its international affairs (Jennings, 1954). Therefore, Sri Lanka remained a state with dominion status, and thus was kept out of the United Nations Organization (UNO) by the Soviet veto twice on the grounds of not being not a fully-fledged independent state. Hence, Sri Lanka had to apply for the membership of UNO three times, and it only succeeded on its third attempt in December 1955. Until such time, Sri Lanka had diplomatic representation only in London, Washington, New Delhi, Karachi, Rangoon, Canberra, Tokyo, Rome, and Jakarta. For the

remainder of the world, Sri Lanka relied on the diplomatic and consular services of the United Kingdom.

One of the other crucial factors which affected Sri Lanka's foreign relations at the early stage was its resistance to the so-called 'Indian expansionism' (Kodikara, 1982, pp. 21-22). The strategic location and the geopolitical importance of Sri Lanka caused India to be vigilant about its internal territorial integrity and the external security in the region. For this reason, the premiers D. S. Senanayake and John Kotelawala believed it was valuable to foster close relations with the UK to face any security threats coming from neighbouring India. Ultimately, because Sri Lanka's foreign policy appeared to have been 'Britain-centric', it hindered an institutionalised and autonomous tailor-made policy for Sri Lanka.

It is safe to argue that multiple factors influenced Sri Lanka's inclination toward the British Commonwealth during the period from 1948 to 1956. First, D. S. Senanayake had faith in the democratic way of life and the Commonwealth's knowledge which stood for this ideal. Second, India's and Pakistan's decision to remain in the Commonwealth must have added weight to Senanayake's desire for Sri Lanka to remain a member of the Commonwealth. Third, Sri Lanka's desire to be in the Commonwealth arose because it granted strength to a small power like Sri Lanka to partner up with a large community of states. Fourth, as a Commonwealth member, a small state like Sri Lanka could better resist the gravitational pull of a neighbouring great power like India or of other closely-knit regional groupings (Melegoda, 2013).

Therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that the development of Sri Lanka's foreign policy took place mainly in an ad hoc manner in the formative years of post-independence Sri Lanka. That policy, of course, arose out of personal factors and ideological preferences, including Sir John Kotelawala's antagonism to international communism (Jennings, 1954; Prasad, 1972)

3.2.2 Ties with the British Commonwealth

Sri Lanka was one of the three Asian dominions (the others being India and Pakistan) that signed the London Declaration of 1949 which marked the beginning of the new Commonwealth (McIntyre, 2014; Ratnapalan, 2016). During the first two

conservative UNP-led governments (1947-1956), Sri Lanka's diplomatic ties were mostly confined to ties with other members of the Commonwealth. The association with the Commonwealth provided the necessary early support for Sri Lanka to navigate the state's foreign relations, set goals, principles, and foreign policy priorities. It is noteworthy to mention here that the guiding principles and foundations of the foreign policy of Sri Lanka during this period shaped the orientation and direction of its foreign relations in the years to come. The change of governments between the conservative UNP and the socialist Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) through periodic elections did not alter Sri Lanka's Commonwealth-centred foreign policy. However, the SLFP-led governments (1960-1965 and 1970-1977) strove to forge diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union (USSR), China, and India (Gamage, 2017; Wilson, 1974b).

The 1947 agreement between Sri Lanka and Britain further pushed the former to be defended by those advocating security of Sri Lanka through Commonwealth membership, as D. S. Senanayake presented. His rule was followed by that of his son Dudley Senanayake and Sir John Kotelawala, the first three prime ministers who hailed from the conservative party of Sri Lanka—the UNP—which espoused a peaceful transfer of power from Britain. All three opted to pursue their foreign policy in a similar manner, but with slight differences. They claimed themselves to be believers in democracy, peace, and freedom. Sino

As the minister in charge of the subject, Senanayake's strategic defence thinking pushed Sri Lanka to pursue a more cautious policy toward neighbouring India. As Sri Lanka was a small and weak state, poorly equipped with the means to defend itself, Senanayake found Britain to be the only reliable, significant power that could help ensure Sri Lanka's security amidst a hegemonic threat from India. D. S. Senanayake was a staunch advocate of close and strong ties with Britain and the Commonwealth to the extent that he grew sceptical even about the United States. Under his premiership, Sri Lanka joined the Colombo Plan, at a Commonwealth Foreign Ministers' meeting held in Colombo in 1950, which was a strategy of securing the economic development of South and Southeast Asia and thereby supporting the West during the Cold War.

Dudley Senanayake, the second prime minister, went one step further than his father in strengthening Sri Lanka's bond with Britain in defence matters. He pursued the

British government's military help to defeat a communist-inspired insurrection (Ratnapalan, 2016). In the meantime, Dudley Senanayake also took a pragmatic approach toward national economic development by entering the rice-rubber deal with communist China in 1952 (Karunadasa, 1992). For Sri Lanka, the establishment of defence relations with Britain, combined with the entry into the Commonwealth, therefore, seemed like a viable option. In the future, possibly, relations could be scaled down, but for the moment the Commonwealth was interested in accommodating the new state and giving it a place of safety through which Sri Lanka would learn how to effectively undertake international diplomacy (Jayawardane, 2005; Madanayaka, 2016; Ratnapalan, 2016).

On the contrary, Dudley Senanayake wanted to look to non-Western states, including communist China, for bilateral ties and cooperation in the economic field, while still maintaining the close Commonwealth bond cherished by his father, D. S. Senanayake. The two Senanayake's who came from the same party followed a dichotomous path in navigating Sri Lanka's foreign relations. One possible explanation for this would be the domestic needs and circumstances that arose at that time, which compelled each Senanayake to adopt different foreign policies. For instance, D. S. Senanayake believed that by being loyal to, and dependent on Britain, Sri Lanka could ensure its socioeconomic development and security. As for Dudley Senanayake, limiting Sri Lanka's ties to Britain and other Western states alone did not seem to help much in Sri Lanka's national interests. Sir John Kotelawala, the third prime minister, openly expressed his fear of the security threat posed by neighbouring India and emphasised the need for Sri Lanka to strengthen its ties with Britain and the Western power bloc (Hasan, 1985, p. 107). However, unlike his two predecessors, Sir John Kotelawala, to a certain extent, pursued a middle path in engaging Sri Lanka with the outside world. He was critical of Western imperialism and equated it with Soviet colonialism. He even opposed the collective defence arrangement for Southeast Asia proposed by Britain (Roy, 2015).

Given the foreign policy pronouncements and postures of the first three prime ministers, it is evident that they sought ways to justify their decisions and approach toward foreign relations in which the 'India Factor' held a central place. Further, the heavy reliance on Britain for security, diplomacy, and trade on the one hand and anti-communist orientation on the other hand appeared predominantly a Britain tilt (a form of bandwagoning) foreign policy. Likewise, Sri Lanka avoided direct confrontation with

India although the former was obsessed with the Indian threat throughout. The Rice-Rubber deal with communist China in 1952 under Dudley Senanayake stands a classic benefit-maximizing move in which the Sri Lankan government gained economic advantage from a rival power without breaking off from the Commonwealth. This dual approach mirrors passive hedging, meaning dominance-acceptance with Britain while selectively engaging with China.

3.3. Foreign Relations between 1956-1977: Steering towards Non-Alliance

When S. W. R. D Bandaranaike became the prime minister of Ceylon, Sri Lanka slowly developed a foreign policy of its own under his highly touted 'dynamic neutralism', a foreign policy orientation propelled by nonalignment and non-involvement in 'power bloc' politics (Kodikara, 1973). The electoral victory of Bandaranaike in 1956 in the general elections signified a change of regime from the UNP to the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (People's United Front) in which the SLFP was a leading coalition ally (Suryanarayan, 1994, p. 206). The new leadership vociferously campaigned during and after the elections for the need to review the foreign policy direction and orientation of Sri Lanka. The SLFP led a new government claiming to pursue a middle path in terms of foreign relations to better serve the state's national interest and forged diplomatic ties with communist and socialist states, including China and the Soviet Union– two countries the former UNP government intentionally kept away from. Bandaranaike's dynamic neutralism, dubbed as the Sri Lankan version of Nehru's nonalignment policy, emphasised a middle path approach to foreign relations and marked a new set of principles and orientations in Sri Lanka's foreign relations (Jennings, 1954; Kodikara, 1973; Prasad, 1972).

Premier Bandaranaike cancelled the previously mentioned three agreements with the United Kingdom. Bandaranaike strove to pursue a new approach called dynamic neutralism in Sri Lanka's foreign policy characterised by "national interest and common humanity" (Bandaranaike, 1956, p. 9). With his active pursuit of dynamic neutralism, Sri Lanka's diplomatic ties, which were hitherto confined mainly to Britain and the Commonwealth, opened a new chapter by exchanging diplomats with socialist and

communist states including Russia and China in 1957, thus giving access to Sri Lanka for all states.

Apart from political and security affairs, the Bandaranayke government's approach to foreign policy managed to convince the Soviet bloc to provide more economic and technological assistance and industrial investments for Sri Lanka. Considering these agreements, Sri Lanka received several industrial projects including the Veyangoda weaving mill, the Mattakkuliya shoe factory, the Kantale sugar mill, the Udawalawa tile factory, and an electricity generation project. One of the major motivators behind the neutral policy of the government was the influence of socialist and Sinhala nationalist-oriented minor parties allied with the People's United Front government led by premier Bandaranaike.

Therefore, the earlier tilted policy relations were balanced by Bandaranaike's dynamic neutralism characterised by a middle path approach to Sri Lanka's foreign relations (Kodikara, 1973; Prasad, 1972). With the escalation of Cold War-related problems in the IOR in the 1960s, coupled with domestic upheavals, Sri Lanka was compelled to articulate its foreign policy more robustly in the face of escalating superpower rivalry in the IOR. Discontentment with Sri Lanka being overly dependent on Britain and the Commonwealth for security, foreign relations, and socioeconomic needs arose because Bandaranaike viewed it as a trap preventing Sri Lanka from pursuing its own independent foreign relations in the Cold War context which involved the two major power blocs, i.e., the US and the USSR. This created a ground for the Bandaranaike government to adopt a neutral and non-allied approach to its foreign policy (Mendis, 1983).

First, the stance of the political leadership of the bipolar superpowers (US and USSR) shifted from being rigid and obstinate toward being soft and adaptable, which made Sri Lanka balance its foreign relations. America's involvement in the Korean War in 1950-1953 ultimately resulted in President Harry Truman being politically defeated and Republican President, Dwight D. Eisenhower getting into power. In the Russian bloc, Nikita Khrushchev, known as a neutral reformist, came to power after Joseph Stalin in the USSR (Gajameragedara, 2017). This shift in the global political landscape opened new avenues for other states to reshape their foreign affairs. For Bandaranaike, Sri Lanka's pro-British and Commonwealth-oriented foreign policy only produced a restricted movement

within the Commonwealth boundaries, thereby keeping Sri Lanka away from other friendly states (Gajameragedara, 2017).

One of the obvious consequences of these limited ties, in Bandaranaike's view, was Sri Lanka's repeated failure to enter the UN as a member. However, premier Bandaranaike's constant involvement with both superpower blocs resulted in Sri Lanka gaining membership to the United Nations in 1955. Second, the economy of the state was deteriorating which compelled the state to expand its relations to the non-member states of the Commonwealth, whilst strengthening existing ties (Kodikara, 1982; Ratnapalan, 2016).

3.3.1 Commonwealth Ties from 1956-1977

During the 1956 Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference, SWRD Bandaranaike declared his intention to make Sri Lanka a republic and to remain within the Commonwealth, as did India. In fact, he was confident that the Commonwealth connection would be an added value and regarded it a form of third force between the international power alliances (de Silva, 1975, p.338; Samarakoon, 2015, p.88). For him, the Commonwealth was not just a forum for regular consultation but a system of governance, including a parliamentary form of government, an independent judiciary, practising the principle of non- discrimination between the state and its citizens, and the rule of law. The statement by Bandaranaike, "I feel we should make an effort to foster this way of life, to show it to other states" (Kodikara, 1973, p. 1124) shows that he strove to position Sri Lanka between the Western world and the communist world.

However, in the attempt to rearrange Sri Lanka's relations with Britain and the Commonwealth, and thereby to prove Sri Lanka's new status as a genuinely independent state, Bandaranaike made certain implicit and explicit moves. First, the Suez policy of Bandaranaike government5 signalled a clear shift away from Sri Lanka's earlier close dependence on the Commonwealth and the propensity to pursue the British leadership in foreign affairs (Nissanka, 2004). Second, he decided to remove the remaining British bases (Trincomalee harbour and Katunayake air base) from Sri Lanka in 1959 (Ratnapalan, 2016). However, he did not want to abolish the defence treaty with Britain (under which Sri Lanka allowed Britain to maintain its bases) altogether. Instead, he wanted to continue the Commonwealth ties by attending meetings and conferences (de Silva,1975).

As Wilson (1974b) argues, the three UNP prime ministers and the two SLFP prime ministers maintained the Commonwealth connection. Furthermore, both SWRD Bandaranaike and Sirimavo Bandaranaike, his successor, believed in keeping Sri Lanka within the Commonwealth, a matter on which their UNP rivals were in complete agreement (Wilson, 1974b, p. 55). For instance, leaders from the UNP gave prominence and priority to Britain and the Commonwealth in matters of Sri Lanka's external relations. This stance is obvious when they stated that a special relationship with Britain and membership in a broader club, such as the Commonwealth, could protect Sri Lanka against a possibly aggressive India in the future. The socialist SLFP also wanted to balance Sri Lanka's relations among Western and non-Western states, so they opted for a middle path policy that was attractive to Western and communist states (Phadnis & Patnaik, 1981).

3.4. Embarking on a Nonalignment Pathway

In the early 1950s, the quest for novel foreign policy positions, unrestrained by ties and obligations with the big powers, was an ongoing issue among most of the Asian states. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike tended to believe that the ideal position for Sri Lanka was similar to that of states such as Switzerland in Europe, that is, "a state following a neutral policy and nonalignment with any power bloc" (Kodikara, 1973). However, what he advocated for was actually a more dynamically Non-aligned approach to international affairs, which eventually became popular as 'neutralism' (Bandaranaike,1956). The philosophy of neutralism, which the Bandaranaike government sought to adhere to, came from two different but related contexts—navigating through two power blocs with opposing ideologies. This led Sri Lanka to become a new independent member of the community of states in the context of a rapidly changing world (Kodikara, 1973). In brief, Bandaranaike envisaged a foreign policy for Sri Lanka which was "friendly toward all, unfriendly toward none" (Kodikara, 1973, p. 1122).

After Mr. Bandaranaike's foreign policy, which was based on a neutral nonalignment pathway, premier Sirimavo Bandaranaike not only continued in the same path but also established it as a foreign policy doctrine (Qureshi, 1963). The foreign policy of Sirimavo Bandaranayake aimed at reaching out to the world across political divides and was set out towards increasing the opportunities for the island state. Sirimavo Bandaranayake served both as Premier and Minister of External Affairs and Defence

during her tenure. Through the Non-aligned movement (NAM), the United States, and the Commonwealth, Sirimavo Bandaranaike was influential in a multilateral arena (Thelikorala, 2016). She played a huge role through her international engagement, which was not limited to multilateral organisations. The strong stance she embraced against injustice and inequality was evident in her approach to multilateralism and adopting bi-lateral relations with nation states across the world (Cooke, 2020).

When Sirimavo Bandaranaike became prime minister in 1960, she stated, "[i]n External Affairs, my government will maintain its policy of non-alignment with power blocs and of neutralism and co-existence. My government's relations with the Commonwealth as well as foreign states continue to be friendly" (Kodikara, 1973, p. 1125). The 1961 Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference held in London was the first official multilateral engagement of Sirimavo Bandaranaike (Fernando, 2022), which was also the first Commonwealth Conference attended by a Female Head of Government. Further, she continued participating in the Commonwealth Prime Minister's Conference once again in 1963 and 1975 – the third Commonwealth Head of Government Conference held in the aftermath of Ceylon becoming the republic of Sri Lanka in 1972. This demonstrates that Sirimavo Bandaranayake strove to follow suit the policy path set by her late husband. (Cooke, 2020).

A significant characteristic of the diplomatic relations during the Sirimavo Bandaranaike government was the balancing of different blocs to accomplish national interests without creating any difficulties to other states (Prasad, 1972). Showing the personality of the state and the neutrality of its policy, Sri Lanka was involved in the India-China border dispute and Indo-Pakistan rivalry during the 1960s. As a result of this involvement, a lasting solution was found to the territorial dispute which arose between India and Sri Lanka over Kachchatheevu island (Gamage, 2023). The dispute over the abandoned island of Kachchatheevu which lies in the Palk Strait, became a matter of concern in 1956 causing a potential conflict between the two states, both posing claims and counterclaims over the sovereignty of the island.

However, in a pragmatic and cautious manner, an agreement was reached between India and Sri Lanka in 1974, in which the two countries agreed on a boundary line that runs from the Palk Straits to Adam's Bridge (Weerakoon, 2024). Consequent to this

agreement, the island of Kachchatheevu came under the jurisdiction of Sri Lanka. As such, the Kachchatheevu problem was solved by peaceful means.

In 1976, the nonalignment (NAM) summit took place in Sri Lanka, led by the premier Sirimavo Bandaranaike, showcasing to the world the power of the Non-aligned movement (NAM). Sirimavo Bandaranaike strengthened ties with India personally and politically while ardently pursuing a nonalignment policy through the NAM (Manoharan & Chakravarty, 2016). She found the NAM to be an effective vehicle to further her husband's (the previous prime minister's) policies and principles of not joining the two power blocs in conducting foreign relations (Balachandran, 2022). Admired by her NAM counterparts for her commitment to its principles, Sirimavo Bandaranaike played a crucial role in giving effect to these principles in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) (Balachandran, 2022), which was then the epicentre of Cold War rivalry in the India Pacific Region (IPR).

Accordingly, she got the NAM to declare the IOR as a 'Zone of Peace' during the Cairo Summit (Kodikara, 1973). Regardless of their ideological affiliations and political and policy differences, the governments of independent Sri Lanka pursued a foreign policy that was similar in certain matters and issues, suggesting that there was a continuity of the nonalignment foreign policy. The case particularly includes anticolonialism, disarmament, and non-involvement in power blocs (Kodikara, 1973). For instance, Dudley Senanayake's government (1965-70) preserved the previous government policy related to nonalignment and attempted to maintain friendships with all the states by reaffirming the preceding government's commitments in relation to disarmament and on issues such as the Arab Israeli conflict and the Rhodesia and Vietnam conflicts. Further, with regards to the admission of China to the United Nations, the Senanayake government continued the previous policy of the Bandaranaike government (Wilson, 1974b, p. 58).

As such, Sri Lanka's nonalignment policy continued over the years. Nevertheless, the 1971 insurrection in Sri Lanka put Colombo's nonalignment policy to test under the United Front (UF) government when it accepted both the US Pacific Fleet and the Soviet Pacific Fleet on a goodwill visits (Iqbal, 1972, p. 56). Eventually, the Cold War rivalry in the IOR and in South Asia, which primarily played out between India and Pakistan as the proxies of the United States of America (USA) and the USSR respectively, impacted the internal and external politics and policies of other states in the region. Due to its geo-

strategic location in the IOR, Sri Lanka was subjected to numerous foreign policy challenges over the heightened period of the Cold War in the region (Somasunderam, 2003, p. 168).

As such, the period from 1956 to 1977 was marked by the nationalist government led by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and Sirimavo Bandaranaike for the most part of the period. They sought to re-orient Sri Lanka's foreign policy by embracing the non-alignment approach and cultivating ties with both Western and socialist blocs, including India and China. In particular, during Sirimavo Bandaranaike's rule (1960-65 and 1970-77) Sri Lanka's foreign policy exhibited hedging-like behaviour when the government managed India-China rivalry (land-borne) without committing to either side and thereby minimizing strategic risks while extracting aid from both.

3.5. Sri Lanka's Foreign Policy from 1977 to 2004

The year 1977 had been considered a watershed moment in the political history of Sri Lanka. United National Party's (UNP) massive electoral victory under J. R. Jayawardane's (JRJ) leadership meant not only a change of governmental system but also a change of the orientation of the country's foreign policy (Amarasinghe, 2020). JRJ made several crucial decisions to reform the existing foreign policy of the state after assuming office as the first executive president of Sri Lanka.

The JRJ government's foreign policy orientation in its first decade was but a reactivation of policy that was adopted in the first decade of postcolonial rule (Nissanka, 1984; Phadnis & Patnaik, 1981). There were three main aspects in post-1977 UNP's foreign policy – they were (i)a marked tilt towards the West, (ii) the hope that this would balance the Indian factor, and (iii) the departure from the Non-aligned consensus (Oudraad, 2016, pp. 19-20). Under J. R. Jayawardena, relations with neighbouring India gradually became distant. Also, during his tenure, the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement was signed in 1987 between President Jayawardena and Rajiv Gandhi (Fourth dimension, 2022).

As Kirinde (2021) states, J. R. Jayawardene considered re-establishing and maintaining a good and constructive relationship with the West as a matter of prime importance. Therefore, after assuming office in 1977, JRJ made Sri Lanka's foreign policy absolutely pro-Western (Kirinde, 2021). President Ranasinghe Premadasa, who came to

power after President Jayawardena, had to face several major crises that emerged internally and externally. Further, he took steps to get the Indian peacekeeping forces withdrawn from Sri Lanka in March of 1990. During this period, relations with Great Britain were very weak and both the British High Commissioner and the Israeli Consulate were removed from Sri Lanka. Many commentators are of the opinion that this period was the darkest period in Sri Lanka's foreign policy (Fourth dimension, 2022).

After the general election in 1994, Chandrika Bandaranaike became the new president under the People's United Front. Since 1994, Asia has occupied a prominent place in Sri Lankan foreign policy. During this period, Sri Lanka maintained bilateral relations with South-East Asia, the Far East, and South Pacific states (Sivarajah, 1999). Furthermore, when Sirimavo Bandaranaike was elected president, the new government sought to re-establish friendly relations with India (Manoharan & Chakravarty, 2016, p. 255). Sivarajah (2004) argues that the new president toured many important world capitals giving new impetus to the state's foreign policy. Thus, she initiated cordial foreign relations not only with the state's neighbours, but also with other states in the world (Sivarajah, 2004).

India, which was closely allied to the Soviet Union, strove to control Sri Lanka by attempting to force Sri Lanka to accept India as the pivotal power in South Asia. India also attempted to wean Sri Lanka away from the US (Gunewardene, 1991), resulting in the deterioration of Indo-Sri Lanka relations during the Cold War. India became involved in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict due to pressure from Tamils in the Indian State of Tamil Nadu who supported Tamil militant groups fighting the Jayawardene government. These developments resulted in an anti-India and a pro-West foreign policy in Sri Lanka (Carment et al., 2006). The following section analyses the relations of Sri Lanka with India and China from 1948 to 2004.

3.6. India-Sri Lanka Bilateral Relations

3.6.1 Early decades of Independence

India-Sri Lanka bilateral relations started with formal diplomatic relations in 1948 following the independence of both states from the British colonial rule. The High Commission of Sri Lanka in New Delhi, India, was also opened in 1948 and was the first

overseas mission of Sri Lanka. Subsequently, Sri Lanka opened several other resident missions in India, namely the Deputy High Commission in Chennai and a Consulate General in Mumbai. To reciprocate, India also opened several other resident missions in Sri Lanka including the High Commission in Colombo, Assistant High Commission in Kandy, and consulate offices in Jaffna and Hambantota (Huettemann, 2020), which attest to the importance both states placed on each other.

During the 1950s, both states shared generally friendly ties and sought to strengthen their bilateral relations (Kodikara, 1965). In 1954, they signed the Agreement on Commerce, Navigation, and Cultural Relations, which aimed to promote trade and cultural exchanges. This was followed by high-level visits to and from both states. Premier Sir John Kotelawala's visit to India in 1954 was reciprocated by then Indian premier Jawaharlal Nehru in 1957 which further cemented the relationship between the two states. Later on, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike who became the Sri Lankan premier in 1956, took Sri Lanka's foreign policy towards nonalignment by abandoning the defence agreement with Britain. His 'neutralist' and 'socialist' world view, his deep knowledge of international affairs, and belief in cooperation and disarmament all coincided with Nehru's world views (Manoharan 2019, p.108).

In 1960, Sirimavo Bandaranayake, the new Sri Lankan premier was in New Delhi on invitation of her Indian counterpart, commencing a long-standing official connection with India. In return, Sirimavo Bandaranaike invited Prime Minister Nehru to visit Ceylon in October 1962 (Waduge, 2013). In the 1960s, Sri Lanka and India continued to maintain generally friendly relations, with efforts to promote economic cooperation and cultural exchanges. The Sino-Indian border conflict, which broke out in October 1962, was the culmination of years of tension and border clashes. During the conflict, China invaded vast land masses controlled by India. In this war, China defeated India's troops deployed in the borders in the Northeast Frontier Agency (NEFA) and the Aksai Chin (India's Kashmir and Jammu province in the Ladakh Range) through two major offensives. After China captured a number of Indian border-defence bases and threatened the interior, Beijing declared a unilateral ceasefire and departed with no political conditions ((Mott and Kim, 2006, p.148). Following the unfolding of the conflict, states in Asia responded differently towards it, depending on their past relationship with either power involved in the conflict.

In 1964, India and Sri Lanka signed the Sirimavo-Shastri Pact, named after the premier of Sri Lanka, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, and the Indian counterpart, Lal Bahadur Shastri (Phadnis & Kumar, 1975, p. 257). The pact aimed at resolving the issue of statelessness of thousands of Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka by granting them citizenship. This was a significant development in bilateral relations, and it helped to address a long-standing issue that had strained the relationship between the two states (Pillai, 2012).

3.6.2 Early Civil War Period

In the 1970s, there were occasional disagreements between India and Sri Lanka over regional issues and differences in foreign policy priorities, which led to some strain in the relationship. Despite these challenges, there were also efforts to strengthen bilateral relations during this period. The UNP under the leadership of JRJ, came to power in the parliamentary election in 1977 and continued to remain in power until 1989, followed by Ranasinghe Premadasa who was in power until 1994. The UNP government adopted a programme of structural adjustment aimed at liberalising the economy and the economic system of Sri Lanka (Venugopal, 2011). By doing so, the UNP government realised the importance of developing a closer relationship with Western states.

Likewise, JRJ adopted a foreign policy which was decisively western oriented for two primary reasons. First, there was a desire to bring in Western aid and investment to accelerate the national economic liberalisation programme launched by him in the late 1970s (DeVotta, 1998, p. 470). Second, he wanted to overcome the growing ethnic Tamil militancy, because he strongly felt that it would affect the success of his economic liberalisation program and his political survival. JRJ government's pro-Western tilt coincided with Sinhalese-Tamil tensions, and both, in turn, challenged the Indian government led by Indira Gandhi (DeVotta, 1998, p. 469). In fact, Sri Lanka's post-1977 leaning toward a pro-Western foreign policy and India's reaction to it was the beginning of the end of Sri Lanka's civil war.

3.6.3 The Indian Intervention Period

During the early 1980s, tensions in bilateral relations grew due to the emergence of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. It was the most difficult period in terms of Indo-Sri Lankan ties (Perumal & Thandavan, 1989, p. 12; Sivarajah, 1986, p. 24). Furthermore, the

return of Indira Gandhi as premier of India in 1980 marked the beginning of a difficult relationship between Sri Lanka and India (Naik, 2017). This state of affairs in the bilateral ties continued throughout the period the two leaders remained in office and persisted when Mr. Rajiv Gandhi assumed office after his mother Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984 (Kirinde, 2021). However, India's main political interest was in building peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka. Since 1983, it has attempted to advance this goal by playing various roles. Further, Manoharan (2022) states that "India was caught in the 'dilemma' of finding a solution that met the sentiments and rights of the aggrieved Tamil community, but without affecting the unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka" (Manoharan, 2019, p. 30).

India, thus, played a crucial role in the Sri Lankan armed conflict, due to the context of international relations that existed in South Asia following the escalation of violence between the Sinhalese and Tamils in the early 1980s (Destradi, 2010). This caused India to become extremely sensitive to the potential role of the US in Sri Lanka's ethnic crisis. For India, any arrangement which would allow the US navy to use the strategically located Trincomalee harbour in the East of Sri Lanka would constitute a grave threat to its own security. Such a scenario would put the USSR at a disadvantaged position too, for it would give the US an added advantages in the superpower rivalry in the Indian Ocean (Kodikara, 1995; Sridharan, 2016), as it was already in possession of a full-fledged naval base in the islet of Diego Garcia.

J. R. Jayawardene's policy over the ethnic conflict, especially the way his government handled the anti-Tamil riot in July of 1983, brought widespread reaction, especially from India, providing it with a window of opportunity to manipulate the conflict for its own benefit (Gunewardene, 1991). What is more, India was worried even of the rumours to the effect that JRJ had asked for military help from the US, though the JRJ government and the US spokesmen denied such claims (Kodikara, 1995). Against this backdrop, India intensified its clandestine support of Tamil militant groups to pressure the JRJ government to be sensitive to India's concerns including accommodating the Tamils and respecting its (India's) security interest (Swamy, 1994). Consequently, the hitherto low-intensity ethnic conflict began escalating into a civil war between the GoSL and Tamil militant groups. In response to increasing Tamil militants' fighting power, the GoSL, in its counterinsurgency measure, drew upon Israeli advisers' support during a time where it did

not have diplomatic relations with Israel (Murthy, 2000). Later, India saw Israel as a surrogate for the USA and had issues about neighbouring states inviting a security presence from third parties without being sensitive to India's concerns.

On the other side, the 1983 riots brought new actors and dimensions to the conflict, making it more complicated. Internalisation of the conflict was one such new dimension that took place immediately after the riot (Ganguly, 2018a; Raheem & Loganathan, 2005) engulfing regional and extra-regional powers' involvement, including India, the UK, and the US (Kodikara, 1987). Initially, India's involvement in the conflict occurred mainly on two grounds: first, India's self-proclaimed role as the net security provider for the South Asian and Indian Ocean regions; second, on moral grounds that India possesses legitimate concern for the welfare of the Tamils of Sri Lanka (of both Sri Lankan and Indian origins) due to the ethnographic connect between the Tamils in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu and the Tamils in Sri Lanka. Especially during the colonial period, Tamils of Indian origin were brought to Sri Lanka for agricultural labour, which led to the sustenance of such an ethnic link between Indian and Sri Lankan Tamils and their interests.

In the early stages, India was fully engaged in the conflict, which could be described as India's hands-on policy towards the conflict, which ultimately led to the signing of the Indo-Lanka Accord of 29th July 1987 (Kodikara, 2019) and the subsequent deployment of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka from 1987 to 1990. However, following the assassination of the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi by the LTTE in a suicide bomb blast on 21st May 1991 (Destradi, 2012a; Kodikara, 2019), Indian policy changed to being hands off from 1991 to 2009 (Destradi, 2012a). Accordingly, India informally took a noninterference stance regarding the internal affairs of Sri Lanka, including the ethnic conflict.

Multiple reasons are ascribed to the improvement in Indo-Sri Lanka relations from the 1990s onwards. First is the change of governments in both the states (UK Essays, 2018). In Sri Lanka, the SLFP-led coalition became the ruling party, ending the UNP government in 1994. Meanwhile, at the Indian general elections, the National Front Government of V. P. Singh came into power in 1989, defeating the Congress Party led by Rajiv Gandhi. Subsequently, in the general election of 1991, P. V. Narasimha Rao from the Congress Party took the helm as the premier of India. After Rao came to power, he

articulated his position on Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict to the effect that India was disinterested in playing any active role in settling the ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka. He was of the view that such issues had to be handled by the Sri Lankans themselves (Chand, 2010). In 1998, India witnessed another change of government. This time, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) came into power and made A. B. Vajpayee the premier of India. The new Indian government maintained a new foreign policy position toward South Asian neighbours showcasing its commitment for respecting national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference (Chattopadhyay, 2010).

Premier Mr. Vajpayee subsequently made a visit to Sri Lanka to participate in the 10th South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Summit in 1998 during which discussions were initiated on signing free trade agreements between India and other SAARC countries. The India Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (ISFTA), signed on 28 December 1998, was Sri Lanka's first ever bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) (Kelegama & Karunaratne, 2013) and as such was a remarkable watershed in Indo-Sri Lanka bilateral relations during this epoch (Savanadasa, 2010). The FTA came into effect on 1st March 2000 and waived import tariffs. For instance, import tariffs were waived on 4,150 products entering India from Sri Lanka and on 3932 products entering Sri Lanka from India. Following the FTA, India managed to become Sri Lanka's top trading partner, accounting for nearly 20% of total imports (Kelegama, 2014b).

Additionally, the two leaders worked closely on multilateral and regional fora such as the SAARC and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) (Mallenpati, 2021). However, politics of Tamils in Sri Lanka took an aggressive stance after the 1970s and turned more violent after the Black July of 1983 which was triggered by a Tamil militant's attack on the government military in Jaffna (Ganguly, 2018a). Sivarajah (1999) claims that the profile of the Sri Lanka Lankan Tamil minority affected India's internal politics as much it affected Sri Lanka's politics, as there were nearly seventy million Tamils in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu (Sivarajah, 1999). As far as communal clashes between the Sinhalese and the Tamils were concerned, the Tamils in Tamil Nadu began to pressure the government of India to take necessary measures to bring justice to their brethren in Sri Lanka (Kumar, 2019).

Further, the 1983 riot triggered hatred and anger among the Tamils in Tamil Nadu (Ganguly 2018). It became obvious that Tamil Nadu played an important role in the Indian intervention in Sri Lanka in 1987. Following the signing of the Indo-Lanka Accord (Kumar, 2019), the power devolution scheme based on the Provincial Council system was introduced as a solution to the conflict. After the fiasco of India's military intervention in 1987, however, India adopted a more benign approach to the ethnic issues in Sri Lanka (Patel, 2021). It maintained a stance of pressuring Sri Lanka on devolution of power within the island based on the 1987 accord, which was ultimately used to enact the 13th Amendment to establish the provincial council system for political power sharing. At the same time, it also maintained a tough stance on the LTTE, banning it as a terrorist organisation and recognising it as a threat to India's national security (Murthy, 2000).

With the tacit threat to its territorial integrity from the Tamil rebels' armed campaign and the challenge to its national sovereignty with India violating Sri Lanka's air space, Sri Lanka faced a foreign policy dilemma– it was unsure whether to confront India or to cooperate with it (Muni, 1993).

To elaborate, when the GoSL pursued the military onslaught called 'Operation Liberation' against the LTTE and when the government troops were on the verge of capturing key strongholds of the rebels in Jaffna, India thwarted Sri Lankan troops by dropping food packages over Jaffna from its air force cargo planes (Gamage, 2017). This Indian act (named Operation Poomalai) done under the pretext of providing humanitarian intervention stood a blatant breach of Sri Lankan air space and thus of the state's sovereignty (Wijesinha, 2007). This made Sri Lanka uncertain on whether to regard India a friend or a foe.

Besides, Indo-Sri Lanka relations also faced turbulence occasionally due to poaching by Indian fishers in the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Straits (Manoharan & Deshpande, 2018). This was particularly the case in the post-war period when the Sri Lankan navy had control of the area after the LTTE's defeat in 2009. However, most of the parties in Tamil Nadu including fishers and politicians tend to blame the situation on the 1974 India-Sri Lanka agreement which poorly demarcated the maritime boundary between the two states (Gaan, 1997). Accordingly, the island of Kachchatheevu, which the

Indian state of Tamil Nadu wanted New Delhi to reclaim from Sri Lanka, fell into the Sri Lankan side of the Palk Strait.

In 1974, India and Sri Lanka came to an agreement to form a joint working group (JWG) on fisheries between the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare of India and the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development of Sri Lanka to find an amicable and permanent solution to the issue faced by the fishermen. Sri Lanka's foreign policy responses to the Sino-Indian conflict should be analysed and understood against the above backdrop to get a clear and complete picture of the factors influencing Sri Lanka's policy towards India and China.

Although it is relatively easy to explain Sri Lanka's general position toward the Sino-Indian conflict, in reality, the response is much more complicated, in that the then ruling party in Sri Lanka was constituted of more than one leftist party with varying ideological inclinations (Kearney, 1962). For instance, the Communist Party was inclined toward China. At the same time, the leftist parties, the SLFP and the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), sought to maintain a neutral position that did not oppose either of the parties in conflict —China or India (Phadnis,1963, p.193).

However, the dominant government party, the SLFP, appeared divergent on this issue, as did the LSSP. Some of its main members unequivocally supported India, contributing generously to the Aid India Fund created soon after the conflict broke out. They dared to suggest that Ceylon's trade pact with China should be removed. Others who belonged to the ruling SLFP argued, with equal emphasis, that Sri Lanka's national interests and the basic tenets of its foreign policy compelled the party to follow a policy of cautious neutrality (Phadnis, 1963, p.191).

The Sri Lankan prime minister showed great eagerness to resolve the crisis peacefully and her efforts resonated with India (Phadnis & Kumar, 1975, p. 252). She also expressed her deep concern to the Indian premier over the issue which, if not resolved, might threaten the peace and security of the world. While expressing opposition to settling any dispute through an armed conflict, the GoSL abstained from blaming either China or India for the crisis, thus appearing to maintain a policy of neutrality.

At the same time, the conflict between China and India caused a threat to the existence and development of a Non-aligned policy. Thus, Sri Lanka soon became nonpartisan after showing its initial pro-India stand. Sirimavo Bandaranaike's change of stance signified her intention to be a mediator and de-escalate the conflict as she feared that openly supporting India would lead to the return of the West's hegemony with the US and the UK (Phadnis & Patnaik, 1981). This is the backdrop against which Sri Lanka convened the Colombo Conference in December 1962 to bring the antagonists around the table to resolve their border issues (Suryanarayan, 1994).

Sri Lanka carried out the role of a mediator between China and India without antagonising either party (Phadnis, 1963, p. 196). Sri Lanka's contribution to bring the conflict to an immediate halt and start negotiations between India and China determined its stance on the Sino-Indian border conflict. This shows how careful Sri Lanka was to not be drawn into a contest about the legal status of the Mc Mohan Line. Any statement on the issue at that point in time would have been interpreted as Sri Lanka holding a biased and partisan stance. Concerned with the risk of a potential escalation of the conflict and its spill-over into the wider region, Sirimavo Bandaranaike attempted to mitigate the crisis, which was looming to push the whole region into an area of power rivalry and war (Phadnis, 1963). Leading a six-member group of the NAM called the Colombo Powers6, Sirimavo Bandaranaike endeavoured to connect the yawning gap between India and China on their 4056 km Himalayan border (Phadnis, 1963, p. 125). Although the armed conflict had already ended, the Colombo Powers came into being and, despite their proposals being rejected by China, they were able to claim that another future Sino-Indian armed conflict would not take place for another five decades.

As the Cold War between the USA and the USSR played out globally, it impacted South Asia and the IOR, which mostly involved the Indian Ocean Rim states such as India, Sri Lanka, and other Southeast Asian states. Although Pakistan is not an Indian Ocean Rim state, it still became entangled in Cold War politics due to its pro-West policy. As a state strategically located in the IOR, Sri Lanka had drawn the attention of world powers long before the European colonial encounter in the region (Seneviratne et al., 2017). During the Cold War period, in the IOR, Sri Lanka's foreign policy and foreign relations were shaped mainly by India's foreign policy toward its South Asian neighbour. This was particularly relevant in Sri Lanka's case, where New Delhi explicitly bullied the regime in

Colombo when it was seen by the former as being insensitive to its interests in the IOR. For instance, in the 1980s, India was determined to prevent Sri Lanka from forging closer ties with unfriendly, or potentially unfriendly, foreign powers such as Pakistan, Israel, and the United States (Malhotra, 2011).

Against the backdrop of heightened tension between the USA and the USSR, government changes happened in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka in the latter half of 1970. This represented a setback to Indian and Soviet interests in the region. These states (Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka) were suspected of collaborating with the West in a campaign aimed at destabilising India. As Jayawardane (1991) noted, from the early 1980s, India imagined that Sri Lanka was also becoming a looming threat to its security because of the rising involvement of foreign states in Sri Lanka. This concern was fully shared by Moscow (Jayawardane, 1991, p.196). On the other hand, the fears of the US' covert involvement in Sri Lanka continued to haunt New Delhi and Moscow, even though the US openly favoured India's mediation. The opening of an Israel Interest Section in the US Embassy in Colombo was seen as a measure designed to enable Israel to act as a proxy for the US interests in Sri Lanka (Jayawardane, 1991, p.199).

During the 1980s, the power rivalry between the USA and the USSR became intense in the IOR. Certain strategic facilities in Sri Lanka such as naval bases and natural harbours had traditionally drawn the attention of great powers since European colonialism in East India. The return of the UNP government led by J. R. Jayawardene, whose policies, both domestic and foreign, were pro-Western and backed by the US, evoked concern in India, which was striving to deter anti-India forces in the IOR and South Asia. To keep the USA away from its sphere of influence, India signed a treaty with the Soviets in 1971, which gave strength to India's foreign policy to compel its South Asian neighbours to be serious and sensitive about its concerns and interests (Menon, 1978, pp. 733-34)

When faced with pressure from India, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, who had personal and political links with Indira Gandhi and who was well-known for her pro-Asian engagement policy, was inclined towards joining the Non-aligned movement. This inclination was propelled by the fact that India and Sri Lanka shared almost similar values and vision for South Asia, including the IOR (Counterpoint, 2022). In contrast, Jayawardene's government aggressively pursued a pro-West policy to restructure Sri

Lanka's economy and contain India's interference in Sri Lanka, especially in the ethnic issue. Almost all the oppositional political parties in Sri Lanka criticised the foreign policy of the UNP regime as a 'dilution' of the state's traditional Non-aligned policy (Jayawardane, 1991). Besides, certain moves of Jayawardene, like a visit to China and the USA in 1984, prompted some Indian commentators to accuse him of trying to collaborate with these two states against India and the Soviet Union (Jayawardane, 1991, p. 201).

Over the period spanning from the late 1980s to the early 2000s two different administrations belonging to two different political parties and coalitions-maintained power in Sri Lanka– from 1988 to 1994 the UNP and from 1994 to 2004 the SLFP- led coalition. Also, the foreign policy of Sri Lanka revolved around the same change and continuity axis but to varying degrees. Over this period, Sri Lanka's relations with India in particular were shaped by two different factors: the non-active involvement of India in Sri Lanka's ethnic affairs and the noninterference policy of India (Manoharan, 2011 p. 229). Regarding domestic matters, the ethnic conflict and related events became especially important.

These highlights between 1987 and 1990 changed the landscape of bilateral relations, and this period could also be viewed as the most turbulent years in Indo-Sri Lanka ties. This was a period during which President Ranasinghe Premadasa vociferously sought the IPKF withdrawal from Sri Lanka, plunging Indo-Lanka relations into turbulence and controversy (Gamage, 2017). At last, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's government heeded the GoSL's repeated call and withdrew Indian peacekeepers (Wagner, 2016). Hence, the period from 1977 to 1994 marked the tilt towards the West (form of balancing) in order to counterbalance Indian pressure, especially during the early years of the civil war. The willingness of Sri Lanka to work with multiple powers, including those at odds with India, shows selective engagement.

3.6.4 India's "Hands Off Policy" Period

The Gujral Doctrine, in which noninterference in neighbouring states' affairs was one of the pillars, appealed to the South Asian neighbours who were suspicious of India's motives and welcomed India's new foreign policy orientation (Murthy, 1999, p. 651). On its part, Sri Lanka too reciprocated India with rapprochement during Chandrika Kumaratunga's presidency who led the People's Alliance (PA) government. The non-

Congress administration led by Prime Minister I. K. Gujral clearly and emphatically espoused the novel foreign policy orientation of noninterference, persuading South Asian neighbours to trust India for their security and prosperity. Thus, India's departure from being 'a bully' towards its South Asian neighbours marked a fresh episode in its relations with South Asia, which provided Sri Lanka with relief from India interfering in its internal affairs (Orland, 2011).

Therefore, India's approach to the Sri Lanka ethnic conflict during the preceding period was twofold. India reviewed the cost and the consequences of directly mediating in Sri Lanka's internal affairs and adopted the approach of non-intervention (Manoharan, 2011). Whilst it backed the GoSL's right, as a sovereign state, to act against a terrorist entity which threatened its territorial integrity, India communicated its deep concern at the plight of the civilian population, emphasising that their rights and welfare should not become enmeshed in hostilities against the LTTE. This position was fuelled mainly by concern for the Tamil community, who had their origin in India. Throughout the conflict, Indian governments emphasised the GoSL on the need to arrive at a solution to the ethnic issue through a negotiated political settlement (Destradi, 2012a).

During this period, India looked towards strengthening economic cooperation with Sri Lanka, while Sri Lanka was sensitive towards India's security concerns (Orland, 2008). This ethos of mutual understanding advanced the bilateral relations to a new era. India's new policy eliminated Sri Lanka's fear of India. Stemming from this reinvigorated political relationship, economic cooperation between the two states began to strengthen and prosper. In July 1991, India and Sri Lanka signed an agreement to set up an Indo-Sri Lanka Joint Commission (MOFA, 2016) and its sub-commissions included trade, investment, finance, science, and technology as key themes. Key high-level visits to and from India took place during this time. Of them, President Premadasa's and Chandrika Kumaratunga's state visits to India are worth mentioning as these visits helped improve strained bilateral relations between the two neighbours (Chand, 2010; Singh, 2010).

During the period of 1994-2004, Sri Lanka witnessed several political leaders who played key roles in shaping the state's foreign relations with India. One such figure was Chandrika Kumaratunga, who served as the president of Sri Lanka from 1994 to 2004. After assuming office, Chandrika Kumaratunga pursued a policy of improving relations

with India which underwent strain in certain respects, especially in political and security fields. Her government particularly engaged in diplomatic efforts to strengthen bilateral ties by negotiating bilateral economic and trade agreements with India (Basrur, 2011, p.246). The India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (ISTA) of 1998 stands as the cocreate symbol of the strengthened economic relations between the two states (Padmakumara & Senanayake, 2019, p. 205).

Another significant political leader in Sri Lanka during this period was Ranil Wickremesinghe who held the office of the premier from 1993 to 1994 and then again from 2001 to 2004. Wickremesinghe's government also sought to improve relations with India and took steps to promote bilateral cooperation by proposing a bridge between the two states, a 'win-win development that could change the map of the region' (Basrur, 2011, p.246). He engaged in high-level exchanges with Indian counterparts, including Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, to discuss issues such as the ethnic conflict and economic cooperation. During the premiership of Wickremesinghe from 2001 to 2004, the ties between the two states advanced further to partnering with each other to construct a sea bridge across the Palk Strait. When in February 2002, Prime Minister Wickremesinghe and the LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran signed a ceasefire agreement (CFA), India welcomed the move (Bullion, 2003, p.131). Because of the above developments, the friendly relations between India and Sri Lanka continued without hindrance. Hence, we can state that Indo-Sri Lanka relations evolved from being contentious to being more cooperative during the period from the late 1980s to the early 2000s, and multiple domestic and regional factors were at play influencing the trajectory of the ties between these two states.

However, there were also differences of opinions among Sri Lankan political leaders during this period regarding Indian interference in Sri Lanka's internal affairs. Some leaders accused India of interfering in the domestic politics of Sri Lanka and supporting the Tamil rebels, which at times strained the bilateral relations (Murthy, 2000, p. 643). These differences in approach towards India's role in the Sri Lankan peace process were evident in the political landscape of Sri Lanka during this period.

The period from 1994 to 2004 is characterized by normalization with India and economic diversification under Chandrika Kumaratunga and Ranil Wickramasinghe

governments. Both leaders sought to improve ties with India and expand Asian economic partnerships. For example, the signing of ISFTA in 1998, which strengthened economic bonds with India, shows dominance-acceptance by Sri Lanka. In the meantime, Sri Lanka's engagement in multilateral platforms such as SAARC, NAM and BIMSTEC reinforced the country's image of neutrality while it subtly balanced Indian influence.

3.7. Sino-Sri Lanka Ties

The formal diplomatic exchange between China and Sri Lanka started in 1945, when the Republic of China (RoC), led by Chiang Kai-Shek, sent a consul to British Ceylon, although contact between the two states in the form of diplomatic exchange dates to the 5th Century (Kohona, 2024). With the People's Republic of China's (PRC) establishment on 1st October 1949, Ceylon was the first state in South Asia to give diplomatic recognition to the newly emergent China, thus laying the foundation on which the contemporary bilateral ties were built (Wang & Ye, 2019). The post-independence era marks an important landmark in China-Sri Lanka relations. Sri Lanka's recognition of the PRC in 1950 led to the reinvigoration of ties with China. Additionally, Sri Lanka was one of the notable British Commonwealth countries that supported China's membership in the UN (Fernando, 2023; Wheeler, 2012).

In 1952, the two states inked the historic Rubber-Rice pact, which stands a testimony of mutual reliance between them (Patnaik & Haldar, 1980; Wang & Ye, 2019). The pact was mutually beneficial, as China had an excess supply of rice but was unable to purchase natural rubber as there were economic sanctions on China from other countries, and both Sri Lanka and China were able to obtain these essential commodities to fill their stocks through this pact. The signing of the pact took place irrespective of the sanctions imposed by the Western world on China, and it was also one of the first agreements signed by China with a non-communist state like Sri Lanka (Babar, 2023, p. 67). The Rubber-Rice Pact was ostensibly the most beneficial trade agreement ever negotiated by Sri Lanka and one of the most successful and durable trade agreements, which is in operation for 30 years (Kelegama, 2014a, p.132). China-Sri Lanka ties have always flourished slowly yet steadily since the two countries formally established relations in the late 1940s, though the two states pursued foreign policies on disparate political, and socioeconomic ideologies, especially when the UNP government was in power (Patnaik & Haldar, 1980).

It is noteworthy, however, that formal diplomatic relations between Sri Lanka and China were established only on February 7, 1957–five years after the Rubber-Rice pact was signed (Singh, 2000a, p.39-40). In 1962 and 1963, two other agreements were signed between the two states on economic and technical cooperation, and on commercial maritime relations which granted the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status to all commercial vessels deployed for cargo and passenger services between China and Sri Lanka. In 1972, the landmark state visit by the then Premier Sirimavo Bandaranaike to China paved the way for Sri Lanka to gain Chinese aid for infrastructure development projects, such as the iconic Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH) (Patnaik & Haldar, 1980).

In 1981, the Sri Lanka-China Society strengthened the friendship between the two states (Kelegama, 2014a). The China-Sri Lanka Joint Trade Committee (1982) and the Agreement on Economic and Trade Cooperation (1984) were also important landmarks in expanding and strengthening bilateral economic relations. The two agreements were merged in 1991, and it resulted in the Sri Lankan-Chinese Joint Commission (Kelegama, 2014a). In 1994, the Sri Lanka-Chinese Business Cooperation Council was established to further consolidate economic cooperation between the two states.

In delving into the evolution of China-Sri Lanka relations, Suryanarayan (1994) divides early Sino-Sri Lanka relations into six periods from 1948 to 1991 based on the political orientation of the governments that operated under two major political parties in Sri Lanka. The SLFP government followed a more dynamic, progressive Non-aligned policy whereas the UNP-governments were more inward-looking and pro-West in relation to their foreign policy orientation (Suryanarayan, 1994, p. 205). The period from 1948 to 1956 marks the first phase when the UNP was in power, and a key highlight of this period was the signing of the Rice-Rubber Pact, as was previously mentioned. The second period from 1956 to 1965 was the reign of Mr. Bandaranaike and Sirimavo Bandaranaike, when formal diplomatic relations were established with China. Important highlights of this period include the visits of the Chinese premier Zhou Enlai to Sri Lanka in 1958 and 1964 (Singh, 2000b). During the India-China war in 1962, Sirimavo Bandaranaike summoned the Colombo Conference to mediate the conflict with a few Non-aligned states. This conference was followed by a state visit by the Sri Lankan premier to China in 1963 (Kodikara, 1978).

The third phase, which spanned from 1965 to 1970, during which the UNP came back to power under the leadership of Dudley Senanayake, reaffirming its pro-West tilt, resulted in rejecting Beijing's nominee for ambassador in Colombo for the next 5 years. This period also coincided with China's cultural revolution which had impacted on Sino-Sri Lanka relations (Singh, 2000a, p.30). The fourth phase spanning from 1970 to 1977 marked the SLFP's return to power and a rapid improvement of relations with China. Sirimavo Bandaranaike considered the relations between the two states as a 'model of interstate relations' (Navaratne, 1976). As a result of the visit, Sri Lanka received an interest-free loan of Rs 265 million to finance agriculture industries and another loan of Rs 20 million to fund an integrated textile mill. China also granted five high-speed naval boats as a gift to Sri Lanka and funded the construction of the BMICH (Patnaik & Haldar, 1980, p. 20).The fifth phase, from 1977 to 1983, brought in a UNP government. However, Sri Lanka continued its relations with China and the Chinese Vice Premier Geng Biao visited Sri Lanka in 1978, followed by a visit by Premier Ranasinghe Premadasa to China in 1979. During this period, China provided an interest-free loan of Rs 500 million, repayable over 20 years (Suryanarayan, 1994, p. 208). The sixth phase lasted from July 1983, which marked the beginning of the armed conflict in Sri Lanka, to 1991.

China-Sri Lanka relations during the above period marked Sri Lanka's attempt at re-orienting its foreign policy by embracing the non-alignment approach and cultivating ties with both Western and socialist blocs, including India and China. In particular, during Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike period (1960-65 and 1970-77) Sri Lanka's foreign policy demonstrated hedging-like behaviour when the government managed India-China rivalry (land-borne) without committing to either side thereby minimizing strategic risks while extracting aid from both.

3.7. 1. China-Sri Lanka Foreign Relations from the Late 1980s to the Early 2000s

An analysis of the period from 1980s to early 2000s shows that China-Sri Lanka military relations saw a stark increase with China providing covert support to Sri Lanka in the form of offensive weapons to fight the LTTE. This position aligned with the five Chinese principles for establishing foreign relations (called panchaseel in India) which promoted peaceful co-existence (Wang & Ye, 2019). Guided by the five principles, China-Sri Lanka relations moved forward even during the time of the ethnic war in the island

state. For instance, Hu Jintao, the Chinese President, asserted China's support for Sri Lanka's sovereignty and territorial integrity. As for China-Sri Lanka military relations, they remained relatively insignificant throughout much of the period in question. In 1990, the Premadasa government purchased arms and missiles necessary for the Sri Lanka navy from China. Also, the same government purchased military equipment from China in 1993 (Uluwaduge, 2022). Likewise, in 2002, during the presidency of Chandrika Kumaratunga, China began to provide combat related arms and ammunition to support Sri Lanka's counter-terror operations (as quoted in Wang and Ye, 2019, p. 485).

Like in the past, during the period from 1980s and 2000s, China-Sri Lanka bilateral relations in general and the aspect of development cooperation in particular had remained a relatively low-profile compared to Sri Lanka's bilateral relations with its other major states in the region and beyond. As Ou (2020) claims, China-Sri Lanka relations witnessed a stagnancy as China began to pursue reform and opening up during the period after 1970s (Ou 2020, p102). This was the period during which the Sino-Indian rivalry was fiercely fought in the Himalayan theatre of which Sri Lanka maintained a neutral stand ever since both countries fought a war over the border between them in 1962. Nevertheless, China-Sri Lanka relations witnessed a new height against the backdrop of Colombo's attempt at tilting the balance in favour of the West (form of balancing) in order to counterbalance the pressure from India, especially during the early years of the civil war. Even while strengthening the US and Western ties, Sri Lanka continued cooperation with China for military and economic assistance.

Economic relations between China and Sri Lanka from the late 1980s to the early 2000s were the result of the development and growth witnessed in China. As a result, various agreements were signed, and some joint committees were set up to promote China-Sri Lanka bilateral ties. This point was evident following the formation of the Sri Lanka-China Joint Commission in 1991 through which China gradually enhanced its economic assistance to Sri Lanka in various development projects (Asirwatham, 2018 n.p). In 1994, the Sri Lanka-Chinese Business Cooperation Council was established – its objective was to further improve trade and investment relations between the two countries. In 1996, the then President Chandrika Kumaratunga paid a state visit to China and signed two agreements to enhance economic cooperation (Xinhua, 2014, n.p). The China-Sri Lanka

relationship further expanded beyond the 1990s because of the PA government's move to pursue balanced and friendly foreign relations against the backdrop of its 'war for peace' campaign (Asirwatham, 2018a).

Further, China had always supported Sri Lanka in international forums (during the civil war and the immediate postwar period) based on a mutual understanding of the basic norms of international relations, such as non-interference in the internal affairs of states (Butler & Wheeler, 2012, p. 34). On its part, Sri Lanka reciprocated by supporting China's entry into the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001 (Asirwatham, 2018a). Further, the trade volume between China and Sri Lanka made US$0.35 billion in 2002 (down 11.4% from 2001), with China's exports accounting for US$340 million and its imports accounting for US$10 million. In 2001, investment by China in Sri Lanka had reached a total of US$12.96 million (China daily, 2005, n.p). Nevertheless, it is evident that China was not among the major trading partners of Sri Lanka during the 1990-2000 period (Deyshappriya, 2019). It is India which was a major trading partner of Sri Lanka during the period 1990 to 2000. As Samaranayake (2011) posits, the foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows to Sri Lanka from China accounted for just US$61.7 million during the years 2003-2008 (Deyshappriya, 2016, p. 374).

Therefore, over the period from the late 1980s to the early 2000s, it can be said that China-Sri Lanka relations grew slowly but steadily, mainly involving economic and trade activities followed by military assistance on a limited scale. However, with China's gradual economic boom, China-Sri Lanka relations moved towards greater cooperation in economic and trade fields, while relations in nonpolitical and security domains remained relatively limited (Fernando, 2010). To put it succinctly, during the period under consideration, China, compared to India which is the regional power with high stakes in southern Asia (South Asia and the IOR), maintained relatively covert bilateral and economic relations with Sri Lanka. As such, China-Sri Lanka relations seldom remained a major irritant in the way of India's relations with Colombo during the 1980s and the 2000s.

3.8. Summary

The above discussion can be summed up as follows. Sri Lanka's foreign policy from 1948 to 2005 shows recurring hedging patterns along with context-specific features

and elements, although it is not as explicit as in the period after 2005. While it sought benefit-maximizing by leveraging economic, military, and diplomatic opportunities from competing powers, it attempted to avoid overdependence on any single power in a volatile regional order. Similarly, Sri Lanka maintained ties with both India and China even during heightened tensions between the two regional giants.

CHAPTER FOUR

Indo-Sri Lanka Relations from 2005-2019: From Normal Bilateral Ties to Limited Strategic Ties

4.1. Introduction

Chapters 2 and 3, laid out the theoretical underpinnings and established the methodology for developing and addressing the overarching research question. This chapter consists of the following sections. Section two deals with Indo-Sri Lanka relations during the Eelam War IV. Section three examines the impact of the shift in India's Sri Lanka policy on Indo-Sri Lanka relations. Section four explains Indian involvement in postwar Sri Lanka. Section five concerns Indo-Sri Lanka development cooperation. Section six evaluates the impact of the human rights issue on Indo-Sri Lanka relations. Section seven focuses on Indo-Sri Lanka strategic cooperation under the National Unity (NU) government. Section eight delves into India's postwar approach to Sri Lanka and the latter's foreign policy towards India. Section nine draws the conclusions of the chapter.

4.2. Indo-Sri Lanka Ties During Eelam War IV: From Disengagement to Engagement

Indo-Sri Lanka relations remained relatively calm and tension-free before and during the period when the MR regime was planning to launch an all-out assault against the LTTE. In the meantime, Indo-Sri Lanka relations, especially the political ties, were marked by a paradigm shift in the period from 2005 to 2009 against the backdrop of the final stages of the civil war in which India became involved, thus giving up its long-held 'noninterference policy' towards Sri Lankan internal affairs (Destradi, 2010). Four distinct but related background factors are worth mentioning in this regard: the LTTE's intransigency and the collapse of the Norway-facilitated peace talks; India's refusal to play a mediator role in the peace talks in place of Norway; MR regime's all-out war against the LTTE (Eelam War IV); and the involvement of external players (China and Pakistan) in support of Sri Lanka.

In the initial years from 2005 to 2009, Indo-Sri Lanka political ties were marked by low-profile exchanges of high-level visits by political leaders from both sides. India's policy of noninterference in Sri Lankan affairs, especially in the ethnic conflict (Destradi, 2012a) continued under the Congress-led Manmohan Singh government, replacing India's previous interventionist policy adopted by Indira Gandhi through to Rajiv Gandhi. Consequently, the conflict factor which used to play a key role in the shaping of bilateral political ties had become obsolete, although much was still occurring in the domain of the ethnic conflict, in particular, the Norway-led third-party mediation to find a political solution to South Asia's longest-running conflict between the GoSL and the LTTE, of which India was an indispensable party from the outset (Dickwella, 2013).

India's role as a spectator in the conflict and the peace process helped further strengthen bilateral political ties which had been put under severe strain due to India's close and constant involvement in the conflict (Raghavan, 2006). Mahinda Rajapaksa's accession to the presidency upon winning the presidential election in 2005 came about at a time when the Norwegian-facilitated peace process had started to crumble with the LTTE's violation of the internationally monitored CFA, thus intentionally provoking a war (Uyangoda, 2009).

4.2.1 India's 'Hands-off' Policy and Indo-Sri Lanka Ties

The collapse of the peace process brokered by Norway between the GoSL and the LTTE, mainly due to the LTTE's intransigency and bellicosity, strengthened the MR hardline nationalist propaganda that vowed to deal with the LTTE toughly (DeVotta, 2009, p. 1040). Against this backdrop of the crumbling peace process, India was approached by certain Western states to play a mediator role between the GoSL and the LTTE, a request which India politely refused (Manoharan, 2011). Nonetheless, the LTTE's acts of provocation at some points compelled India to urge both the GoSL and the LTTE to respect the CFA and show commitment to the peace process, as India knew that only the peaceful settlement of the conflict would ensure peace and stability in Sri Lanka as well as the Indian Ocean. India often adopted this position whenever it emphatically urged both the GoSL and the LTTE to focus on the need to resolve the conflict through political means (Destradi, 2010).

In response, the MR administration showed India that it was willing to conduct peace talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), while continuing its military assault on the LTTE. The MR government emphasised on finding a 'homegrown solution' to the ethnic issue (Manoharan, 2019, p. 30). Besides, knowing the indispensable role of India in bringing an end to the civil war and stability to Sri Lanka, the MR administration sought India's participation in the peace process on various occasions in varying degrees and forms (Behuria & Sultana, 2013). To this effect, MR appointed an All-Party Representative Committee (APRC) in 2006 to explore options and possible solutions that meet minimum expectations of all parties to resolve the ethnic question (Verité Research, 2016) Yet rather than exploring novel options to address the national question, the APRC advised the president to implement the 13th Amendment to the Constitution in its interim report submitted in January 2008 (Tamil Guardian, 2008, n.p).

4.2.2 The Tamil Nadu Factor and Indo-Sri Lanka Ties

The Tamil Nadu factor came to be reckoned with when the LTTE and other militant groups developed links with a number of Tamil Nadu political groups (Gunaratna, 1997). Among these groups Dravida Munnetra Kazhakam (DMK) and Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhakam (ADMK) are noteworthy. In the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict and the civil war alike, Tamil Nadu occupied a most important place as it formed part of the larger India factor, and it merited particular attention as it played an impactful role in shaping the GOSL's policy and strategy towards the civil war in general and the New Delhi government's approach to the final civil war and the aftermath, in particular (Ranjan & Chattoraj, 2022). The Tamil Nadu issue had been one of the major irritants in India's relations with Sri Lanka for decades, causing constant tension whenever the political parties in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu demanded access to Sri Lanka to intervene in protecting Tamils and their rights and interests (Rao, 1988). However, unlike in the past, India was very cautious in handling the matter, as it was now aware that whatever stance or statement India made on the ethnic issue would have a devastating impact on one country or the other.

In this sense, Tamil Nadu displayed support to the LTTE by taking two major actions: a) by showing solidarity to the LTTE's cause by passing a resolution in the Tamil Nadu state assembly and b) by organising rallies and protests across the state of Tamil

Nadu condemning the GOSL and pressuring the Indian central government to proactively react to the happenings in the civil war theatre (Singh, 2010). Hence it is clear that Tamil Nadu, from the beginning, had been a factor to be reckoned with since it impacted the final civil war and its aftermath. As respondent IDP3 stated:

> In the backdrop of [the] final civil war, protest in Tamil Nadu [ensued] against the humanitarian operation in Sri Lanka. [The] Minister of Foreign Affairs visited [...] India and discussed [the matter] with Indian Minister of External Affairs, Pranab Mukherjee. [The] President also had [a] telephone [conversation] with [the] Indian Prime-Minister Manmohan Singh, but India decided to ban [the] LTTE in India (personal communication, November 08, 2019).

The main reason for Tamil Nadu's role was that the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) which was in power in Tamil Nadu at the same time was an important coalition ally of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government of India (Blarel, 2019). With its double power of being the ruling party in the state and a coalition ally at the centre, DMK played a proactive role, exerting pressure on the centre to intervene in favour of the Sri Lankan Tamils. For instance, India conveyed to Sri Lanka its deep concerns about the Tamil population in Tamil Nadu (Gamage, 2017). The Tamil Nadu factor remained a domestic constraint on India's relations with Sri Lanka during the ethnic conflict as the former was pressurising the Government of India to make a meaningful intervention to address Tamils' demands. Additionally, during MR's regime, the foreign policy, at first, promoted ending the civil war, and his regime was more inclined towards obtaining maximum external support to this end during Eelam War IV (Destradi, 2012a).

4.2.3 India's Involvement in the Eelam War IV

Against this backdrop, in 2006, India began to get involved in Sri Lanka, thereby breaking its long silence on the ethnic issue. Two factors caused this shift in India's foreign policy towards Sri Lanka. First, the LTTE's deliberate violation of the internationally monitored CFA in a bid to provoke the GoSL, thus dragging the latter into war coupled with the latter's skilled diplomacy towards India (Destradi, 2012, p. 607). Second, the MR government approached China for help with its decision to defeat the LTTE, a move with

which India was initially reluctant to cooperate, and which led Sri Lanka to play the "China Card" against India (Pant, 2017).

The MR regime's stylised employment of a hedging strategy slowly began to play out when the former animated the dormant Indo-Sri Lanka political ties by effectively playing the "China Card" (Pant, 2017). Being aware of the need for India's support in the military campaign against the LTTE, the MR regime made a calculated move in relation to India, which however, distanced India from the civil war happenings for some time, in line with its policy of noninterference in Sri Lankan affairs (ICG, 2011a). Discontent with India's initial passive response on account of India's domestic compulsions, i.e., the Tamil Nadu factor, the MR government made an open call for external support for its military campaign against the LTTE, a call to which China and Pakistan responded positively (De Silva, 2010). While the positive response from China and Pakistan gave a moral boost to the MR regime, it induced India to follow suit by abandoning its long-pursued policy of 'principled noninterference' towards the Sri Lankan ethnic issue. Respondent PA4 elaborated on this:

> The mutual calculation of both India and Sri Lanka for varying reasons brought them together toward embarking on the military campaign against the LTTE. For India, safeguarding its strategic interest in the island state was more imperative than defeating or weakening the rebel outfit. Whereas, for Sri Lanka (GoSL), complete military defeat of the LTTE was the only option on its table. To this end, the GoSL desperately looked for outside support -mainly economic and military- from potential friendlier states (personal communication, December 08, 2019).

The regime was persistently engaged in this exercise until India offered covert help, starting from military advice through to defence collaboration to the provision of weapons (Destradi, 2012, p. 612). As part of its skilful diplomacy, the MR regime dragged China and Pakistan, rivals and enemies of India respectively, into the civil war theatre as active collaborators through their economic and military support (Wang & Ye, 2019). When Chinese participation in the civil war increased, it forced India to abandon its hands-off policy, despite the self-imposed and circumstantial constraints to do so. At the same time, India took utmost caution not to be insensitive and insensible to the sentiments of the general public and political parties (Senevirathna, 2015). The DMK of Tamil Nadu was an

important coalition ally at the centre. This calculated engagement with China while keeping India partially involved reflected an active form of hedging, allowing Sri Lanka to extract benefits from both sides without fully aligning with either.

With the fight intensifying in the Northern theatre, the MR administration badly needed India's support to cripple LTTE activities, particularly at sea. The MR administration came up with a proposal for defence cooperation between India and Sri Lanka, which India did not entertain due to its aforementioned domestic compulsions (Destradi, 2010, p. 13). Instead, to ensure its contribution, India covertly provided Sri Lanka with nonlethal weapons, radars, and intelligence information which the MR regime needed to successfully carry out the military campaign against the LTTE. Respondent PO3 explained this in the following manner:

> India's decision to participate in the final war came about at a crucial juncture where New Delhi had to choose between supporting the rebel outfit or the GoSL. Having gauged the cost-effect, India, eventually, [chose] to take [sides] with the GoSL amidst repeated call for the opposite (to intervene in Tamils' favour) from Tamil Nadu (civil groups and political parties alike) which (DMK) was an important coalition partner in the central government (personal communication, November 02, 2019).

It can, therefore, be stated that Indo-Sri Lanka political ties during the period from 2005 to 2009 were conducted with the utmost caution on both sides against the backdrop of emergent developments in the civil war theatre, a by-product of the ethnic conflict which used to be the prime trigger of tension between the two neighbours (ICG, 2011c). Thus, during the final stages of the war, India played a key role by providing covert support to the GoSL. It could be stated that India was compelled to do so due to the involvement of China and Pakistan who backed Sri Lanka. China and Pakistan played a vital role by providing Sri Lanka with money and weapons (Blanchard, 2018). Indeed, India risked getting involved in the final war in the face of stiff pressure from the Tamil Nadu state government, which was an important partner of the coalition government at the centre. Moreover, India's covert involvement in the war, on the other hand, helped the Sri Lankan state to reduce international pressure on it during the final battle (Pant, 2017). Respondent

IDP1, one of the Second Secretaries of the High Commission of India in Sri Lanka, stated the following:

> India did support Sri Lanka in [the] latter stages of the conflict which was not very much highlighted. There are [a] few reasons for this. One is, India does not want the LTTE to have a separate state in [the] North for the Tamils. If the LTTE had [been] able to hold on to its territories and had continued its struggle for some more time, interstate intervention too was on the card[s]. Both these developments would not cater [to] India's interests in the region. (personal communication, November 06, 2019)

Thus, in order to manage the tension stated above between the two states, Sri Lanka during this period followed a diversified foreign policy which was non-aligned (Gamage, 2017). This policy was followed mainly because the MR regime wanted to gain maximum external support during the civil war. As Destradi (2012a) points out, from the outset, the foreign policy strategy pursued by the MR regime towards India was prompted by two considerations and calculations. The first consideration was getting India on board with the military combat against the LTTE. India's involvement would help to keep pressure from the US at bay, as it saw India as the legitimate net security provider of South Asia including the IOR. Secondly, to effectively deal with the LTTE, military, diplomatic and logistic support, and defence cooperation with India were essential (Destradi, 2012b).

Therefore, MR's initial accession to power as the President of Sri Lanka and the end of Eelam War IV which culminated in the defeat of the LTTE by the Sri Lankan armed forces in May 2009 contributed to this shift in Sri Lanka's foreign policy towards India (Destradi, 2012a). During this period, which may be dubbed as the first tenure of the MR administration (2005-2010), Indo-Sri Lanka relations witnessed steady progress in several fields, i.e., in security and politics, while economic relations progressed as usual.

4.3. Shift in India's Sri Lanka Policy and Indo-Sri Lanka Relations

This shift happened especially during the final stages of the civil war when the New Delhi government apparently vacillated over whether to be involved in the war or to continue adhering to their hands-off policy (Destradi, 2012 p.145). However, it also

became clear that there was a limit on Tamil Nadu's ability to influence New Delhi's decisions regarding Sri Lanka, especially those affecting the Tamils in Sri Lanka. As respondent IDP2 who was the Assistant High Commissioner of India in Sri Lanka stated:

> Thus, Singh's Congress government (2004-2014) created a partnership with the Tamil Nadu state government to find a political solution to the Sri Lankan internal issue. However, separatist claims from Sri Lankan Northern Tamils had threatened the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka as well as India. Therefore, Indian foreign policy towards Sri Lanka encountered a dilemma where India needed to maintain a positive equilibrium between Tamil [Nadu's] political needs, and Sri Lanka's territorial integrity (personal communication, November 06, 2019).

However, as one of diplomatic officials attached to the Economic Affairs Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SLDP4) pointed out:

> disagreements between the two states with regard to Sri Lanka's post-conflict reconciliation, transitional justice, and resettlement processes in the North arose. Likewise, India also promoted a widespread political solution for the issues raised by the Tamils and called for the effective implementation of the 13th amendment (personal communication, July 16, 2020).

As respondent IDP2 stated*:*

> I was able to understand that Indo-Sri Lanka foreign affairs [were based] on economic and geopolitical interests. I see [that] it is more than economic and geopolitical interests. I narrowed down to regional security. [Neither] India [nor] Sri Lanka [can] survive without each other's cooperation. (The Assistant High Commissioner of India in Sri Lanka. (personal communication, November 06, 2019).

Nevertheless, a clear shift in India's hands-off approach could be observed in the second half of the 2000s as the MR government was seriously pursuing its military

campaign with the support of China, Pakistan, and Iran, who swiftly responded positively to Sri Lanka's call for help. As Destradi (2012b) argued,

> [After] the election of Rajapaksa as Sri Lanka's president in 2005, India did not change its approach in any significant manner. India continued to pay attention to keeping its position of non-involvement in the conflict, a position which emerged quite clearly from the joint statement issued after Rajapaksa's first visit to Delhi. Both parties agreed that a lasting solution could be reached only through internal political processes and dialog that promote consensus and reconciliation (p. 77).

Hence, it is discernible that the shift in India's Sri Lanka policy did not take place overnight or voluntarily. Rather, it was largely an outcome of the interaction of policy response between India and Sri Lanka against the backdrop of escalating fights in the civil war theatre with the participation of certain external actors—namely China and Pakistan (Mayilvaganan, 2012, p. 19). By signalling openness to both Chinese and Indian engagement, Sri Lanka maintained a hedging posture that encouraged India to move from passive observation to active, albeit quiet, support.

The initial shift in India's Sri Lanka policy can, therefore, be characterised as a 'quiet intervention' in support of Sri Lanka, where the former covertly gave the go-ahead to certain MR government's actions and initiatives (Destradi, 2010). For instance, in late 2007, India had started to renounce its hitherto practiced approach of non-interference and began assuming a covert yet very important role in the armed conflict (ICG, 2012). As Destradi (2012) posits, the quiet India quietly supported the GoSL's military offensive against the LTTE by not exerting pressure, all the while repeatedly expressing its preference for a "negotiated political settlement" encompassing forms of power devolution and meeting "the aspirations of all communities" (Destradi, 2012, p. 604). According to NCR, this shift can be explained by the interaction between external balancing imperatives in the face of Chinese influence and internal political constraints within India, producing gradual policy realignment toward covert and later overt engagement.

The second shift (open intervention in support of Sri Lanka) could be seen to have occurred when the MR administration intensified the military campaign towards the Northern province— the LTTE stronghold which included its head office and military command—after defeating the LTTE in the Eastern province. Since this phase of the final

civil war (Eelam War IV) was decisive in exterminating the LTTE, the MR government found it vitally important to have India on board while also getting economic and military support from China and Pakistan (Behuria & Sultana, 2013).

Beyond India's implicit support for the GoSL's military campaign, a more radical shift could be observed in New Delhi's approach to the MR regime (ICG, 2011b), a shift that regarded sensitive issues like the terms of a potential political settlement as well as human rights violations by the GoSL. For example, India reacted to the interim report issued by the All -Party Representative Committee (APRC), which Rajapaksa created to formulate suggestions about power sharing, by defining it as a 'welcome first step' towards a settlement acceptable to all communities of Sri Lanka (ICG, 2011c). Another instance was when the Indian Ministry of External Affairs issued a statement which was neutral in tone when the end of military hostilities and the death of Prabhakaran were announced by the GoSL on 18th May 2009 (Destradi 2011b, p. 81). While the statement avoided congratulating the GoSL for its victory, it also refrained from condemning the conduct of the military campaign and pledged instead to cooperate with Colombo in providing relief to displaced people (Destradi, 2012a).

Thus, the MR regime's determination to defeat the LTTE, along with its skilful deployment of hedging strategy to induce India to respond to the developments in the civil war theatre in the way the GOSL wanted India's policy shift during the final war (Destradi, 2010).This shift in India's Sri Lanka policy is characterised by the shift of stance from its strict and long-standing hands-off policy to pragmatic silent support, and to proactive open support vis-à-vis the final civil war and its aftermath (Ranjan & Chattoraj, 2022).

4.4. India and Postwar Sri Lanka: From Asset to Annoyance

India's involvement in postwar Sri Lanka can be divided into the following subsections to systematically understand the dynamics and impact of its involvement on Indo-Sri Lanka ties in terms of Indo-Sri Lanka political ties, Indo-Lanka security and defence ties, and Indo-Sri Lanka economic and trade ties.

4.4.1 Indo-Sri Lanka Political Relations

The MR regime's second tenure (2010 to 2015), dubbed as the 'postwar period', exhibited a binary trend of conflict and cooperation in the political domain of Indo-Sri

Lanka relations. The cordial and cooperative political relations between India and Sri Lanka soon began to erode after the war (Mitra, 2019; Xavier, 2016). Two factors contributed to this state of affairs: the West's allegation of war crimes committed by the GoSL in the final stages of the civil war; and India's insistence on a political solution to the ethnic issue that triggered the civil war (Sultana, 2017b). Also, during the second tenure of the MR regime, Sri Lanka's relationship with China fluctuated with China increasing its presence in Sri Lanka in the aftermath of the civil war. Interestingly, this time around, India found that the 'war victor MR regime' was not as easy to deal with as it had been during the final civil war which culminated in the GoSL's victory, a victory which would not have been possible without India's support (MEA, 2016).

In other words, the MR regime which saw India's participation as an asset during its military campaign against the LTTE, perceived the latter's involvement in postwar Sri Lanka as unwarranted, especially in matters of reconciliation and human rights (ICG, 2011b). Three factors explain this purported shift in Sri Lanka's attitude towards India: the MR administration's strong belief that with the defeat of the LTTE, the ethnic conflict was resolved, that is, that the ethnic issue did not exist anymore, and that only development issues remained; India's persistent urging of the MR administration on the need for ethnic reconciliation and a political solution to the ethnic issue; and China's close engagement with Sri Lanka when the latter was faced with political and economic imperatives (Gracewilliams, 2010). However, respondent SLDP2 pointed out that:

> India was also involved in the post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation work in Sri Lanka. Its postwar reconstruction process [involved] several projects such as [the] reconstruction of [the] Duraiyappa stadium [and] cultural centre [in] Jaffna, [the] establishment of healthcare facilities in Kilinochchi and Mulaitivu, [and the] development of [an] industrial zone (personal communication, November 07, 2019)

The shift in Sri Lanka's (during the second term of the MR regime) approach to India can best be explained by invoking NCR's dual-level analysis-systematically. India's concerns over China's deepening influence incurred pressure on reconciliation, but domestically, Sri Lanka's leadership

which was buoyed by war victory, deprioritized India's political conditions in favour of economic partnership with China.

Furthermore, the co-occurrence of the above three factors shaped Sri Lanka's engagement strategy with China and India in terms of scope and scale. In fact, the MR government welcomed almost all the projects China offered with much enthusiasm, while it showed little interest in the ones proposed by India (Sultana, 2016). For instance, whenever China came to Sri Lanka's rescue at the UN Security Council, the UN General Assembly, and the UNHRC against the Western states (which India joined occasionally) who wanted to hold the GoSL accountable for the alleged human rights abuses during the final civil war, the MR regime reciprocated by signing new development projects with China, such as the 2012 expansion of Hambantota International Port and the 2013 the Southern Railway Line Extension project (Kumar, 2017b). This mutual reciprocation of support between the MR regime and China at some point culminated in Sri Lanka being upgraded to a "strategic cooperative partner" of China (Diplomat, 2016; Goodman, 2014).

Against this backdrop, India, discontented with the deepening China-Sri Lanka ties, reacted to the MR administration's dealings with China in two ways: individually, it urged Sri Lanka to find a political solution to the ethnic issue based on power sharing (The New Indian Express, 2011) and collectively, together with the West, India pressured Sri Lanka to address the human rights allegations (The Economic Times, 2012). Thus, this Indian approach consisted of a dual strategy that could be divided into two sections: direct and indirect. A direct strategy here means a policy where India directly pressured Sri Lanka to arrive at a political solution to the ethnic conflict.

However, after 2010, India began to follow an indirect strategy whereby it began to pressurise Sri Lanka, for example, at the level of the UNHCR. India, which lacked economic soft power, sought to employ noneconomic soft power i.e., its diplomatic weight and political might to thwart Sri Lanka from swaying towards China, whose presence in the strategic backyard of India posed a serious challenge to its regional superpower status (De Silva, 2015, p.59). To complicate the situation further, India, which refused to join China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) claiming that it would significantly undermine its interest in and influence among the states in the IOR, became disheartened when Sri Lanka

decided to be one of the first states to join the BRI in 2013. In this regard, Respondent MP7 who is an independent journalist attached to a leading private television network expressed the following views on this:

> In the aftermath of the civil war, the MR government began to ignore India while at the same time sought to further strengthen its relations with China. In light of this, India was highly concerned and resorted to [turning] the table on its own right [...] by partnering with some Western countries which were unhappy with the MR regime for its conduct [during] the final war (personal communication, July 02, 2020).

In contrast, the advent of the Maithripala Sirisena (MS) administration from 2015 to 2019, which vowed to revive Indo-Sri Lanka relations that were strained during the MR regime (second tenure) while reviewing the China-funded development projects, marked a new chapter in postwar Indo-Sri Lanka relations. Pursuing an India-centric policy, the new regime sought to redress the imbalances created by the previous MR government which had failed to pay due regard to India's concerns over China's increased presence on the island, a presence which caused serious threats and challenges to India (Chazan, 2017). Interestingly, there are a couple of conspiracy theories about the unexpected victory of MS amidst MR's peak of popularity. The widely held theory is that it was India which worked behind the scenes for the MS election victory (Sultana, 2016). We cannot simply discard this idea as baseless since there were considerable reasons for India to do so, such as its concern regarding how the China-Sri Lanka relations developed in the aftermath of the civil war, in general, and the launch of BRI in 2013. Moreover, India also warmly congratulated the new MS government upon its victory, and the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Sri Lanka as a goodwill gesture in reciprocation of President Sirisena's first official overseas visit to India soon after taking the presidential oath (Business Standard, 2015).

Against this background, the new MS government (2015-2019) sought to balance India against China which had enjoyed the upper hand in Sri Lanka's economic sphere (Kumar, 2017b). Two measures were adopted in this regard: suspending Chinese-funded projects including the Colombo Port City, China's flagship project in Sri Lanka with a budget worth US$1.8 billion and renegotiating the terms of the Chinese development loans

to Sri Lanka; and awarding fresh development projects to India, for instance, the development of the East Container Terminal at Colombo Port (Bagchi 2019). Among the prominent reasons stated for the review of Chinese projects were, the lack of transparency and following improper procedures in awarding projects and the environmental impact of these projects. To be concise, unlike the MR regime (during the second term), the MS government was enthusiastically engaged with India to mend ties. China, frustrated by the MS regime's 'passive hedging', reacted with a heavy hand in that it demanded that the GoSL pay default interest as a penalty for the period the Chinese projects were put on hold. In the end, the MS administration, which was left with no option, agreed to lease out Hambantota Port to China for 99 years in return for restructuring the loans (Sultana, 2016). During the interview, respondent SLDP3 expressed the following views.

> The NU government, to some degree, was able to navigate both China and India by employing [a] balancing strategy. Bringing India to the centre stage, the new government maintained close strategic cooperation with India, while alienating itself from China. Antagonised by the NU government's see-saw move, China began to tighten its grip on the former using its debt-trap diplomacy (personal communication, November 14, 2019).

The MS administration, having found that its foreign policy strategy toward China had its own limits due to the latter's deep economic and strategic presence in Sri Lanka which India could neither replace nor substitute, sought to make rapprochement with China, thereby enacting the MS government's much-touted policy of rectifying the mistakes in the previous regime's India policy (Manoharan & Pawar, 2019). To make things worse, the deteriorating relationship between President Sirisena and his Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe caused open conflict, culminating in political instability and an attendant political crisis which frustrated both China and India. Therefore, Sri Lanka simultaneously strengthened ties with China and employed selective cooperation with India. This can be seen as an instance of passive hedging where verbal assurances were given to India, but substantive benefits and projects were directed towards China.

4.4.2 Indo-Sri Lanka Security and Defence Ties

Security and defence ties between India and Sri Lanka have played an important role in their bilateral relationship from the outset. India has consistently shown interest in strengthening bilateral security and defence linkages with Sri Lanka in various ways and on numerous occasions. From providing training to Sri Lankan servicemen and providing military equipment to conducting joint military exercises at a regular interval, India has broadened bilateral security ties while further deepening them (Destradi, 2012b).

However, during the period from 2005 to 2009, Indo-Sri Lanka security ties came to the fore once again when the GoSL, which had always been interested in obtaining India's open support in the fight against the LTTE, attempted to promote the idea of a defence cooperation agreement, despite the deal ultimately never being formalised due to political pressure from Tamil Nadu (Destradi, 2012a; Farzana, 2005; Ghosh, 2014). As one of leading columnists in the field of international relations (PO 5) opined out:

> India wanted to secure its territorial integrity and state security. Gradually, the regional power and interests came to the centre of India, and I believe that Sri Lanka used the Indian support in defeating the LTTE. However, I have no details to claim that India provided financial support for ending the war. Indian concern was on the Tamil people though it did not want to support the LTTE any longer (personal communication, November 7, 2019).

This was further elaborated by respondent PA3 who is a leading scholar in the field of international relations stated:

> As Sri Lanka's open call for support to its war campaign was well received by certain Asian powers like China, Pakistan, and Iran which India looks upon as [competitors] and [challengers] respectively except for Iran, India felt that it was left with no option but to support Sri Lanka in the best way possible in the face of domestic constraints i.e., DMK coalition ally. To this effect, India by quietly cooperating with [the] GoSL logistically and

> diplomatically offered whatever it thought necessary for Sri Lanka to fight the LTTE (personal communication, November 5, 2019).

Further, India was very receptive to the GoSL's request and call for support and cooperation in the security and logistical domains. For instance, when the GoSL repeatedly proposed that India should jointly patrol the Palk Straits in order to limit the activities of the Sea Tigers (the LTTE's naval forces), India complied promptly. The Tamil Nadu state government opposed this move in April 2007, but India (central government) had deployed three ships from its navy and coast guard to patrol the seas around Sri Lanka and justified this move as protecting Indian fishermen from attacks (Destradi, 2012a). From 2006 to 2009, the Indian and Sri Lankan naval forces undertook coordinated operations, leading to the destruction of at least 10 'floating warehouses' used by the LTTE, thus considerably weakening the Sea Tigers (Suryanarayan, 2012, p.172). The Indian navy was involved in reconnaissance missions and the provision of intelligence to the Sri Lankan navy, which carried out the strikes (Smith, 2010, p. 49).

Furthermore, India made life saving equipment such as flak jackets available for the GoSL. And India, in 2006, 'quietly gifted' five helicopters to the Sri Lankan air force and an offshore patrol vessel to the navy in 2007 (Destradi, 2012a, p. 606). Yet, the only publicly acknowledged support by the Indian government consisted of providing two air surveillance radars to deal with the LTTE's air attacks. Evidence shows that Sri Lanka became the single largest recipient of Indian military training in India (Destradi, 2010). India later extended annual training for the Sri Lankan armed forces in India, and particularly in the maritime realm, gifted two naval ships to Sri Lanka in 2008 (Roy-Chaudhury, 2019).

The security dimension of Indo-Sri Lanka ties figures prominently in all the other aspects and elements of their bilateral ties due to Sri Lanka's geopolitical and geo-strategic location in the middle of the IOR (Awad & Todkar, 2021a). Sri Lanka is essential for maintaining India's power in South Asia, as it can help India to resist the advances or influences of other states in the region. India, for example, is interested in basing itself at Colombo port for important economic and geo-strategic reasons. The strategic dimensions of the IOR have now, therefore, changed with the coming of China onto the scene (Mishra & Mishra, 2021).

As a result, Sri Lanka is of great geo-strategic importance to India. In line with Panikkar's (1945) concept of 'strategic unity', Sri Lanka occupies an integral part in the security of India and the Indian Ocean (Kodikara, 1978). Hence, Sri Lanka is a strategic gateway to the Indian Ocean (Farzana, 2005; Mallempati, 2022). Owing to the island's location, socio-political developments happening in Sri Lanka tend to affect the peace and national integration and unity of some Indian states, particularly Tamil Nadu (Farzana, 2005). This fact had become evident during the ethnic conflict in the island which, at one point, drew the involvement of external powers and prompted various forms and degrees of Indian reaction. For instance, India's desire to keep external powers away from the region in order to maintain its security interests resulted in the 1987 Indo-Lanka Accord with Sri Lanka (Murthy, 2000).

To make its role assertive in dealing with the civil war, India set up a 'troika' mechanism (2008-2009), which consisted of three members each from India and Sri Lanka – with the expectation that it could make decisions on behalf of the respective governments to deal with India-Sri Lanka relations amid the war (Mallempati, 2022). Both humanitarian as well as security concerns were addressed through this mechanism. While India supplied offshore patrol vessels (OPV), non-lethal equipment, and an air defence support system which restricted the supply chain of the LTTE by increasing maritime surveillance, it urged the Sri Lankan government for the safe passage of civilians (Mallempati, 2022).

The new NU government (2015-2019) showed considerable sensitivity to India's security concerns. To this effect, the PM, Wickremasinghe, assured India that the NU government would inform it about the entry of Chinese warships and submarines into Sri Lankan ports well in advance (Sultana, 2017a). In fact, the NU government had refused the entry of a Chinese naval ship to a make port call in Colombo in May 2017, days prior to the BRI conference in China (Mansoor & Pandey, 2020). Additionally, to diminish Indian fears about China's expanding influence and attendant security threats to India, the GoSL incorporated additional clauses into the Sri Lanka-China agreement on the Hambantota Port. Moreover, keeping in mind India's concerns, the GoSL refused to buy the JF-17 combat aircraft from Pakistan, even though the Sri Lankan air force had plans to refurbish its air capability at the time (Panda, 2016, n.p).

4.4.3 Indo-Sri Lanka Trade and Economic Relations from 2005 to 2015

Contemporary Indo-Sri Lanka bilateral economic ties should be understood against the backdrop in which they evolved. With India's economic liberalisation drive and the attendant increase in economic growth, India sought to position itself towards its South Asian neighbour as an 'opportunity' for removing its traditional image of being a 'threat' (Malone, 2011, p.127). Against this backdrop, India gradually began to reach out to the states in the region, including Sri Lanka, which has been one of the single largest recipients of Indian aid in recent times (Kugiel, 2017). India channels most of its aid in three forms: grants, loans, and technical assistance. Indo-Sri Lanka economic relations received a big boost during the period from 2005 to 2009 due to burgeoning economic ties following the implementation of the Indo-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (ISFTA) in March 2000, despite ups and downs in their political relations particularly on the ethnic issue (Mazumdar, 2014).

Bilateral Trading

The ISFTA liberalised trade between the two states by reducing tariffs and duties (Kelegama, 2014b). India has been considered the most valuable balanced trade partner in South Asia. India is the only state among the top 10 Sri Lankan trade partners, where exports and imports have been substantial (Bimal, 2020). Needless to say, since independence of both states, Sri Lanka has remained India's largest trading partner among the SAARC countries, with both states establishing free-trade agreements (Huettemann, 2020).

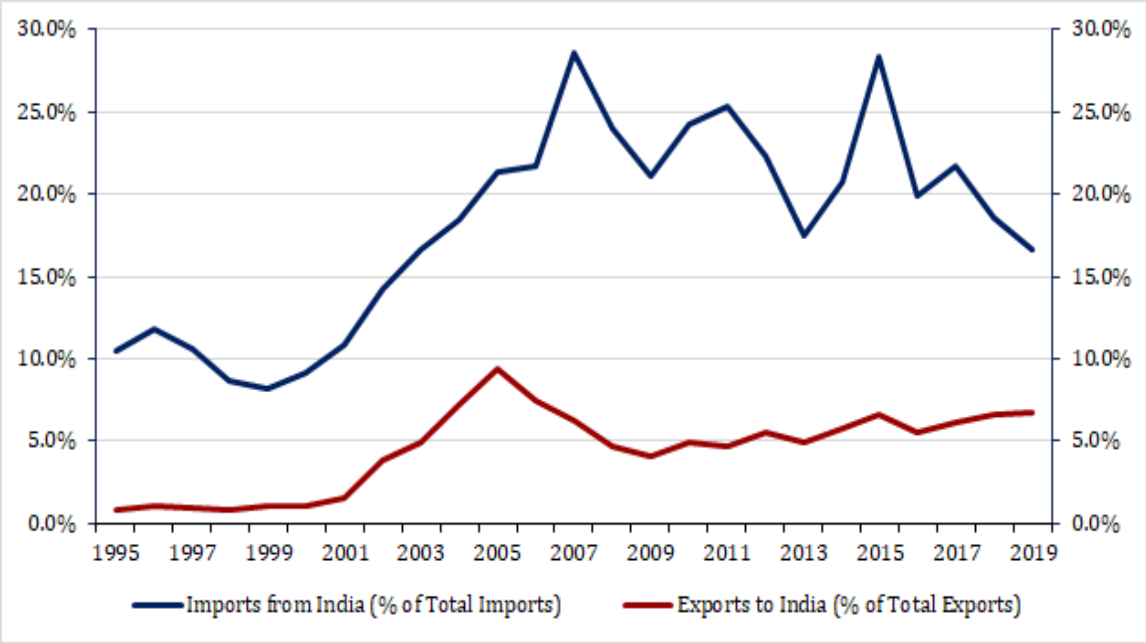

Figure 4. 1 Imports and Exports (Sri Lanka- India)

Source: LKI, 2020

Figure 4.1 indicates that Sri Lanka continued to be the most important trade partner of India in the South Asian region. Moreover, it shows that imports from India always exceeded Sri Lanka's exports to India. Particularly, during the war from 2006 to 2009, there was a high volume of imports from India, which had reached almost 25%, an all-time high (Kelegama, 2014b). During this time, aircrafts, boats, organic chemicals, vehicles, and minerals were imported from India.

As per the data from the Sri Lankan customs, bilateral trade amounted to US$4.6 billion in 2014 (Perera, 2015). In terms of imports, India in 2016 imported products like coffee and tea (19%) from Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka’s imports from India amounted to US$3,977.18 million, and exports to India amounted to US$624.67 million, registering a rise of 24.83% and 14.86%, respectively, as compared to the corresponding period of 2013 (High Commission of India Colombo, 2015). After 2015, however, with the regime change in Sri Lanka during President Maithripala Sirisena’s tenure, Indian exports to Sri Lanka had considerably decreased. An overall analysis predicted that during the Mahinda Rajapaksa period, India’s and Sri Lanka’s overall trade and business record was high compared to all other periods. However, exports from Sri Lanka to India have increased drastically over the last 12 years under the India- Sri Lanka trade agreement (ISFTA),

according to the Indian High Commission. In a few years, India became Sri Lanka's largest trading partner by replacing the West and Japan. Eventually, Sri Lanka became India's largest trading partner in South Asia (Huettemann, 2020).

In 2005, the trade balance was 2.4: 1 in favour of Sri Lanka (Padmakumara & Senanayake, 2019). This was a positive sign of the progression of bilateral relations between the two countries. It also led to developing a fellow feeling of Sri Lankans towards India. This positive engagement resulted in many outcomes. One such positive outcome was that the largest number of foreign tourists arriving in Sri Lanka was from India, with Indians accounting for 21.4% of total arrivals in 2008 (as quoted in (Manoharan, 2011, p. 230). Thus, increased people-to-people relationships resulted in colossal economic and social interests to sustain the states' bilateral relations. In that sense, Indo-Sri Lanka bilateral trade linkages witnessed substantial growth in bilateral commercial relations after the 2000s. The ethnic civil war, which at some point negatively affected Indo-Sri Lanka political relations, appears to not have substantially affected the growth of trade links between the two states (Mazumdar, 2014).

In recent times, Indo-Sri Lanka trade grew at a remarkable pace following the introduction of the FTA two decades ago, benefitting both states and changing the pattern of trade between the two states since then. Nevertheless, India's trade relations with Sri Lanka give India the upper hand, as it faces less competition from other states when it comes to exporting to Sri Lanka (Samaranayake, 2011). This was largely fostered by duty-free and duty-preferential access. A large volume of India's exports to Sri Lanka includes petroleum products and transport equipment, whereas India imports tea, coffee, edible oil, spices, and electrical machinery from Sri Lanka (Huettemann, 2020). As a result, India became the most important trading partners of Sri Lanka (Taneja & Bimal, 2020).

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka also benefits from its trade with India, as Sri Lanka has been able to export plenty of products to the hitherto protected Indian market due to the pre-liberalisation economic policy (Harilal & Joseph, 1999). In addition, several Sri Lankan companies selling industrial and commercial products like biscuits, furniture, footwear, machinery, and herbal products, have successfully entered the Indian market in the recent past (Mazumdar, 2014). Most of the trade between the two states was limited to goods rather than services. Given the dense nature of trading activities between India and Sri

Lanka, India remains the largest exporter of goods to Sri Lanka accounting to 19.1% of the latter's total imports, while becoming Sri Lanka's fourth largest export destination, amounting to 5.5% of Sri Lanka's total trade ((Warunasurya, 2023, n.p).

The mutual success of the FTA pushed the two states to negotiate a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in 2015 to further advance trade in areas of services and investment (Reddy, 2008), although the CEPA still remains a dream project that has not yet taken root due to opposition from trade unions in Sri Lanka. There was an expectation that the CEPA would further strengthen bilateral trade and Indian investment in the Sri Lankan service sector. CEPA's service component caused fear and suspicion among the business community in Sri Lanka because it was perceived that services and investment liberalisation measures are likely to harm certain domestic sectors and companies (Samaraweera, 2008). This concern has affected the progress of bilateral talks on the CEPA since then.

Regarding the investment component in Indo-Sri Lanka economic relations, it should be noted that the extension of bilateral trade had also enabled Indian investment in Sri Lanka, making India one of the largest investors in Sri Lanka with US$110 million in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in 2010 (High Commission of India-Colombo, 2012). In 2014, Indian investments in Sri Lanka accounted for more than 50% of total Indian investments in South Asia (High Commission of India-Colombo, ND). It is found that major investments were confined mostly to tourism and tourism-related infrastructure and other sectors including information technology, telecom, textiles and garments, food products, and retail petroleum.

The majority of Indian investments in Sri Lanka are in the services sector (Kelegama & Mukherji, 2007) making Indian investments both a destination for Indian products as well as a manufacturing centre for Indian companies. During the 10 years following the signing of the FTA, both bilateral trade and Indian investments in Sri Lanka increased substantially (High Commission of India-Colombo, 2013). It appeared that the political change of 2015 in Sri Lanka, which brought a new government, further boosted the Indo-Sri Lanka economic relations as Sri Lanka's ties with India progressed smoothly during this period.

The period spanning from 2015 to 2019, during which the NU government led by Maitree- Ranil duo was in power, witnessed both the prospects as well as challenges on the economic domain of the Indo-Sri Lanka bilateral ties. Although the Indian FDI in Sri Lanka increased substantially to a total of US$1.6 billion in 2019, Sri Lanka was not a major source of FDI for India. In fact, Sri Lanka's FDI accounted for a very small volume of India's total receipts (Huettemann el. al, 2020, p.7)). As for trade in services, it showed a rise of 31%, of which tourism figured the most, accounting to an average of 18% in annual inbound travel arrivals from India. Similarly, merchandise trade marked a seven-fold increase during the period in question. Sri Lanka's exports to India were centred around commodities and agricultural products. However, India was focused on cooperation in the Ocean economy through continued and increasing ODA to Sri Lanka, thereby seeking to take the FTA to the next level (Sultana, 2017a).

4.5. Indo-Sri Lanka Development Cooperation

Apart from the normal bilateral economic and trade relations between India and Sri Lanka, development cooperation in the forms of investments (FDI) and infrastructure development steadily took root in the aftermath of the civil war. One of the respondents (SLDP4) stated the following:

> In the post-conflict era, the most pressing challenge Sri Lanka faces is economic development which got stalled by the 30-year long civil war. With the conclusion of the civil war, a new chapter is opened up for Sri Lanka to revive its economy by looking forward to enhancing its trade, exports in particular, [attracting] foreign direct investments, and [promoting the] tourism industry. Given the interdependent nature of international relations, it is vital for Sri Lanka to forge healthy relations with the states in the world in order to achieve the foretold goals. [At best], Sri Lanka should think seriously about how to [involve] both India and China which are willing to support it [in] the post-conflict development process (personal communication, July 16, 2020).

The signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in 2011 between India and Sri Lanka over the rehabilitation of the Kankesanthurai Port stands as a major move by India in supporting the postwar reconstruction and development drive of Sri Lanka. As one of the political analysts who writes on Indo -Sri Lanka relations to local newspapers of Sri Lanka (PA2) stated:

> In the midst of mounting pressure and [challenges] India faced from various fronts i.e., China's unthwarted economic involvement, GoSL's favouritism to Chinese development financing and investment, India came forward with very few significant projects [for] Sri Lanka especially for the [North] which India [considered] its region of interest (personal communication, November 03, 2019).

In 2012, Sri Lanka received FDI of US$160.17 million from India, whereby India became the fourth largest investor in Sri Lanka after the UAE (US$213.59 million), Hongkong (US$200.04 million), and China (US$184.96 million) (Sunday Observer 2015, n.p). Moreover, in June 2012, Sri Lanka signed its largest FDI agreement amounting to US$4 billion with an Indian company to construct a special industrial zone for heavy industrial manufacture in Trincomalee (Wedagedara, 2013, p. 74)). Similarly, in 2013, India was amongst the eight largest overall investors in Sri Lanka with total investments of around US$50.52 million (High Commission of India-Colombo, ND). Sri Lanka received a total of US$1.42 billion FDI during this period (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka 2014). From 2015 to 2019, inflows from India to Sri Lanka accounted for 13% of total FDI receipts making it the third largest source of FDI (Huettemann, 2020).

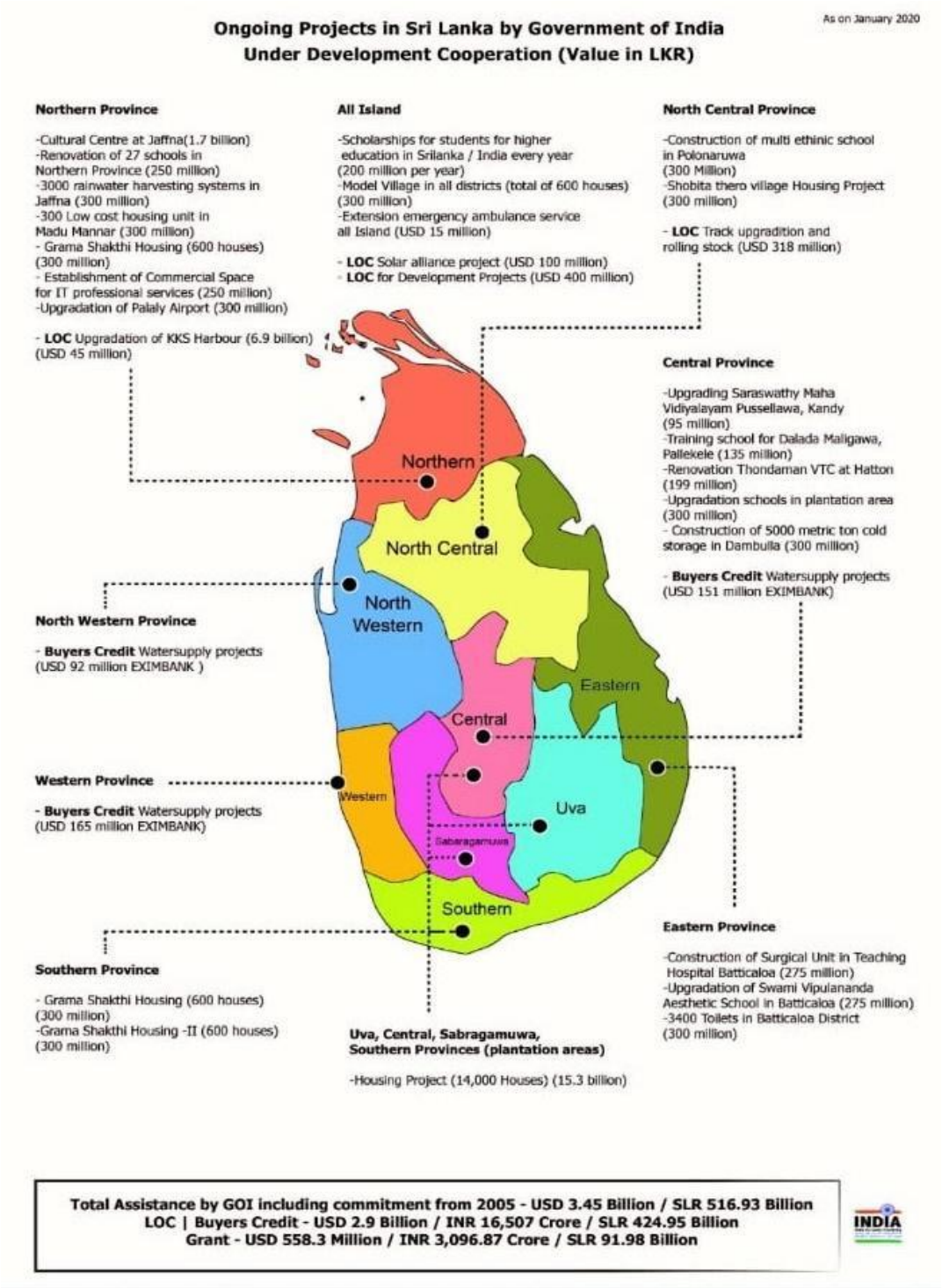

Figure 4. 2 Ongoing Projects in Sri Lanka by the Government of India

Source: High Commission of India, 2020 (see https://hcicolombo.gov.in/ for more details).

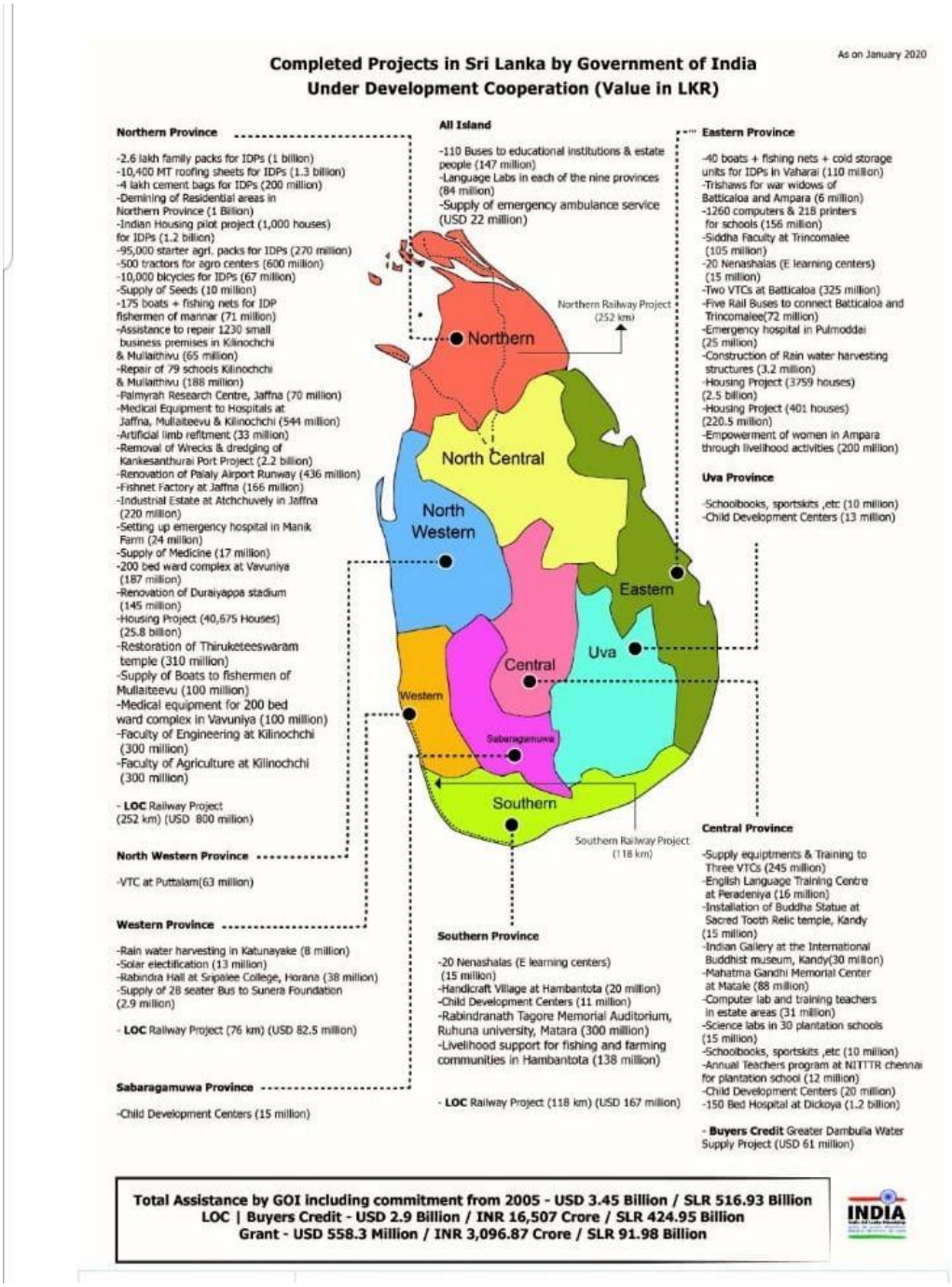

Figure 4. 3 Completed Projects in Sri Lanka by the Indian Government

Source: High Commission of India, 2020 (see https://hcicolombo.gov.in/ for more details).

Figures 4.2 and 4.3 respectively show the ongoing and completed Indian projects in postwar Sri Lanka. In the postwar rebuilding of Sri Lanka, India had established its presence in some areas such as housing, infrastructure, education, health, agriculture, fisheries, industry, handicrafts, culture, and sports. India showed phenomenal interest and

involvement in the war-torn Northern province by grabbing the opportunities on offer in reconstruction of the war-affected regions, rebuilding villages, and boosting the economy in the Northern and Eastern provinces of the state. Housing development involved the construction of 50,000 houses with a commitment of over US$270 million, making it the flagship project of India's grant assistance to Sri Lanka (The Economic Times, 2015a). India also announced a grant of Five hundred crores in Indian rupees to be given for rehabilitation/reconstruction activities, including the development of 50,000 houses for internally displaced people (IDPs) in Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka (High Commission of India Colombo, 2015).

India, in comparison to China, has funded small-scale development projects, which are more focused on social welfare as opposed to the mega development projects funded by China (Sultana, 2016). The Chinese projects involved infrastructure development and had a major impact on the economy. India's involvement in infrastructure development projects was at a lesser scale than China (Jain, 2022; Manoharan, 2013). Thus, unlike China, due to the nature of the Indian-backed projects, India could not exert substantial pressure over Sri Lanka. Additionally, there was a significant increase in the tourism sector too - in 2014, out of the total of 1,527,153 tourists who visited Sri Lanka, 242,734 were from India– an increase of 16.25% when compared to 2013 figures (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2014).

4.6. The Human Rights Issue and Indo-Sri Lanka Relations

The end of the civil war created a set of socioeconomic problems that presented policymakers with an unprecedented challenge.

As respondent IDP4 stated:

> From a diplomatic perspective, India supported the resolution on Sri Lanka [that was] brought in at the Human Rights Council held in 2009. India voted in favour of the resolution and condemned all attacks that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam launched on the civilian population and its practice of using civilians as human shields, and welcomed the conclusion of hostilities, the liberation of thousands of citizens [of the state] kept as hostages by the LTTE against their will,

> and the efforts by the Government to ensure the safety and security of all Sri Lankans (personal communication, July 30, 2019).

Externally, the EU, other Western states and the UN exerted pressure on Sri Lanka over the alleged human rights violations. Internally, reconstruction and development imperatives battered the Rajapaksa administration, which desperately needed foreign support to deal with these emergent challenges. To deal with the external challenge, the GoSL was compelled to seek the support of the UNHRC member states, and at the same time, it was engaged in the disarmament of the LTTE cadres and took measures to rehabilitate child soldiers all the while assuring security for internally displaced peoples (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2009). Having made a timely entry onto the scene, China helped Sri Lanka escape the international call for an independent investigation into the allegation of war crimes. To tackle this challenge, Sri Lanka, with the diplomatic support of China, attempted to refute the international call for an independent scrutiny by claiming that the alleged violation of human rights stands a "domestic matter that doesn't warrant outside interference" (Pidd, 2009, p. 455).

In this regard, the GoSL has consistently maintained that there was no need for international mediation on domestic issues, while voluntarily proposing an internal investigation into the allegation (Iqbal, 2018). Due to persistent pressures from Western states and international human rights organisations, Sri Lanka was left with the option of restoring to support from China in dealing with human rights challenges. At this critical juncture, China made itself available to help Sri Lanka, as India and the USA wanted to hold the GoSL accountable for alleged abuse of human rights (Hein, 2017). In this regard, one of the Indian professors in International Relations (PA4) stated the following during the interview conducted when he visited Sri Lanka:

> As war crime allegations against [the] GoSL continued, the United States and Europe prepared to bring a UN resolution to investigate the allegations, which received overwhelming publicity and support from South Indian politicians and the Tamil diaspora. In this context, India began to support the UN resolution against Sri Lanka in 2012 and 2013 (personal communication, December 08, 2019).

To this end, the Tamil diaspora set up several organisations to fund operations against the GoSL and provide evidence of human right violations during the war (Wayland, 2004). Furthermore, it was clear that they had been vociferously campaigning since 2009 against the GoSL over the purported genocide. Despite the LTTE's complete military defeat in 2009, the Tamil diaspora's support for the Tamil Eelam did not recede (Wayland, 2004). The Tamil diaspora's campaign against the GoSL on its alleged war crimes, together with winning so-called 'Western sympathy' towards its campaign, led the UN to increase its pressure on the GoSL to make way for an international inquiry on the alleged human rights violations (Jayasundara-Smits, 2022). In turn, the GoSL under MR rushed to set up a home-grown mechanism called the Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) to investigate the circumstances that lead to the failure of the February 2002 CFA (Keenan, 2011). The recommendations and the suggestions the commission produced were considered by the UNHRC to fall short of international standards due to the commission's limited mandate, and the recommendations were not implemented either (Human Rights Watch, 2014).

Interestingly, during the 2012 UNHRC session, India and the USA, who were unhappy with Sri Lanka's progress in restoring postwar peace, voted in support of the resolution condemning the GoSL (Indian High Commission of Colombo, 2012; Jain, 2022). However, China voted in Sri Lanka's favour, opposing the resolution (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2013). Furthermore, the year 2013 was an important one for China-Sri Lanka relations. The UNHRC membership of China was critically important during this period, as the UN human rights rapporteur was planning to present a critical report on Sri Lanka's postwar record on accountability and reconciliation (Markar, 2020). In this regard, one of the respondents (PA6) opined the following:

> As the West-led UNHRC member states including India attempted to make the GoSL accountable for the alleged war [crimes] by bringing a UN resolution to investigate the allegations, India together with the US and some European states voted in support of the resolution, while China opposed it. This shows [that] China's Sri Lanka policy remained consistent throughout, while India's policy [was] fluctuating (personal communication, June 27, 2020).

4.7. Indo-Sri Lanka Strategic Cooperation Under the NU Government

The change from the MR government to the MS government in January 2015 marked a new beginning for Indo-Sri Lanka relations in general and for the bilateral development cooperation in particular. In line with presidential candidate Sirisena's much vowed pledge to replace the MR regime's overt pro-China policy with a balanced policy, he intended to follow an India-centric policy, while maintaining friendly relations with all states (De Silva, 2018). A Senior media person (MP2) stated:

> There has been a positive change in [Sri Lanka's] foreign policy during the post-2015 period. Sri Lanka made a positive change in its foreign policy particularly in terms of balancing between China and India. As there was a coalition government at that time, Sri Lanka was able to address a greater audience in her international system (personal communication, November 14, 2019).

In doing so, the MS government was focused on reviving bilateral ties with India, which remained strained in many respects. For instance, politically, India regained the leverage over Sri Lanka, especially over the human rights issue and political solution to the ethnic conflict. Economically, however, India wielded limited power as its development activities were confined primarily to the Northern province (Kandaudahewa, 2020). Coincidentally, the newly installed Indian government led by Premier Narendra Modi focused on showcasing its 'Neighbourhood First' policy as the new strategy to engage states in South Asia and the IOR (Gill, 2024). In particular, Modi's Sri Lanka policy placed special emphasis on strengthened economic cooperation through development cooperation, bilateral trade, and public-private investment (Sultana, 2017a). Under this new policy, India sought to change its widely held image of being a 'big brother' among its neighbours into being a 'benign brother', anticipating that the new image would bring neighbouring states closer to India for development cooperation (Muni, 2020, p.107 & 109).

For India, the imperative was to devise an effective foreign policy strategy based on economic and development cooperation to contain China which had made forays in Sri Lanka using its economic state crafting. With the MS administration's high enthusiasm to maintain more friendly and cooperative relations, the Modi government made a comeback

in a big way with its multiple development projects in various fields ranging from infrastructure development to economic boosting (Manoharan & Pawar, 2019). For instance, India offered a US$328 credit line for various infrastructure projects including railway expansion; and offered US$1.1billion to stabilise the Sri Lankan rupee. It also effected the disbursement of US$73 million for the procurement of two advanced offshore patrol vessels (Sultana, 2017a, p. 229).

The Sirisena-led NU government efforts to rectify the MR regime's mistakes in the initial few years (2015-2018), and India's renewed energy and enthusiasm for closer economic and strategic engagement under the Neighbourhood First policy, helped India to regain the strategic space it had lost to China during the MR administration (particularly during his second tenure). This illustrates how the strategic rivalry between China and India influenced Indian policy innovation, and NCR helps explain why such systemic rivalry translated into these specific state actions. The 'honeymoon phase' of Modi's NDA and Sirisena's NU governments continued until Sirisena made a U-turn in his foreign policy and visited China and signed new development projects in 2018 (Manoharan & Pawar, 2019). The irony was that Sirisena, during his election campaign, accused Chinese projects in Sri Lanka for being corrupt, and discontinued them after assuming office as president. However, the new development project signed between China and Sri Lanka aimed to develop President Sirisena's own district (Polonnaruwa) and included the construction of a kidney hospital. This abrupt change of policy of the MS administration was partially due to the personality clash between Sirisena and Prime Minister Wickremasinghe which affected the economic and foreign policy of Sri Lanka (Siriwardana, 2018). Here again, NCR highlights how unit-level leadership conflict and domestic political priorities mediated systemic rivalry, producing foreign policy inconsistency despite continued India-China competition.

It is apparent that since the advent of the bipartisan government led by the Sirisena-Wickremasinghe duo in 2015, Indo-Sri Lanka relations, especially in the area of development cooperation, witnessed a productive bilateral engagement (Mallempati, 2022). The following factors have contributed to this situation: the near coincidence of the coming of Modi's NDA and Sirisena's NUG governments into power and their respective Neighbourhood First and India-centric policies helped improve Indo-Sri Lanka economic relations in the area of development cooperation (Manoharan & Pawar, 2019, p.138); and

unlike the previous Congress-led coalition government where DMK of Tamil Nadu was an important ally who sought to interfere with New Delhi's decision on Sri Lanka, Modi's NDA government enjoyed an absolute majority in Lok Sabha that discouraged Tamil Nadu from exerting influence in New Delhi's decisions regarding Sri Lanka (Sultana, 2017a, p.234). In this regard, a senior academic who teaches and researches on international politics (PA1) mentioned the following:

> the convergence and compatibility of [the] outlook on China by India and Sri Lanka during the early years from 2015 to 2019 under [the] NDA and NU governments respectively opened up new avenues of strategic cooperation in development and security. India's offer of new development projects along with strategic investments during this period stands as a clear testimony for the renewed Indo-Sri Lanka bilateral relations (personal communication, November 03, 2019).

It was relatively easy for the NDA government to smoothly employ its Neighbourhood First policy on Sri Lanka, at least during the first few years (Moorthy, 2016). However, with the increase in the Sirisena regime's intimacy with China during its final 2 years, the pace of the economic cooperation with India was negatively impacted, despite India's efforts to improve the relations.

4.8. India and Sri Lanka's Hedging Policy

Unlike India's Sri Lanka policy during the final civil war, New Delhi purportedly pursued a two-pronged approach regarding the post-war exigency in Sri Lanka. In the face of India's post-war approach, Sri Lanka, under the MR regime, employed hedging in a particular and distinct way – verbal displaying (in the form of assurance) of being India-sensitive while at the same time favouring Beijing over New Delhi. This is a clear indication of how passive hedging was pursued by Sri Lanka where MR signalled the rhetoric of being India sensitive while functionally drifting away towards China for economic benefit and diplomatic cover.

4.8.1 Dual Strategy and Indo-Sri Lanka Relations

For the GOSL, speedy reconstruction was more imperative than sluggish rehabilitation and reconciliation. It wanted to address Tamil grievances, the trigger of the civil war, through physical development and livelihood support (Keerawella, 2013). The civil war, fought for nearly 30 years, had severely affected Sri Lanka's economic and political stability, incurring a high cost economically (Karunaratne, 2014). Though it is not clear as to what percentage of people died as a result of the war, most of them were ethnic Tamils (Kilavuz, 2017). Besides, thousands of IDPs, war victims, child soldiers, and former LTTE combatants were among those who required immediate attention (Siriwardhana & Wickramage, 2014). As far as Sri Lanka was concerned, foreign relations had become an essential element in the aftermath of the war in which the government emerged victorious. Sri Lanka's challenges in the postwar period can be categorised under these areas: reconstruction, resettlement, rehabilitation, reintegration, and reconciliation (Sahu, 2016b).

Realising the gravity of the multiple challenges that were ahead such as reconstruction, the rehabilitation of ex-LTTE cadres, the development of the state as a whole, and dealing with the international community over human rights allegations, the GoSL wasted no time but looked to China, Pakistan, and such like-minded states in the Persian Gulf, touting an Asia pivot policy instead of a traditional Non-aligned policy and pro-Western policy. The GoSL (the war victor) strengthened its foreign relations with such states in South Asia, Asia, the Persian Gulf, and Africa (Abesinghe, 2022). Compelled by these imperatives for rebuilding the economy in parallel with reconstruction and rehabilitation, postwar Sri Lanka had to simultaneously pursue a foreign policy that would attract foreign investments and funds (Premarathna, 2021). In the meantime, it needed diplomatic support from states to tackle international pressure on alleged human rights violations and the pressure which came primarily from India and the West for a political solution to the ethnic conflict. To this effect, Sri Lanka looked to new development partners such as China and India, as opposed to its erstwhile traditional development partners, for economic and diplomatic support (Saravanathan, 2014).

This view became evident when India abandoned its longstanding hands-off policy over the ethnic issue and internal politics, in general, in Sri Lanka in order to assume a role for itself in the postwar setting. With its secondary role in the Eelam War IV, i.e., providing covert support by sharing intelligence information and in some cases, non-lethal weapons to Sri Lanka amidst strong opposition from within the government coalition ally, India sensed the challenges ahead for itself in postwar Sri Lanka. India's support towards rebuilding came about mostly in the form of humanitarian and livelihood assistance rather than infrastructure development, as was the case with other participants in the postwar rebuilding activities (Manoharan, 2010). For instance, the Northern housing project consisting of 50,000 units for war-displaced persons stands as a landmark of the support that India provided to postwar Sri Lanka in addressing the immediate needs of the displaced people (Sultana, 2017a).

Respondent MP6, who is a news editor of a local newspaper noted:

> The emergence of [the] postwar scenario provided the window of opportunity for both China and India as the major contributors after the civil war conclusion. However, India, due to its coercive concentration on the former war-torn area, as opposed to China's southern Sri Lanka [focus], along with its insistence on reconciliation, soon became an annoyance in the eyes of Sri Lanka (personal communication, June 27, 2020).

Hence, India's participation in postwar Sri Lanka came about at a juncture where India, in addition to playing an apolitical role as a supporter of reconstruction, was faced with challenges on various fronts. First, the GOSL's disposition toward preserving postwar stability helped it to ensure its political survival, thereby shooting down any initiative for ethnic reconciliation or power devolution that India attempted to impose during the early years of the postwar period. Second, China's involvement mainly in the non-erstwhile war zones in the South of Sri Lanka, by undertaking major infrastructure development projects in strategically important areas like Hambantota and Colombo, posed a serious security threat to India (Loc, 2023). Third, the GOSL's increased dependence upon China and other India-unfriendly states like Pakistan for diplomatic and economic assistance within the UN

and beyond pushed India towards a dilemma of whether to pressurise Sri Lanka or to cooperate with it on its reconstruction policies and programmes (Shivamurthy et al., 2022).

PO4 who is a senior research officer in international politics observed the following:

> The Indian participation in the postwar Sri Lanka was prompted by a set of domestic and regional compulsions: the Tamil Nadu factor, India's regional security, and hegemony. While India participated in the post-war reconstruction to preserve its strategic space, it constantly urged [the] GoSL of the need to resolve the ethnic issue owing to the pressure exerted by Tamil Nadu upon the India's NDA government (personal communication, November 02, 2019).

The International Crisis Group (2011) reported that New Delhi considered four priority options regarding the reconstruction of the war-affected areas in Sri Lanka. They were;

1. providing humanitarian assistance to people who were displaced during the final stages of the war,
2. embarking on main development projects targeting the North and the East and providing financial assistance by supplying raw materials and concessionary loans,
3. pressuring the Government of Sri Lanka and Tamil-political parties to reach a negotiated settlement to address the requirements of the Tamil people, and
4. encouraging economic integration between Sri Lanka and the Indian government (ICG, 2011d).

4.8.2 Strains inflicted by Sri Lanka's hedging on Indo-Sri Lanka Relations

What follows next is an analysis of the Sri Lanka's foreign policy behaviour as a small state toward India and China during the period from 2005 to 2019. In doing so, it sheds light on Sri Lanka's hedging strategy in its relations with the two major regional powers-China and India- that compete for strategic primacy in the IOR. Sri Lanka with its ample geo-strategic and geoeconomic significance, sought to treat both partners equally, weighing their relative importance and relevance on a strategic scale during the different

circumstances it faced. For instance, the MR regime, when it was preparing for an all-out military offensive on the LTTE in 2007, first approached India for help and defence cooperation, knowing fully well that India's hands were tied by its own domestic constraints including its self-imposed hands-off policy towards Sri Lankan internal affairs (especially the ethnic issue) and prevailing political sensitivities in Tamil Nadu which vociferously espoused the LTTE's cause i.e., securing a separate state for Tamils. The initial unfavourable response from India to the MR regime's request was a convenient excuse and an opportunity for Sri Lanka to look to other external state actors who were already in conflict and in competition with India for the same help. As PO2 who is an Executive Director of a Non-Governmental Organisation stated:

> In the years leading to the final stages of the Eelam War IV, the GoSL led by Mahinda Rajapaksa was well positioned to make use of Sri Lanka's diplomatic potentials by navigating between the two regional rivals to get them on the same board— [as supporters] of Sri Lanka's war campaign (personal communication, November 02, 2019).

The MR regime's hedging between China and India, however, witnessed an ascendance during its second tenure in the postwar period (2010-2015). That is, in the face of mounting pressure from India to address ethnic and human rights issues, the GOSL sought to sway with China to ignore the Indian pressure, letting Sri Lanka to fall into the Chinese fold. To understand Sri Lanka's behaviour clearly, we should examine the background against which Sri Lanka's hedging strategy evolved over the period from 2005 to 2019 and its implications for Indo-Sri Lanka relations.

China and India's involvement in Sri Lanka during the final stages of the civil war and in the postwar period alike had posed both challenges and opportunities for Sri Lanka as a small power faced with two major regional powers that were engaged in strategic competition (Babar, 2023). Sri Lanka viewed China as the opportunity most of the time, and viewed India as the challenge concerning certain matters, i.e., postwar reconciliation and human rights issues. Regarding viewing China as the opportunity, three different but related matters warrant attention: first, Sri Lanka-initiated dealings with China in the field of reconstruction and infrastructure development; and second, China-induced development

projects to which Sri Lanka was a party or participant. Sri Lanka's joining of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in 2009 and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2014 belong to this area. Third, to tackle the pressure from India and the western countries, at times India joined hands to enhance its leverage on Sri Lanka. Therefore, factors at three different levels (domestic, regional, and international) influenced Sri Lanka's view of China.

The Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation of China accounted for 60% of the shipments in the Malacca Strait (Ventura Jariod & Martínez de Osés, 2020); meanwhile, 85% of China's energy resources were shipped through the Malacca Strait to the Indian Ocean once a year (Kelegama, 2014a). During his visit to Sri Lanka in 2016, Chinese State Councillor, Wang Yi directly stated that China was willing to assist Sri Lanka by contributing to its national development vision and aim to become the long-term shipping, logistic, and financial centre within the Indian Ocean (Colombo Gazette, 2016).

China's presence in postwar Sri Lanka reverberated even more in India when China, under its BRI, introduced its investment and infrastructure development initiatives. China's BRI had poured fuel onto India's suspicions about China's moves in the IOR in general, and in Sri Lanka in particular, insofar as whatever China does in South Asia was perceived by India as anti-Indian or being hostile toward India. For instance, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is seen as a potential threat to India's national security (Green et al., 2018). In this respect, respondent MP10 who is a leading columnist in local newspapers and a popular journalist in the Northern part of Sri Lanka, stated the following:

> Due to certain exigencies Sri Lanka encountered in the postwar period, Indo-Sri Lanka political ties became contentious when [the] MR regime maintained close dealings with China in the face of mounting challenges and pressure domestically and internationally. During this period, Sri Lanka looked upon China as a reliable friend [...], thus increasing the former's reliance on the latter economically and diplomatically (personal communication, July 17, 2019).

To clearly capture Sri Lanka's hedging strategy, we should closely examine the context when Sri Lanka received external support from states like China, Iran, Pakistan, and Russia in waging the war, as US and Britain distanced themselves from the MR government on account of its human rights record at the time it launched its offensive against the LTTE. This distancing continued even after the end of the war but took a more hostile attitude and approach (Edirisuriya, 2017). It is noteworthy how Sri Lanka skilfully hedged between two rivals—one of which was reluctant to play the proactive supportive role that Sri Lanka badly needed—while maintaining its strategic autonomy. The hedging policy adopted by Sri Lanka demonstrated another important element where small and middle powers are able to diversify their relations without risking their political and strategic autonomy (Rana, 2021). This is to say that the MR regime's war-time diplomacy illustrates active hedging as it focused on securing essential military support from India while simultaneously encouraging support from China. In the postwar period, this evolved into passive hedging, where rhetorical alignment with India masked a functional pivot towards China for large-scale infrastructure and diplomatic support.

Therefore, Sri Lanka's relations with China and India from 2005 to 2019 stand as the period of challenges and opportunities for Sri Lanka's foreign policy on two accounts. First, the relatively friendly bilateral ties between India and Sri Lanka provided the MR regime with a free hand to deal with the LTTE, which had already earned the wrath of India (opportunity). Second, the advent of the Sino-India rivalry in the IOR unleashed opportunities followed by challenges for Sri Lanka. With its enormous geo-strategic significance coupled with its stylised use of hedging strategy between China and India without antagonising either country, Sri Lanka, during the MR administration from 2005 to 2009, managed to achieve its goal of annihilating the LTTE from Sri Lankan soil (Destradi, 2012a, p.602). This illustrates the fact that Sri Lanka effectively pursued active hedging.

As Sultana (2017) posits, every Indian government in the past, present, and future wanted/wants to have better ties with Sri Lanka. Against this backdrop, the Modi government which came to power in mid-2014, pursued a refreshing policy toward Sri Lanka which showed considerable sensitivity to India's concerns especially in the security field. The factor that caused this change in the Modi government was that it viewed the NU government's approach to resolving the ethnic conflict as a genuine exercise to address

ethnic issues. Although India strengthened its bilateral ties with the NU government in the fields of politics and security, there was no sign of China's involvement in Sri Lanka diminishing. In brief, when the competition between China and India became intense, Sri Lanka's approach to navigate between the two rivals (China and India) yielded positive results.

Overall, the preceding analysis reveals that Indo-Sri Lanka relations under the NU government were not merely shaped by the shifting preferences of Colombo but were embedded in the broader structural rivalry between India and China. India's efforts to project itself as a development partner, and Sri Lanka's oscillation between China and India, can be understood through NCR as outcomes of the constant interaction between systemic pressures (strategic rivalry) and domestic-level political calculations. The temporary alignment with India, followed by renewed Chinese engagement, illustrates NCR's central claim that foreign policy outcomes are conditioned both by international or regional systemic competition and by state specific domestic and leadership dynamics. Similarly, from 2005-2019, Sri Lanka's foreign policy oscillated between active and passive hedging, reflecting its effort to maintain strategic autonomy amid Sino-Indian rivalry. During the civil war, active hedging employed by Sri Lanka secured critical Indian intelligence and Chinese weapons. In the post-war period, hedging shifted towards a passive mode, where rhetorical alignment with India masked a functional drift to China's economic statecraft. Under the Sirisena-Wickramasinghe (NUG) government, hedging took the form of oscillation, i.e., maintaining closer engagement with India though development cooperation was later offset by renewed Chinese partnerships.

Thus, hedging-defined as a middle path between balancing and bandwagoning, which highlights how Sri Lanka, as a small state, shaped and executed its foreign policy during the period in question. Evidently, Sri Lanka exploited great power competition to maximize benefits while avoiding overdependence, albeit at the cost of fluctuating trust and recurring strains in bilateral relationships, especially with India.

4.9. Summary

India, one of the traditional development partners of Sri Lanka, gained prominence in Sri Lankan external relations from 2005 to 2019. During this period, Indo-Sri Lanka

relations were affected by various factors. In the final civil war period, the Indo-Sri Lanka relations transformed from being 'India-phobic' to 'India-centric'. However, in the aftermath of the civil war, their bilateral ties exhibited fluctuations, although cooperation in cultural and economic fields improved significantly. The close relationship between India and Sri Lanka at the initial stage (during the final civil war) was poised to be short-lived, as Mahinda Rajapaksa attempted to tilt towards China. Three factors influenced his move. They were evading India's persistent pressure on the need to address human rights allegation and find a political solution to the Tamil issue; protecting his government from international pressure for an investigation into alleged human rights abuses in the final civil war; and making use of China's economic potentials to rebuild war-torn Sri Lanka. The MR administration's skilful diplomacy characterised by 'active' hedging-where Sri Lanka kept both China and India at equidistance, however, shifted toward 'passive' hedging displaying gradual erosion of the initial equidistance.

Therefore, it can be claimed that Sri Lanka's relations with India from 2005 to 2019 exhibit a stark fluctuation characterised by both change and continuity. At the same time, fluctuation between change and continuity is conditioned on a set of variables playing out at different domestic and regional levels. Domestic variables involve types of regimes (such as single party government and coalition government, with a single party government being relatively stable and more focused on pursuing foreign policy objectives) and ideological convergence-divergence, whereas regional variables concern regional power dynamics, i.e., how states in South Asia and the Indian Ocean interact with each other and with extra-regional powers. Therefore, as seen through the Indo-Sri Lanka relations from 2005 to 2019, it could be concluded that Sri Lanka, especially the MR regime, managed to induce a change in India's policy regarding the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. This change was impacted while still retaining China on its side, making this an instance where Sri Lanka successfully deployed active hedging.

CHAPTER FIVE

China-Sri Lanka Strategic Engagement and Indo-Sri Lanka Relations

5.1. Introduction

In the recent past, the involvement of China in Sri Lanka can broadly be categorised into two periods in terms of its nature and scale. First, the final stages of the civil war between the GoSL and the LTTE, which is marked by multiple forms of Chinese involvement ranging from military support to infrastructure development. Second, the postwar period from 2009 to 2019, which features development cooperation and diplomatic support from China. Thus, China's involvement, particularly from 2005 to 2015 (during which time Mahinda Rajapaksa was the President of Sri Lanka), indicates a departure from the traditional China-Sri Lanka bilateral relations characterised by friendship and mutual respect.

This chapter aims to examine the development of Sino-Sri Lanka ties from 2005 to 2019 and their impact on Indo-Sri Lanka relations. In doing so, the chapter pays attention to the factors and dynamics of strengthened Sino-Sri Lanka relations which led to the shaping of Indo-Sri Lanka relations. The chapter is divided into several sections to address the multiple facets of the phenomenon studied here. Section one provides an account of China-Sri Lanka relations and concentrates on the salient aspects of the bilateral ties during the final stages of the Sri Lankan civil war vis-à-vis the background factors shaping the relations. Section two details postwar China-Sri Lanka bilateral ties, followed by economic, political, security, and military ties forged under the MR regime. The third section concerns China's diplomatic support for the human rights violation allegations faced by Sri Lanka. Finally, the chapter focuses on the Maithreepala Sirisena approach toward Sino-Sri Lanka relations. Hence, this chapter explores how two different regimes (i.e., those of MR and MS) conducted Sri Lanka's ties with China.

5.2. War Campaign during the MR Regime and China's Entry into Sri Lankan Civil War

Contemporary Sino-Sri Lanka bilateral relations took place under the shadow of the final civil war which the MR regime waged against the LTTE in 2007, and which continued until mid-2009. As a matter of fact, Sri Lanka remained a normal diplomatic partner in China's overall foreign relations until 2005. In 2005, however, China, repositioned Sri Lanka's diplomatic role as a cooperative partner featuring friendlier mutual support (CIDCA, 2020). The Rajapaksa regime's decision to go for an all-out military offensive against the LTTE in 2007 required heavy economic and military backing in addition to solid political and diplomatic support. Initially, as respondent PO3 who is a freelance consultant pointed out that:

> When Mahinda Rajapaksa became the president, he maintained a close rapport with China to defeat the LTTE and China supported him in many ways for this purpose. So, he became much loyal to China after the end of civil war and the latter helped Sri Lanka with development projects in a big way (personal communication, November 02, 2019).

China offered extensive support, supplying Sri Lanka with military hardware needed to successfully conduct the war against the LTTE who ultimately got defeated at the hands of Sri Lankan armed forces. China, which was enthusiastically looking for new opportunities to expand its economic activities and influence, wasted no time to grab the emergent opportunity in Sri Lanka (Myers, 2020b). India, Sri Lanka's immediate neighbour and the most powerful regional actor who considers the latter as an integral part of its security strategy, however, was hesitant to help Sri Lanka due to two reasons. First, India faced the domestic constraint in that the NDA government, a coalition of which Tamil Nadu based DMK, an ardent supporter of the Tamil cause, was a key constituent prevented it from positively responding to Sri Lanka's desperate call. Second was the foreign policy constraint India faced in that it was pursuing a non-interference policy towards Sri Lanka especially in the affairs of the ethnic conflict. This is the backdrop against which China made a timely entry into Sri Lanka's (final) civil war theatre by making assistance available in the form of offensive weapons and economic assistance.

This marked the beginning of a new chapter in China - Sri Lanka bilateral relations, which started to thrive with unprecedented pace, height, and scale (Butler & Wheeler, 2012).

5.3 Sri Lanka's Geo-Strategic Location and China's Engagement with Sri Lanka

Over the past one and half decades, a new chapter in the history of Sri Lanka's foreign policy in general, and towards China in particular, began with Mahinda Rajapaksa coming into power in Sri Lanka. In the past few decades, China's policy on Asia has focused on Northeast, Southeast Asia and South Asia, including the IOR, where Sri Lanka occupies a key geo-strategic position. Consequently, Sri Lanka was gradually emerging as an important hub for China's strategic engagement (Brewster, 2015a). Since the 2000s, China has been closely engaged with states in Asia, especially in Southern Asia which includes South Asia and the IOR i.e., Myanmar, Bangladesh, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Nepal and, particularly, Pakistan, with which it has maintained special ties ever since the border conflict with India in 1962.

In the face of China's engagement with the states in Southern Asia which India has long considered its exclusive realm of influence, India began to gravely consider China's move in the region especially in the IOR including Sri Lanka. China's economic and strategic engagement with maritime and littoral states of the region is viewed by India as an expansion and encirclement of it. Thus, India was and is pushed to re-assert its position as the regional leader by countering Chinese inroads in geo-strategically critical states like Sri Lanka. For China, the pivotal position of Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean through which a significant portion of the international sealine communication and trade are conducted requires it to secure a strategic foothold in the island. Whereas, for India, Sri Lanka was part and parcel of its maritime security architecture ever since the former's independence. As such, Sri Lanka's geo-strategic (for India) and geo-economic (for China) significance has led China and India, two regional powers, to engage in a competition for strategic primacy in a mutually threatening manner. As a result, India's foreign policy began to pivot on a dual focused engagement by seeking to preserve the *status quo* in the Southern Asia while striving to strengthen its bilateral relations with Southeast Asian states where China has secured a strong foothold.

Chinese engagement in Sri Lanka facilitated by China's economic boom has led India to view China as a revisionist challenger which not only challenges India's dominance in the region (Indian Ocean and South Asia) but also threatens its security interests. In this scenario, although China is a long-time strategic partner in the Asian region and an emerging economic partner in South Asia, Sri Lanka became critically important for China's strategic interests (Kumar, 2017b). Studies have shown China's unprecedented interest in and enthusiasm for working with Sri Lanka since 2005 owing to Sri Lanka's strategic location in the IOR and China's necessity to keep Sri Lanka as a strategic partner (Amarasinghe, 2020). For this reason, Sri Lanka is well positioned to play a strategic role between India and China. As respondent PA 1 states:

> There exists clear evidence to the effect that China is more interested in forging and strengthening its relations with states in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. In particular, China is more focused on states like Sri Lanka which are maritime states with significant geo-strategic importance. This is the reason why China was enthusiastic to make an entry into the civil war theatre of Sri Lanka in the late 2000 during the MR administration (personal communication, November 03, 2019).

As the above quote suggests, Sri Lanka's geo-strategic location played a key role in attracting China's attention and subsequent involvement in the final civil war.

Postwar circumstances such as the western hostilities towards GoSL regarding the way in which the protracted war ended and the military defeat of the LTTE pushed Sri Lanka to strengthen its relations with states that maintained a low profile in Sri Lanka's foreign relations. Instead of its traditional pro-Western pivot, Sri Lanka pursued an Asia-centric policy encompassing China, followed by Pakistan, Iran, and certain affluent Gulf states, thus marking a significant shift in its foreign policy orientation in the recent past (Miller, 2015). According to some commentators, China was prepared to grab every opportunity to get a foothold in South Asia, including the IOR, by projecting its financial abilities in development loans and investment (De Alwis, 2010; Jain, 2022; Kelegama, 2014a). China's engagement in this sense is prompted more by its national interests than by regional prosperity concerns, as some local commentators have poorly understood (Pal,

2021). Equally applied, in Sri Lanka, Chinese investment has been pumped into various projects of strategic importance.

The scale and nature of China's post-war development engagement took the forms of commercial credit and FDI (most of which were mega projects), indicates the fact that China's engagement in Sri Lanka has transformed from ordinary bilateral cooperation to strategic cooperation. The massive pumping of funds worth of nearly $15 billion by China into Sri Lanka (Gateway House, 2016) made the former a pivotal development partner whom the latter's post-war development drive was largely dependent on. China's mega development projects in southern Sri Lanka led to the alienation of India which thus far remained a key traditional development partner of Sri Lanka, although India carried out certain important reconstruction projects in the war-torn areas.

Besides, China is one of the leading powers influencing global affairs in the contemporary world in terms of technology, economy, and trade. Furthermore, China's economic influence on the global stage has become increasingly visible with its ambitious BRI, which physically connects China with the rest of the world, especially with Asia, Africa, and Europe, so much so that in some cases, China has even replaced the Western states that are traditional providers of foreign aid. In fact, China was the world's sixth-largest foreign aid provider in 2019 (Donor Tracker Insights, 2021). Thus, Sri Lanka's strategic location encouraged China to get a foothold in the IOR to wield its influence across Asia and beyond, particularly in the areas of economy and security. Further, India's participation in the final war in support of the Sri Lankan government ignoring its 'hands-off' policy signifies the fact that in order to retain its leverage in Sri Lanka, India took the risk of striking a delicate balance between domestic and external dynamics.

5.4. Mahinda Rajapaksa's War Campaign and China's Engagement

China-Sri Lanka relations reached a new phase under the MR regime which spanned from 2005 to 2015. Economic and military relations were growing at a greater pace during this period (Kelegama, 2014a), owing mainly to the co-occurrence of two things: the MR regime's military offensive against the LTTE against the backdrop of the Norway-sponsored peace project's collapse due to the LTTE's deliberate violation; and China's enthusiasm for strategic engagement with states like Sri Lanka as stated before,

which offered a window of opportunity for the former to engage when the MR regime made an open call for external support for its war campaign (Destradi, 2010). In the years leading up to the final civil war, Sri Lanka's associations with China grew into a solid partnership rooted in expanding security and military ties. As respondent MP5 who is a leading Sri Lankan journalist and a key figure of Sri Lankan Journalists for Global Justice, stated:

> The cordial and cooperative relationship between China and Sri Lanka further [developed] the economic, political, military, and diplomatic ties [from] 2005 onwards, proving once again that the China-Sri Lanka relationship is a distinguished example of big state and small state relations with mutual benefits (personal communication, June 23, 2020).

The final civil war period from 2007 to 2009 can be considered an important watershed in Sri Lanka's relations with China in two respects. First, this was the time China saw an opportune moment to get a foothold in Sri Lanka, who was in dire need of external assistance in the form of money and weapons for its all-out military campaign against the LTTE (Wheeler, 2012). Sensing of Sri Lanka's exigencies, China readily extended its support by supplying arms and ammunition which Sri Lanka desperately needed to pursue military assaults first in the Eastern province, and later in the Northern province. Second, coincidentally, it was the same period when India, which had remained passive toward Sri Lanka's ethnic affairs for some time, became involved in Sri Lanka's military campaign by providing limited assistance (Manoharan & Chakravarty, 2016, p.256). The MR regime's manoeuvring tactic between China and India worked. By approaching India in the first place for assistance, and when India turned down their request, it sought China's assistance. Resultantly, in a bid to prevent it (MR regime) from tilting towards China, India offered covert support. Knowing India's constraints and compliance over the war campaign, the MR government persistently strove to involve India in the war campaign amidst DMK's stiff resistance, which brought the two regional hostile powers to support MR's move. This particular employment of hedging exhibits an unbiased character as it was used to get both rivals to participate in the war campaign in the same footing, resulting in a cooperative-cooperative footing. This reflects Sri Lanka's strategic use of hedging,

i.e., maintaining cooperative engagement with both rival powers to maximize benefits while minimizing risks.

According to the Stockholm Peace Research Institute, China became Sri Lanka's largest supplier of arms since 1959, and the value of military equipment supplied by China was US$749 million (Attanayake, 2021. p.1). From 2000 to 2008, China's arms trade with Sri Lanka was US$271 million and these arms directly contributed to Sri Lanka's military victory in 2009 (Attanayake, 2021. p.1). The supply of arms increased after 2007 when the US suspended military aid to Sri Lanka on account of human rights violations. In April 2007, Sri Lanka signed a US$37.6 million deal with China to procure Chinese ammunition and fighter jets to destroy the LTTE 's air power (De Alwis, 2010, p. 435). Moreover, in the same year, MR engaged in an arms deal with China in the fight against the LTTE, and, in 2008, Sri Lanka received Xian-7 jet fighters, anti-aircraft guns, and a JY-11 radar to counter the LTTE De Alwis, 2010, p. 435). In 2007, China also encouraged Pakistan to sell weapons to Sri Lanka and to train Sri Lanka pilots to fly Chinese fighters because China and Pakistan maintained a productive relationship during this period. Moreover, China's encouragement led Pakistan to increase its annual military allowance to Sri Lanka to US$100 million although China had become the biggest arms supplier of Sri Lanka in the 1990s (Wickremasinghe, 2014, p.362).

What is more, China's critical military aid to Sri Lanka increased the intensity of the war against the LTTE, which finally resulted in the defeat of the LTTE, causing thousands of casualties in terms of human lives and human rights (Chellaney, 2009). Hence, the war funding from China in the form of money and offensive weapons, while playing a significant role in the GoSL's war campaign against the LTTE, provoked a hostile reaction from India, who remained a fence-sitter due to its self-affirmed stance on the ethnic conflict (Destradi, 2012a).

Apart from that, during this period Sino-Sri Lanka bilateral ties continued to develop at a fast pace, with China diversifying its involvement into some new fields, i.e., infrastructure development in Sri Lanka. As respondent PA2 states:

> However, what makes China's economic engagement in Sri Lanka is the type of mega development projects to which Chinese money is being pumped in. Most of the projects entail geo-strategic

> significance for the site chosen for the ventures such as construction of [the] deep-sea Port in Hambantota, Port City in the heart of Colombo, and the Lotus Tower in Colombo, which India suspects is a clandestine move by China to spy on India for security and strategic information. China's massive money in Sri Lanka, therefore, would translate into China's vested geo-strategic interest in the long run (personal communication, November 03, 2019).

China's economic involvement in Sri Lanka exhibits several interesting features. China uses its economic diplomacy (economic statecraft) to fulfil its interests and ambitions. Rather than relying on military power, China is token on utilising its economic strength to appeal to states like Sri Lanka. At present, most of the development projects in Sri Lanka including the Southern Expressway, Hambantota International Port, and Mattala International Airport etc. have been funded by China (Kelegama, 2016). Furthermore, the Port City project is the largest investment carried out in Sri Lanka. However, it should not be forgotten that all these projects have been carried out through Chinese loans. The loans and grants from China that supported such development projects, especially the Hambantota Harbour, were given with the ulterior motive of at securing a foothold on one of the world's most vital sea trade routes on which Sri Lanka is strategically located. In this regard, respondent CDP3 pointed out the following:

> Chinese doors were open to developing states like Sri Lanka and funds were given according to the mutual understanding of these governments. [M]ega-projects like the Southern Expressway, Hambantota Harbour, cricket stadium, Port City, and Lotus Tower were the result of those agreements (personal communication, November 13, 2019).

Elaborating further, respondent SLDP1 states: "From Sri Lanka's perspective, it is good for the state to develop its infrastructure facilities, but at the same time, it should be concerned about the financial challenges that would follow" (personal communication, November 13, 2019).

As the above respondents opined, China, with its economic diplomacy, which sometimes translates into 'economic state crafting', was generous in providing development assistance to Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka eagerly welcomed and received those aid without a proper evaluation of the strings attached to the provision. Much of the funding for infrastructure development projects came through Chinese government-owned companies. The China Machinery Engineering Corporation, for instance, built the US$1.3 billion Norochcholai coal power plant. The US$1 billion loan for the Hambantota port came from the China Harbour Engineering Company Ltd. and the Sino-Hydro Corp (Kelegama, 2014a, p.142). The China-funded southern expressway linking Colombo, the state's capital, and the southern part of Sri Lanka tied the country to China through heavy debt. Evidently, these financial loans for development were granted by China as a part of its covert soft power strategies, which have worsened Sri Lanka's financial stability by leading the country to indebtedness.

In 2005, China provided more funding, and consequently, the funding increased to US$1 billion in 2008 and to US$1.2 billion in 2009 (Kelegama, 2014a, p.142). During MR's first tenure as the President of Sri Lanka (2005-2010), China was the top provider of official development assistance (ODA) and FDI to Sri Lanka, which amounted to US$14 billion (Gateway, 2021). According to the former Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (from 2004- 2009), Rani Jayamaha, China's investment was an excellent opportunity which would boost investors' confidence and encourage future portfolio investments (Wang & Ye, 2019).

According to Kelegama (2014a), China's assistance in the form of loans and grants exceeded US$3.8 billion in 2008, and in the same year, China became Sri Lanka's second-largest importer. In June 2009 and August 2009, China and Sri Lanka signed two agreements to create the *Mirigama* Exclusive Economic Zone and Colombo-Katunayake Expressway, with financing agreements totalling US$276.2 million (Samaranayake, 2011, p. 126). Moreover, these infrastructure development projects included the renovation of road networks, particularly the main supply road to the northern peninsula which was devastated due to the civil war between the LTTE and GoSL (Wickremasinghe, 2014). The MR regime, therefore, was the time in which bilateral ties between China and Sri Lanka gained momentum due to the administration's resolve to put an end to the decades-old civil

war and rebuild Sri Lanka. In this regard, the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the bilateral relations between the two states in 2007 became a landmark in post-independence Sri Lanka (Deyshappriya, 2016). Furthermore, the increased Chinese involvement in Sri Lanka, along with an acceleration of bilateral activities, culminated in both states signing the following eight bilateral agreements and MOUs:

I. Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation between China and Sri Lanka;
II. Agreement between the City of Guangzhou of China and the District of Hambantota of Sri Lanka on the Establishment of Friendship City Relationship;
III. MOU between the Ministry of Construction of China and the Ministry of Urban Development and Sacred Area Development of Sri Lanka;
IV. MOU on Two-Way Investment Promotion Cooperation between the Investment Promotion Agency of the Ministry of Commerce of China and the Board of Investment of Sri Lanka;
V. MOU on Cooperation in the Film Industry between the Film Bureau of the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television of China and the National Film Corporation of Sri Lanka.
VI. MOU for the Donation of Eye Corneas and Promotion and Cooperation, Exchanges, Technical and Technology Transfer between the Red Cross Society of China and the Eye Donation Society of Sri Lanka.
VII. MOU between the Chinese Academy of Agriculture Mechanisation Sciences and the Department of Agriculture of the Ministry of Agriculture of Sri Lanka.
VIII. MOU of Academic Exchange between the Beijing Foreign Studies University of China and the University of Kelaniya of Sri Lanka (Kelegama 2014a, p.133).

These agreements and MOUs were aimed at strengthening the long-term bilateral relations between the two states (Kelegama, 2014a). Consequently, China-Sri Lanka bilateral trade ties have seen steady increase in the recent past. In 2005, the total trade between the two states was about US$660 million (Sultana, 2016). Sri Lanka wanted to revive trade and business deals with China which was rising economically (Kelegama, 2014a) and most of its ODA is in loans and grants– US$12 billion in energy, infrastructure, and services sectors. In addition, private Chinese investments amounting to around US$2 billion contributed to expanding the development sector in Sri Lanka (Gateway, 2021).

Therefore, the period from 2005 to 2009 marked the beginning of a change in China-Sri Lanka relations by both broadening and deepening the bilateral ties in a range of fields in which economic and development cooperation featured prominently. China's search for fresh partners for its expansionist project in the IOR, on the one hand, and Sri Lanka's desperate longing for critical external support for its war project, coupled with MR's skilful diplomacy on the other, moved China-Sri Lanka relations to the level of close strategic engagement and cooperation (Hariharan, 2013). The MR government sought to pursue both 'drawing and dragging' tactics to involve China and India simultaneously in the civil war, and this stylised use of hedging between the two hostile powers produced an immediate positive outcome, despite the fact that its long-term outcomes are subject to controversy (Wheeler, 2012). During an interview, respondent PA1 elaborated the below.

> The MR administration was faced with two most important challenges. Ensuring the success of the military campaign against the LTTE in the wake of west's unfavourable stance. And obtaining optimal external support for the regime's military offensive from potential friendlier states. MR regime's skilful diplomacy of maintaining close and equidistant relationship with China and India helped getting both the adversaries on board (personal communication, November 03, 2019).

This reflects Sri Lanka's strategic use of hedging, i.e., maintaining engagement with both rival powers to maximize benefits while minimising risks. It is obvious that China-Sri Lanka relations from 2004 to 2009 witnessed phenomenal growth resulting from the interaction and interplay among a set of dynamics: the MR regime's resolve to defeat the LTTE and end the war; the brewing rivalry between China and India in the IOR; and the MR regime's skilful diplomacy featuring stylised hedging between China and India (Destradi, 2012a; Ramachandran, 2022). The MR regime's decision for an all-out military assault on the LTTE offered China a window of opportunity to enter Sri Lanka while inducing India, which remained indifferent to Sri Lankan internal affairs, to cooperate with the MR regime. At initial stages, Sri Lanka's involvement with both China and India aimed to bring an end to the war, and later, to tackle international pressure and domestic development imperatives (Goodhand, 2012).

Following the end of the war in 2009, China was the only state that came for GoSL's financial aid to undertake post-war reconstruction while providing unconditional diplomatic support (Lim & Mukherjee, 2019a, p.511). India's involvement during this period, however, mainly focused on low profile reconstruction projects in the former war-torn areas while it continued to pressurize the MR regime to bring a political solution to the ethnic problem which triggered the civil war.

India provided $200 million to set up a power plant in Trincomalee in eastern Sri Lanka in 2010 (Destradi, 2012a, p. 615). In June 2011, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka announced that China's currency—the Yuan—could be used for international transactions, and China became one of the significant contributors to Sri Lanka's economic growth and development. In 2012, total trade between Sri Lanka and China, including Hong Kong, was US$3,485 million and China became the largest trading partner in Sri Lanka (Kelegama, 2014a, p. 134). China and Sri Lanka signed an MOU in 2013 for trade and economic cooperation and agreed to establish a joint working group as well. In consequence, the two states became major trading partners (Jain, 2022). Moreover, bilateral lending from China to Sri Lanka stood at In 2015, FDI from China stood at US$150.78 million and by 2017, it increased up to US$628 million (Jain, 2022, p. 926). Further, China is the largest source of imports into Sri Lanka and accounted for 22% of Sri Lanka's imports in 2016. Imports from China to Sri Lanka have increased five-fold over the last decade (Verité Research, 2018).

China-Sri Lanka economic relations have drawn immense attention in recent years. In 2005, China became the top provider of development assistance to Sri Lanka, and by 2010 it overtook Japan in development assistance (Wijayasiri & Senaratne, 2018, P.383). China has taken all measures to maintain this status even at present. The year 2013 was an economically successful year for both Sri Lanka and China. In 2014, the total trade transaction between China and Sri Lanka amounted to US$4.041 billion (Wu Jiao & Yunb, 2014). The Chinese President Xi Jinping formally visited Sri Lanka in 2014 and signed 27 MOUs, ensuring that China became the biggest investor in the postwar Sri Lanka. Both countries began talking about an FTA rooted in Sri Lanka's support for the Maritime Silk Road project as it was reported in the China Daily (Jiao, 2014). Yet, it was dropped in 2017

due to disagreements over the level of trade liberalisation that the FTA would grant (Behuria, 2018).

At the same time, it should also be borne in mind that the Rajapaksa government was keen to build a strong relationship with China. President Rajapaksa felt it essential to paint an image of Sri Lanka as a country that rapidly recovered from the war owing to the Chinese support and investments. The focus on economic recovery, nevertheless, led Sri Lanka to acquire more debt than its capacity to repay (Brautigam & Rithmire, 2021). One possible explanation for the MR regime's drive for rapid development was its belief that embarking on infrastructure development and reconstruction ventures will serve two purposes: regime stabilisation and providing a solution to the ethnic conflict. Clearly, the MR regime was preoccupied with continuing to be in power by undertaking infrastructure development which, in turn, will be a solution to the Tamil problem (Prema-Chandra & Sisira, 2013). As such, the regime saw China being the ideal partner for this due to China's support (political, military and economic) during the final phase of the war as well as in the aftermath of the war.

5.4.1 China and Postwar Reconstruction

Sri Lanka's postwar era denotes the period after the military ending of the conflict between the government forces and the LTTE, a conflict from which the government emerged victorious. Any analysis of the postwar reconstruction in Sri Lanka, therefore, needs to be contextualised within the victor's peace ushered in by the end of the civil war. Preoccupied with the preservation of this peace, the GoSL sought to engage in reconstruction, rehabilitation, and reconciliation arbitrarily. For instance, the government prioritised infrastructure development over rehabilitation and reconciliation as an urgent requirement for postwar stability. GoSL believed that rapid reconstruction was more imperative than rehabilitation and reconciliation that would take much time. Apparently, the government wanted to address Tamil grievances, the trigger of the civil war, through physical development and livelihood support (Keerawella, 2013). This conviction held by the MR regime served as the lead cause creating friction between Sri Lanka and India in the aftermath of the civil war. This was because India, after MR regime's promise to

address the root causes of the ethnic conflict, was hopeful that the war victor (the MR regime) will arrive at some form of political settlement which satisfies India.

Ironically, the war victor MR regime was preoccupied with infrastructure and physical development than with arriving at an acceptable political solution to the ethnic conflict. As a result, the government was required to draw external financial support as it was still cash-strapped due to the heavy budgetary expenditure on defence, specifically during the final battle. Thus, an opportunity opened for both China and to capitalise on Sri Lanka's cash-strapped situation in the postwar setting via pumping large amounts of money into various infrastructure development and investment projects. This was particularly true for China as it stepped forward to provide unlimited developmental and political support (Awad & Todkar, 2021b). This moment exemplifies the interplay between systemic and domestic levels: China's rise (systemic shift) coincided with Sri Lanka's urgent postwar reconstruction needs (domestic driver), creating incentives for Colombo to strengthen ties with Beijing, despite the risk of straining relations with India. However, unlike their participation in the final war, China's involvement in postwar Sri Lanka came about in a different setting characterised by the GoSL's drive to economically rebuild the war-torn state in the wake of mounting pressure from both within and outside the country for reconciliation and to address human rights violations. This was further explained by respondent CDP 2;

> With regard to China's participation in reconstruction in particular and postwar Sri Lanka in general, China has been enthusiastically involved in sectors like infrastructure, reconstruction and investment since the end of the war, marking phenomenal engagement with Sri Lanka in the entire history of the bilateral ties between [the two] states (personal communication, November 13, 2019).

In this sense, Sri Lanka, being an important state in the Indian Ocean due to its geo-strategic location, happened to attract China, which was on the lookout for partners with whom it could forge strategic ties to expand its economy and influence so that it can effectively wield its dominance in the major sea routes intersecting the Indian Ocean, which India tends to consider its own lake (Scott, 2006). During this period, China was a

frontline partner of finance and trade for Sri Lanka, playing the role of the leading development partner. This was due to two interrelated reasons. The first was the trending bandwagon of states partnering with China for economic reasons and infrastructure development prospects, as China set fewer conditions for credit lending. The second reason was Sri Lanka's requirement of capital and monetary assistance to rebuild the state, especially the formerly war-torn areas. Further, Sri Lanka wanted to revive trade and business deals with China for economic growth (Kelegama, 2014a). Analysing the information and statistics for the period from 2005 to 2013 revealed that China's loans comprised US$5.644 billion, out of which 98% was taken in the form of loans while only 2% came as grants (Sultana, 2016). The loans taken from China were invested mainly in the sectors of construction, power and energy, ports, shipping, and aviation (Attanayake, 2023). This behaviour pattern reflects the positional dimension of the Sino-Indian strategic rivalry described in the theoretical framework, where each competing power seeks to consolidate influence in third-party states to outcompete the other.

Due to certain attributes embedded in China's development funding, such as the quick provision of loans with a lack of transparency, critics of China have called its development cooperation strategy 'debt-trap diplomacy' (Hameiri & Jones, 2024). In fact, NCR helps frame this as a systemic opportunity that China exploits to increase its influences, while Sri Lanka's acceptance of these loans reflects domestic leadership preference and perceived urgency of development over long-term debt sustainability. As MP4 states: "Sri Lanka is in a debt trap where the state has no capacity to pay back the loans borrowed from China, which has pushed them to lease out some of the infrastructure development projects funded by China" (Personal communication, June 20, 2020). Critics refer to this Chinese strategy when describing how China is enthusiastic about providing aid to South Asian states including Sri Lanka by using debt-trap diplomacy to entrap states in the region and around the world. This type of diplomacy evidenced by the fact that China's Export-Import (EXIM) Bank provided Sri Lanka with US$1.4 billion in 'soft loans', i.e., a loan with generous interest terms (Samaranayake, 2011).

To systematically understand the Sino-Indian parallel engagement in Sri Lanka, the drivers of the Sino-Indian competition in the IOR, which is a sea-borne version of the long running land-borne Sino-Indian rivalry, need to be explored (Frankel, 2011). In the

meantime, it should be noted that some of the informed individuals (mostly Chinese) prefer to adopt the term 'competition' rather than 'rivalry' as they tend to view the rivalry between China and India a one-sided contest. The substantive reason they attribute to this state of affairs is that it is only India that enthusiastically plays the role of the rival in the China-India dyadic relationship and not China, which seldom tends to consider India as its rival. However, the China-India dyadic relationship typically features more of a political, economic, and security nature, and hence, fairly qualifies as a true interstate rivalry (Paul, 2018). These patterns are consistent with the characteristics of strategic rivalry, namely, competition, threat perception, and enemy identification, and these are now projected into the maritime domain. During the interview, one of respondents (CDP4) stated the following.

> China's presence in Sri Lanka should be seen not as unnatural and unusual but more as spontaneous one. This is because the prosperity [ensuing from] China's economic growth benefits not only […] China but also the region (Asia) as a whole. Therefore, China's engagement with states in the region of South Asia should count as [a] boon and not as [a] bane in the backdrop of Beijing's growing inroads in the region (personal communication, November 20, 2019).

In international relations, dyadic interaction is known as a relationship involving soft power projection and hard power projection. Soft power projection is a tactic employed to reach out to states that are strategically located or with strategic importance, and to diplomatically solidify bilateral ties economically and politically (Ford, 2012). Therefore, soft power projection is a tactic for forging ties with targeted states as a part of playing out the interstate rivalry although it is a tactic that does not result in direct confrontation between states. Conversely, hard power projection involves actions which demonstrate a state's military capacity and capabilities in a third state's territorial, sea, or air space where another competing or rivalrous power is trying to make inroads (Cook, 2008). It is against this backdrop that the respondents (both journalists and political commentators) tend to see China-India dyadic involvement in Sri Lanka demonstrating many features of a rivalry. In this regard, respondent PA4 who is a Professor of International Relations stated the following:

> Sri Lanka became the battlefield for the two rival powers—China and India. Yet there was no substantial evidence to illustrate that China-Sri Lanka relations triggered a split in Sri Lanka-India relations. Hence, the fact that the struggle between India and Sri Lanka was intensified by Chinese involvement as a third party remains as an unfinished debate to which the present research can contribute (personal communication, December 08, 2019).

The rise of China in the early 2000s involved armed clashes, unarmed fights, stand-offs, and ensuing tension between China and India in the Himalayan area which lies between these two regional powers. Some scholars claim that from the 1990s and up until the mid-2000s, the situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC)- a notional demarcation that separates Indian-controlled territory from Chinese-controlled territory in the Sino-Indian border dispute was relatively calm (Sharma, 2022). However, between 2013 and 2014, Chinese incursions into the Indian side of the LAC grew in frequency, intensity, and seriousness. The unresolved dispute and deterioration of the relationship between the two countries are crucial to understanding why India regards China as a rising power in Asia in general and in the Indo-Pacific region (Sheikh, 2017).

Year	**State/power**	**Nature/form**
2014 onward	China	Buddhist diplomacy to bolster cultural ties and to mitigate criticism of China's projects in Sri Lanka
2011	China	Establishment of a Confucius Centre to propagate Chinese language and culture
2016	India	Religious tourism to sacred Buddhist sites in India
2017	India	PM Modi's visit to Sri Lanka to celebrate international Vesak Day

Table 5. 1 Instances of Purported Soft Power Projection

Source: Based on Author's Desk Review Data and Evidence (2020)

Year	State	Nature/form
2014 November	China	Submarine Changzheng-2 and warship Chang Xing Dao docked in Colombo Port.
2014 Early September	China	Warship and submarine docked in Colombo Port.
2017 May	China	China sought permission from Sri Lanka to dock its submarine, but permission was not granted.

Table 5.2 Instances of Attempted Hard Power Projection

Source: Author's Compilation of Desk Review Data and Evidence (2020)

Tables 5.1 and 5.2 given above illustrate the scale and intensity of the contemporary Sino-Indian rivalry in the Indian Ocean Region. Accordingly, the two states are almost engaged in one way or the other to enhance their image as the dominant power in the region by resorting to both soft and hard power projection. They also empirically demonstrate how strategic rivalry manifests through both soft and hard power projection aimed at securing influence over Sri Lanka.

5.5. China's BRI and China-Sri Lanka Increased Development Cooperation

Geopolitically, the South Asian region is the most lucrative region for all powerful states due to its oil, gas, and ocean resources. The placement of Sri Lanka as the "Pearl of the Indian Ocean" makes the state's location strategically significant, attracting many world powers to establish their presence in Sri Lanka either physically or symbolically from early history to the present day (Brewster, 2010). China's involvement in postwar Sri Lanka in general, and in reconstruction, should be viewed against the backdrop of China's proclaimed strategic project One Belt, One Road (OBOR) or its latest version, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) aimed at expanding its economic influence towards states in the IOR and beyond (Rabeya, 2023). In October 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping officially proposed the BRI, and in March 2015, the Chinese central government published its Vision and Actions to Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt as well as 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR) (Wang & Ye, 2019).

As a result of China's MSR initiative in 2013, Sri Lanka has become an important strategic partner for China which aspires to dominate the IOR and beyond. The Maldives and Sri Lanka were considered necessary for China to ensure its security and financial hubs in the centre of the Indian Ocean. Thus, China's MSR project holds potentially favourable consequences for Sri Lanka in relation to its development drive. Knowing the potential of being strategically located in the IOR, Sri Lanka has repeatedly expressed a strong desire to join China's OBOR development strategy (Goodman, 2014).

Because of BRI initiatives, China can quickly access the sea from the strategic locations that have already been established within sensitive hubs in South Asia. It should be noted here that India increased its vigilance of Chinese activities in the Indian Ocean after the Chinese President's visit in 2014 (Panda & Prasad, 2016). During his visit, President Xi pointed out that "Sri Lanka is going to build maritime, aviation, commercial, energy, and knowledge canters with China's proposed MSR… Both states should work together… for benefit for both states and their people" (Xi, 2014, as quoted in Wang & Ye, 2019, p. 487). In affirming the ever-growing Chinese presence in Sri Lanka and the Indian Ocean, another respondent, (CDP1) pointed out the following:

> The conclusion of the civil war provided China with a great deal of opportunity to strengthen its ties with Sri Lanka in a number of fields and ways i.e., economic, diplomatic, and security. With the launch of the BRI, China became even more assertive to upgrade its relations with Sri Lanka to a strategic cooperative partnership from its normal cooperative partnership (personal communication, November 12, 2019).

As Singh (2018) posits, President Xi's rise power and his visit to Sri Lanka created understandable concerns in India. For instance, India viewed the frequent docking of Chinese submarines in the Colombo Port as an expansion of China's security and military footprint in South Asia (Singh, 2018). To India and the Western bloc, Sri Lanka seemed like a Chinese colony with its sovereignty endangered for Chinese economic and security interests due to Sri Lanka's increased dependence on China (Pant, 2017). This mirrors the zero-sum logic of strategic rivalry where gains for one actor are perceived as losses for the other.

Moreover, there were corruption allegations about the Chinese investment activities by China-based companies. For instance, President Maithreepala Sirisena suspended the development of the Northern Expressway until an investigation had been conducted (Barry, 2015). Ironically, the MS government, too, had to rely on China as Sri Lanka had no other ally who could alleviate its financial difficulties due to high-debt loans. Many Sri Lankan citizens, however, believed that most of the Chinese-funded mega development projects deprived the locals of the chance to get jobs at construction sites since most of the jobs were given to Chinese workers (Brautigam & Rithmire, 2021; Sultana, 2016).

When analysing China's involvement in postwar Sri Lanka, especially after 2014, there is a potential nexus between China's lending money to cash-strapped states like Sri Lanka and its BRI project (Himmer & Rod, 2022). One of this project's objectives is to extend benefits to consumers and producers who could connect with Chinese markets (Chen & Guo, 2022). This project has expanded Chinese investment in over 70 states, including Sri Lanka. When considering the MSR and BRI, it is important to examine why China is interested in taking a position in Asia and Africa despite the high cost of the loans it offers to other states. In the IOR, this is because the more China is involved in Sri Lanka, the more that involvement threatens the Indian hegemony in the IOR (Faslan, 2021). India has frequently criticised China for being engaged in security-related constructions in Sri Lanka though China's MSR projects are neither purely military nor commercial (Green et al., 2018). This project has expanded Chinese investment in over 70 states, including Sri Lanka. When considering the MSR and BRI, it is important to examine why China is interested in securing a position in Asia and Africa despite the high cost of the loans it offers to the other states. In the IOR, this is because the more China is involved in Sri Lanka, the more that involvement threatens the Indian hegemony in the IOR.

Hence, it is obvious that when China came up with its touted BRI project, which places Sri Lanka at the centre, it prompted India to react strongly. India flatly refused to participate in the project, stating that the project serves as a gateway for China to accomplish its national interest by gaining access to the Gulf for oil resources, while encircling the Indian subcontinent (Green et al., 2018). According to Kelegama (2014), China engages with South Asia to enhance its influence over India. China's 'String of Pearls' strategy could be a geopolitical strategy to expand Chinese dominance in the IOR.

On the other hand, the IOR indeed features a lot of geo-strategic significance because most of the world's shipping routes go through choke points such as the Strait of Malacca, the Strait of Mandeb, the Lombok Strait, and the Strait of Hormuz (Emmerson & Stevens, 2012, p. 2).

Figure 5.1 given below shows China's economic assistance to Sri Lanka and demonstrates how China's development cooperation with Sri Lanka increased even after the BRI project started.

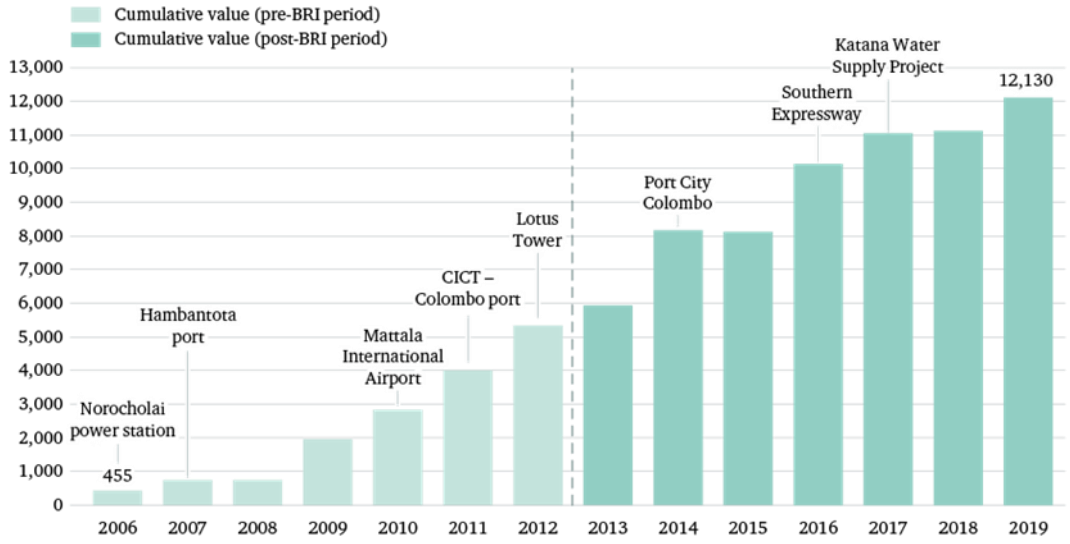

Figure 5. 1 Annual Development Assistance Provided by China to Sri Lanka from 2006 to 2019

Source: Wignaraja et al. (2020)

Figure 5.1 shows China's extensive investment in Sri Lanka in the postwar period through its annual development assistance. The Export and Import Bank of China (EXIM) funded some major projects investing US$1.6 billion from 2014 to 2017 including the Colombo Port City and Southern Expressway among others (Wignaraja et al., 2020). Other banks that supported Sri Lanka include the Asian Development Bank and the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC). One of the striking features of China's engagement with Sri Lanka is that while China has pursued its own investment activities by pumping in large amounts of money, it has also provided grant aid to major infrastructure

development, making China the single largest ODA provider to Sri Lanka (Feigenbaum, 2021) as China was ready to provide loans amounting to US$3,599 million and grant funds amounting to US$10 million (Kelegama, 2014a). As respondent MP1 who is a political commentator of a leading private television network of Sri Lanka stated:

> China is fishing in the turbulent waters of Sri Lanka [that] emerged in the postwar period due to the latter's cash-strapped economy and lack of diplomatic support from the West. This state of affairs pushes Sri Lanka towards China. China with its economic ability is willing to provide huge loans and grants under extremely limited terms, despite its lack of transparency and accountability in financial matters (personal communication, November 14, 2019).

The following map (Figure 5.2) shows the ports funded by Chinese development assistance.

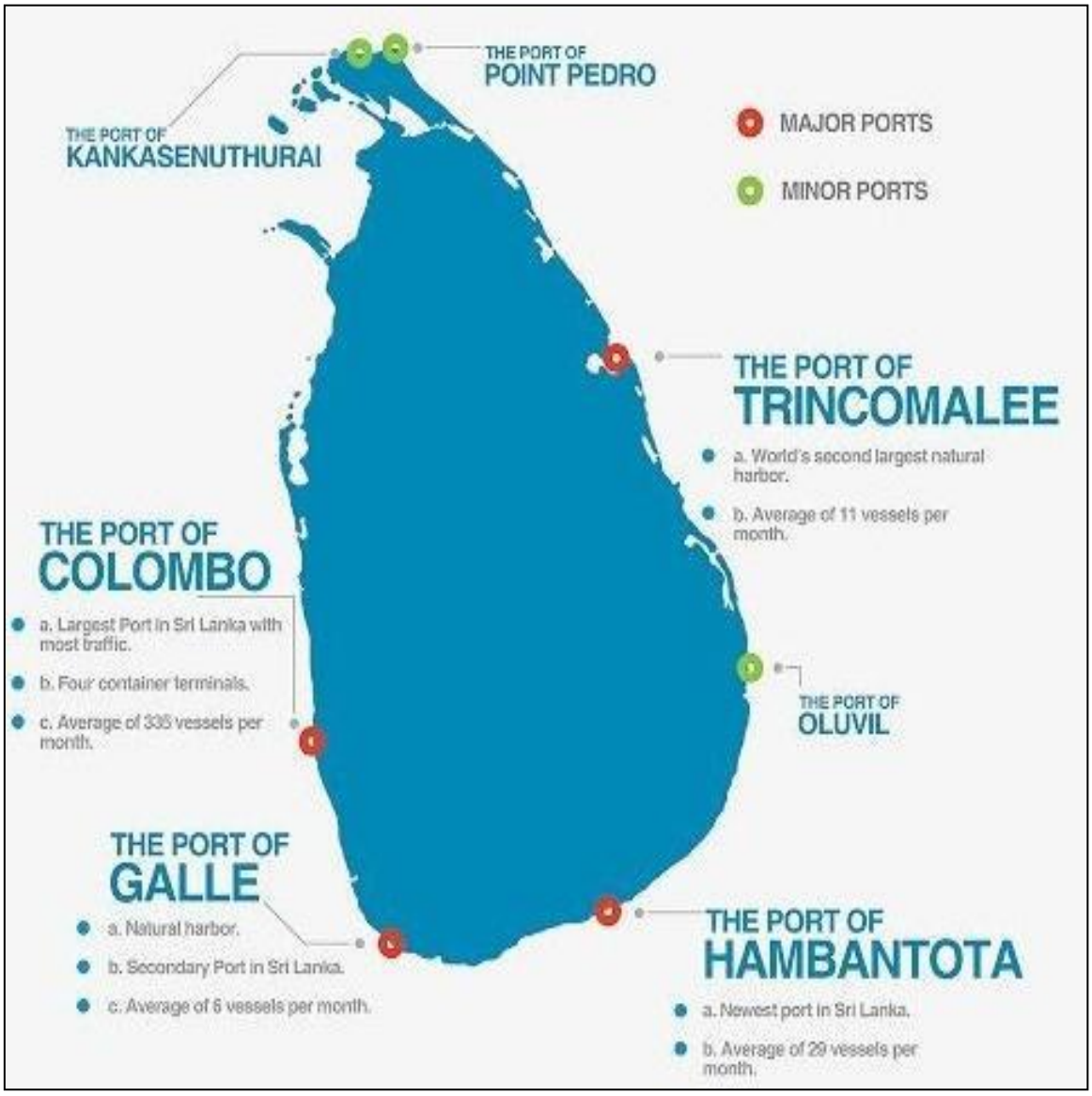

Figure 5. 2 Map Showing the Infrastructure Projects in Sri Lanka Funded by China

Source: Institute of Asia Studies (2021)

Since the protracted war dragged Sri Lanka into underdevelopment, especially in war-affected areas, the state had to rely on foreign assistance to rebuild the state. Up to 2008, the assistance it received from China was recorded as US$1 billion and remained the same in 2009 (Fernando, 2010, p. 289). The overall disbursement of Chinese loans and grants from 2017 to 2022 was US$2,512 million (Moramudali & Panduwawala, 2022), and the disbursement of US$865 million in 2012 was the highest disbursement within the period under review ((Ministry of Finance & Planning, 2012, n.p). In comparison, India's support for postwar reconstruction was contingent on certain conditionalities such as insistence on the need to address the grievances of Tamils who were the victims of the

war although India was not firm about its stance during MR's second term in office (Sahu, 2016a). By contrast, China placed no conditions on Sri Lanka whenever it defended Sri Lanka at international fora like the UN where human rights violation allegations against Sri Lanka were taken up for discussion and voting.

Therefore, there is a stark difference of stance between China and India regarding their approach to the postwar reconstruction because while China extended the GoSL unwavering diplomatic support, India was moving with caution. Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa believed that winning the war was good enough to allow him to retain the office for an extended period (DeVotta, 2016b). This belief prevented him from pursuing balanced relations between the Western and Eastern blocs (including India, Iran, Libya, China, and Russia) thereby causing collateral damage for Sri Lanka in diplomatic and economic fields (De Silva, 2018). In an interview with MP9, an international news reporter is based in Colombo, Sri Lanka, expressed the following views:

> The second tenure of MR regime could be counted as the heyday of China-Sri Lanka relations during which the bilateral relations peaked […] in many respects—especially in economic and diplomatic fields. The depth and breadth of the bilateral ties marked by qualitative and quantitative changes at one point led both China and Sri Lanka to mutually describe it as 'all weather friends' (personal communication, July 10, 2020).

5.6. The NU Government, Debt Trap Diplomacy, and Sino-Sri Lanka Ties

The coming of the NU government to power following the unseating of the MR regime in 2015 was a landmark in postwar Sri Lanka's relations with China and India. India was disappointed with the way MR conducted affairs in postwar Sri Lanka concerning foreign relations in general and ethnic reconciliation in particular. Having eagerly awaited a change of policy or regime in Sri Lanka, India found that there might be a possibility for this when MS was fielded as the common presidential candidate at the 2015 presidential elections after he broke away from the Rajapaksas (Feltman, 2019). Having won the elections on the promise of bringing forth clean politics by establishing good governance and balanced foreign relations, MS' coming to power was seen by India

as a new beginning for its relations with Sri Lanka in the wake of heavy Chinese presence and influence in the island state (Panda, 2015).

During the election campaign, MS staunchly criticised MR for his corrupt dealings to secure China-funded mega-development projects and vowed to pursue a balanced policy toward China and India. As a result, the advent of the NU administration slowed down Chinese development activities in Sri Lanka as the new government vowed to reassess the previous regime's pro-China foreign relations underlying the regime's often touted Asia-centric policy (Domínguez, 2015a). The NU government's decision to suspend China-funded mega-projects including China's flagship project and the Colombo Port City on the grounds of lack of transparency caused a strong outcry from the Chinese government, which urged Sri Lanka to resume the halted projects (Tiezzi, 2015). This reflects Sri Lanka's use of hedging, that is, maintaining cooperative engagement with both rival powers to maximize benefits while minimizing risks.

However, due to China's heavy presence in Sri Lanka in infrastructure development and investment, and its importance within the UN, specifically at UNHRC, the new government followed a balanced policy to ensure both China and India were there for Sri Lanka's betterment and benefit (Chahal, 2016). One of the key factors behind Sri Lanka's renewed policy towards China relates to the human rights issues which had been affecting Sri Lanka since the conclusion of the civil war in 2009). This reflects how Sri Lanka adopted hedging strategy by engaging cooperatively with both competing powers to gain maximum advantages while keeping potential risks at a minimum.

On the other hand, there has been widespread criticism of China's engagement in postwar Sri Lanka, mainly from the West (chiefly the USA), and some critics working in the fields of international relations and security studies, that believed China is engaged in 'debt-trap diplomacy' as a means to gain a foothold in cash-strapped states in Asia and Latin America in an effort to expand its economic influence and strategic presence (Gopaldas, 2018). Moreover, with the 'debt trap' China entices poorer states get loan after loan to build expensive infrastructure projects that they cannot afford and will bring few benefits, with the end goal of eventually taking control of the assets of its struggling borrowers, i.e., poor countries (Rithmire, 2021). Nevertheless, China has constantly

refuted the claim, stating that China's financial dealings with Sri Lanka are purely based on mutual understanding and agreement, and that China lent money to Sri Lanka at a lower rate of interest compared to the rate of the international financial market at that time.

Yet, international observers who closely follow the events point out that China-Sri Lanka relations are set in China's favour as China exploits the small island state for its resources and strategic location (Behuria, 2018). In the face of these allegations, in 2015, the newly installed NU government decided to suspend all the mega-projects initiated by Chinese state-owned companies in Sri Lanka. As already noted, Sri Lanka received US$1.12 billion for doing so (Wignaraja et al., 2020). Further, following the reversal of Sri Lanka's decision, Chinese development banks funded several projects, including the development of the Kandy-Nuwara Eliya Road. Ironically, the MS government too had to rely on China, as there was no other choice. During the interview, a political commentator, PO6, highlighted the following.

> China's economic engagement in post-war Sri Lanka was seen highly favourable both by the regime in power and the public culminating into China's profile hike. However, the situation soon changed when the pro-India government replaced the pro-China government in 2015 elections. This realignment of development partners enabled some new development initiatives in Sri Lanka, halted the Chinese funded ones, thus evoking Beijing's harsh punitive stance (personal communication July 19, 2020).

Given the moves taken when conducting foreign relations under the Sirisena-Wickremasinghe-led NU government, the administration, during its term of office, strove to pursue a balanced policy toward China and India by giving due consideration to their concerns. For instance, Sirisena embarked on his first official visit to India soon after he assumed the office of the president in 2015 (Patel, 2021). A few months after his Indian visit, he also visited China for bilateral talks, which meant that Sri Lanka was sensitive to both China and India in its foreign relations. The Sri Lankan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2015) stated that President Sirisena participated in the China Boao Forum to further negotiate the 2014 bilateral FTA and renegotiate US$5 billion worth of Chinese-funded

projects (Domínguez, 2015b, n.p). During this visit, Chinese President Xi Jinping remarked that China considered Sri Lanka to be a strategic partner and expected to strengthen relations with Sri Lanka further to promote the China-Sri Lanka relationship to fulfil an essential objective (Domínguez, 2015b).

In addition, Prime Minister Wickremasinghe and the Chinese President Xi Jinping signed an FTA to increase economic activity over the next 20 years. China agreed to begin developing Sri Lanka's Road infrastructure under the China Development Bank-funded priority roads project. These projects included the building of bridges, railways, highways, ports, energy plants, and developing routes from central to Sabaragamuwa provinces (Samatha, 2016). In the meantime, the Sirisena-Wickremasinghe-led NU government decided to resume the Port City project and turn back to China as the government faced financial difficulties (Dasgupta (2016). However, some experts have analysed this case as an instance where Sri Lanka had to show a pro-China stance as the USA and India failed to assist Sri Lanka at a time Sri Lanka deserved assistance (Dasgupta, 2016).

In this light, in 2016, the new government understood that China was a crucial trade and business partner that could help to run the government. It is evident that without Chinese economic support, the government of Sri Lanka could not develop the state's economy through investments and development assistance. April 2016, in an effort to further strengthen the relationship between both states, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe visited China to discuss cooperation between the two states (Embassy of the People's Republic of China, 2016).

5.6.1 The Sirisena-Wickremasinghe Rift and Sri Lanka's Relations with China and India

However, due to differences in ideology and personality between Sirisena and Wickremasinghe, from 2018 to 2019, the NU government which was voted into power on the electoral promise of establishing good governance eventually pushed the state into political instability, thus letting the Rajapaksas evade accountability for corruption and mismanagement during their regime. It is worth noting that President Sirisena's abrupt

appointment of MR as the new prime minister while Ranil Wickremasinghe was still the sitting premier caused not only a constitutional crisis, but also spawned various conspiracy theories of Indian involvement (ICG, 2018).

Some sources have suggested that the rift between the duo was due to not only to local or internal power politics, but also due to the regional power dynamics where India was seen as displeased with the manner in which Wickremasinghe settled the issues over Chinese loan facilities and investment projects (Shams, 2018). Discontented with PM Wickremasinghe's compromise with China, India, which played a key role behind the scenes to bring the NU government to power in a bid to contain China, wished to see the struggling Sirisena administration replaced with a stronger and pro-India one (Amarasinghe, 2020).

To this end, India closely and covertly worked with Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, who by that time was becoming popular among the majoritarian populace for his national security rhetoric prompted by the 2019 Easter Attack in Sri Lanka by a militant Islamist group called National Tawheed Jamath (NTJ) (Coakley, 2019; Kumarasiri, 2019). It is against this backdrop that Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, who was formally Secretary of Defence under the MR administration, emerged as the presidential candidate in November 2019 presidential elections, vowing to ensure national security by placing it as the first priority of the new government if he was elected as president (Keenan, 2020). Reportedly, India wanted to replace the NU government for its staggering policies and decisions with new and stable government which would cooperate with India on a steady footing.

Given the moves taken when conducting foreign relations under the Sirisena-Wickramasinghe NU government, it is evident that the administration strove to pursue a hedging-oriented balanced policy towards China and India by giving due consideration to their concerns. In particular, the administration's decision to resume the Port City project and turn back to China as it faced financial difficulty reflects passive hedging, where expedience drove selective engagement with China despite earlier of the suspension project.

5.7. War Crime Allegations and China's Diplomatic Support

The way the civil came to an end invited widespread criticism and allegations of war crimes against Sri Lanka were posed by various local and international parties. The alleged killing of the civilian population during the final war drew the attention of international human rights organizations such as Amnesty International (AI), Human Rights Watch (HRW), and the think tank ICG, which took up the matter to make the GoSL accountable for the killings. Consequently, former President, Mahinda Rajapaksa, his brother and the war-time Defence Secretary of the state, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, have been targeted by these human rights groups (Economy next, 2021).

The end of the civil war was also accompanied by a set of socioeconomic problems that challenged policymakers despite ordinary people enjoying peace and security. Externally, the EU and other Western states as well as the UN exerted pressure on Sri Lanka over the alleged human rights violations (Castillejo, 2011). To deal with these external challenges, the GoSL was compelled to seek the support of UNHRC member states, and at the same time, it was engaged in the disarmament of the LTTE cadres, rehabilitation of child soldiers, and providing security for internally displaced people (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2009). Having made a timely entry into the scene, China helped Sri Lanka evade the call for an international investigation regarding alleged war crimes of GoSL during the final stages of the civil war (Krishnan, 2012).

Sri Lanka sought the help of China in the face of constant allegations and pressure from the West over alleged war crimes committed by the former, China came to the defence of Sri Lanka at the UNHRC and other UN forums like the Security Council (Gamage, 2017). The critical vote in 2009 to free the GoSL from any obligations for committing alleged war crimes was the beginning of China's support for the government of Sri Lanka with regard to human rights issues. China continues to staunchly defend Sri Lanka from various US and West backed HR resolutions at the UNHRC, to make sure that Sri Lanka's human rights issue falls under the purview of domestic terrorism. Thus, China provided Sri Lanka with much needed counter-pressure against India, the US, and the international community at large during UNHRC sessions (Castillejo, 2011).

As respondent MP3, a freelance journalist, states that “China supported Sri Lanka by voting against the resolution brought forth against the alleged war crimes committed by the Sri Lankan state towards the latter part of the ethnic conflict in 2009” (personal communication, June 13, 2020).

Thus, Sri Lanka, with the diplomatic support of China at international fora, attempted to refute the international call for independent scrutiny of the war by claiming that the alleged violation of rights was an internal matter that did not require external interference (Pidd, 2009). Furthermore, as Marwa and Verma (2023) stated:

> China’s Foreign Minister appreciated Sri Lanka's efforts to promote human rights and economic and social development. Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson stated “we are against politicizing human rights and applying double standards, or using it to interfere in other countries”(Marwah & Verma, 2023, p. 232).

In 2012, at its 19th session, the UNHRC held Sri Lanka accountable for its postwar human rights activities under the heading of ‘promoting reconciliation and accountability in Sri Lanka’ (CPA, 2013b). During this session, the UNHRC voiced its dissatisfaction with the lack of tangible improvement in the state of human rights even though three years had passed since the ending of the war. China voted against the resolution in support of Sri Lanka while the Indian and US governments voted for it (CPA, 2013a). India’s decision to vote for the resolution denoted its disappointment with the happenings in postwar Sri Lanka, specifically the failure to address the Tamil issue (Hariharan, 2012).

At the UNHRC session in March 2013, when another resolution calling for Sri Lanka to address the alleged rights violation was brought by a US-led group of states which included India, China once again extended unconditional support to Sri Lanka by voting against the resolution (Hariharan, 2012), while the US and India voted in support of the resolution against Sri Lanka. The year 2013 was an important year for Sri Lanka-China relations. To respond to India’s decision to support the UNHCR resolution, Sri Lanka immediately announced that it had repossessed part of the strategic oil storage depot from Indian Oil Co. Ltd (The Economic Times, 2013).

In addition, the Hambantota International Airport made things more complicated. A high-level Chinese official participated in the opening ceremony for the airport while the Sri Lankan President visited China. The year 2015 witnessed the international community's grip on Sri Lanka becoming tighter when the UNHRC released its latest report on the stage of the state's human rights that charged the GoSL over war crimes in 2009 (IJRC, 2015).

In responding to this report, the GoSL issued a counter-allegation claiming that it was the LTTE which was involved in human rights violations. Thus, the government pledged to carry out a domestic inquiry while rejecting the call for foreign judges to sit in the courts that were to be set up to hear the cases associated with human rights. The issue appeared to be watered down when the MS government proposed to set up the Office of Missing Persons (OMP) in Colombo. According to the International Crisis Group (ICG) (2015), the GoSL promised to set up a domestic mechanism to deal with the postwar peace-building problems (Kodikara, 2023). China paid no regard to human rights, while India, which proudly claims to be the world's largest democracy, joined the West in pushing for the devising of an investigation mechanism that would hold Sri Lanka accountable for the violations (Patel, 2021).

Moreover, when Chinese official Yang Jiechi met Gotabaya Rajapaksa, China once again assured Sri Lanka that it would stand by Sri Lanka to defend its sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity at the UNHRC and the UN (Markar, 2020). For its part, the US government was getting stricter, banning some Sri Lankan military officers from travelling to the USA because of charges of human rights violations. The US government-imposed sanctions against General Shavendra Silva, denying his entry into the USA is one example for this.

The Chinese seat at the UNHRC is generally considered crucial as it supports Sri Lanka to face human rights issues in the state. China has always defended Sri Lanka without hesitation in front of UN bodies on human rights matters whenever the latter attempted to pass a critical report against Sri Lanka over accountability and reconciliation (Hein, 2017, p.90). It is evident, therefore, that the alleged human rights violations purportedly committed at the final stages of the civil war between the GoSL and LTTE,

and China's diplomatic support of Sri Lanka at the UN and its human right body (the UNHRC), provided an opportunity for China to engage Sri Lanka at a time when Sri Lanka was entangled in postwar problems and international as well as local challenges (Patel, 2021).

In particular, the way Sri Lanka played the China card against India whenever the latter teamed up with the West against Sri Lanka shows how a small state could effectively influence the external behaviour of a major power in support of it by effectively navigating its foreign relations. As Sahni (2012) contends, the divergence or contrast between the ideologies of China and India in their dealings with Sri Lanka became evident when both states sought to team up with two opposing factions within the UNHRC when Sri Lanka's alleged rights violation case was debated and voted on (Sahni, 2012). While India teamed up with the USA, the UK, and the EU against Sri Lanka, China acted individually and collectively by using its own diplomacy and economic leverage to help Sri Lanka to reach out to African states over which China exerted influence for their support at the UNHRC (Manoharan & Chakravarty, 2016; Marwaan, 2020; Ranjan & Chattoraj, 2022; Saravanamuttu, 2019).

In brief, this episode highlights how strategic rivalry between China and India shaped Sri Lanka's external environment. By defending Sri Lanka at the UNHRC and UN Security Council, China positioned itself as a staunch supporter of Colombo's sovereignty. India, by contrast, often aligned with the US and other Western states in voting for resolutions critical of Sri Lanka, driven by both normative concerns and domestic pressures relating to the Tamil issue. Thus, the UNHRC arena functioned as a proxy battleground of the Sino-Indian strategic rivalry, where competing great powers positions transformed Sri Lanka's human rights issue into a site of geopolitical contestation.

5.8. India's Response to China's Involvement in Sri Lanka

India's reaction to Chinese involvement in the final war did not particularly come to the fore as India still wanted to maintain its hands-off policy towards Sri Lanka, overtly at least, due to two domestic compulsions (Mehta, 2009). While the Tamil Nadu factor coupled with the DMK's participation at the central coalition government pushed India to

be more assertive of its position on and leverage over Sri Lanka, China's involvement, to a large extent, discouraged India from doing so (Ranjan & Chattoraj, 2022; Senevirathna, 2015). However, the strategic element of Sino-Indian rivalry largely remained dormant during the final civil war mainly due to Sri Lanka's skilful manoeuvring of its diplomacy between the two major powers in the region (Destradi, 2012a). This dormancy illustrates how strategic rivalry can be temporarily muted by a third-party state's hedging behaviour. For example, Sri Lanka reduced overt contestation despite the underlying competitive impulses of both India and China.

Sri Lanka under the MR regime demonstrated a great deal of sensitivity to India's interests and concerns during the former's desperate need of external support, which China and India were prepared to provide in different forms and degrees. The way Sri Lanka struck a balance in a bid to hedge between China and India indeed enabled the former to extract what it needed at the time in an optimal fashion (Paul, 2019). This balancing reveals how strategic rivalry may not vanish but remain latent and resurface later in other domains once immediate pressure subsides.

As far as India's participation in postwar Sri Lanka is concerned, it involves reconstruction to a greater degree and reconciliation to a lesser degree even though India pushed the GoSL to address the Tamil issue in the beginning of the postwar period (Manoharan, 2010). India's initial insistence is attributed to the pressure exerted by the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, which has, from the outset of the conflict, been sympathetic to the Tamil cause in Sri Lanka (Destradi, 2012a). Here rivalry becomes evident in the postwar period as both powers, China and India, shift to contesting influence through reconstruction, aid and distant leverage, showing how strategic rivalry evolves into political economic spheres.

Nevertheless, upon realising that the GoSL was not prepared to compromise its position as a victor and its resolve to preserve postwar peace as the status quo, India had to review its policy towards Sri Lanka so that India could at least check further Chinese encroachment into its backyard (Mayilvaganan, 2012, p.22). Viewing each other as the competitor in Sri Lanka's postwar reconstruction, China and India have always striven to maintain good relations with Sri Lanka as the latter is a vital strategic location for China

and India for achieving their future security and economic goals (Jain, 2022). Sri Lanka's geo-strategic location thus transforms it into a theatre of Sino-Indian strategic rivalry, where spatial competition manifests in efforts to secure influence over a crucial maritime hub.

Therefore, it is important and necessary that both China and India maintain goodwill with the GoSL. Sri Lanka, especially in the postwar period and the second term of MR's regime, has often found it hard to strike a balance in its ties with China and India as the two states ostensibly pursue the same ends but through a disparate approach (Arangalla, 2017). China sought to achieve its foreign policy goals by defending, cooperating with, and bailing out Sri Lanka wherever possible and at whatever cost. India, on the contrary, faced certain constraints in its dealings with postwar Sri Lanka in its attempt to countervail China in India's strategic backyard. Of these constraints, India's stake in the origins and escalation of the ethnic conflict and the Tamil Nadu factors are noteworthy among other (IPCS, 2013a).

While India had constantly expressed its concern about Sri Lanka, emphasising the need for ethnic reconciliation (Wickramasinghe, 2014), the GoSL was charged with continued militarisation in the postwar reconstruction process (Pant, 2017). Rotberg (2010) identified that security forces were involved in all civilian developments. Despite India's offering support to the GoSL to restore normalcy in the North and East, specific issues loomed over Indo-Lanka relations in 2013 due to the latter's dealings with China. For instance, there had been tensions over the 2013 UNHRC resolution on Sri Lanka regarding its alleged war crimes over which India took a stand against Sri Lanka due to continuous domestic pressure from the Tamil Nadu government (India Today, 2013).

Further, as Green et al. posit (2018), the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is seen as a potential threat to India's security. As previously stated, India, too, had the same threat perception regarding Sri Lanka's relations with China. Clearly, India worries that China seeks to use Sri Lanka to maintain its strategic supremacy regionally and to continue its upsurge in power globally (Pant, 2017). In addition, Sri Lanka's joining of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2009, when the Rajapaksa government was in office, caused much concern to India as SCO's objectives are to conduct regular military exercises among its members to counteract terrorism and ensure

security and regional stability (Kelegama, 2014a). Such enduring threat perceptions (security threats) constitute the core component of strategic rivalry, where threat assessment drives competitive foreign policy behaviour.

5.9. Sri Lanka's Balancing of Relations between China and India

Sri Lanka's foreign policy towards China and India, the two major funders and partners of its war campaign, was subjected to a litmus test in the aftermath of the war. The postwar context of Sri Lanka had opened both windows of opportunity and challenges for Sri Lanka's traditional development partners including China and India, which have dominated the scene in various ways through reconstruction, reconciliation (including human rights), and rebuilding of the economy in Sri Lanka (Manoharan, 2019).

Therefore, it is discernible that Sri Lanka's postwar exigencies exhibited opportunities and challenges which invited both China and India to take advantage of the situation. In doing so, both states sought to provide support and assistance which Sri Lanka required to sustain postwar peace and stability though the scale and form of their support and assistance varied significantly. While India was focused mostly on postwar reconstruction and reconciliation, China paid attention to infrastructure development and political stability (Ramachandran, 2018). The divergence of the approaches of China and India to postwar Sri Lanka's needs and requirements not only pitted the two states against each other in their engagement with Sri Lanka, but also shaped the potential and limits of their engagement with Sri Lanka. For instance, Sri Lanka found it comfortable to cooperate with China while allowing Indo-Sri Lanka relations worsen in the face of international pressure over the alleged rights violation (Jain, 2022; Manoharan & Pawar, 2019).

Overall, the broader context of strategic rivalry between China and India structured the environment in which Sri Lanka manoeuvred. However, hedging granted Sri Lanka agency in navigating this highly asymmetrical environment. Similarly, neoclassical realism, the theoretical bridge linking these two dynamics (China's rise and India's response at systemic level regime survival concerns in Sri Lanka at unit level) filtered and mediated external pressures and helped to capture the layered reality of the phenomenon. In other words, Sri Lanka's hedging behaviour was both enabled and constrained by the

Sino-Indian rivalry, while India's responses reflected the tension between systemic imperatives and domestic politics.

5.10. Summary

China-Sri Lanka relations during the period from 2005 to 2019 can broadly be divided into two phases in terms of their nature and scale of involvement. First, during the final civil war period from 2005 to 2009, Sino-Sri Lanka relations grew at a relatively slow but steady pace as China involved both militarily and economically in supporting the GoSL. Therefore, during this period China-Sri Lanka ties exhibited an increase of their traditional bilateral ties. In the second period spanning from 2009 to 2019, though, China's involvement in Sri Lanka saw exponential growth, transforming the two states' relations from normal cooperative relations into a strategic cooperative partnership, which can even be termed as an extra ordinary bilateral relationship. This was possible mainly due to MR's 'passive hedging' in that his government made a subtle shift from its initial approach of active hedging (from solid equidistance to a more fluid equidistance) between China and India.

The upgrading of the bilateral ties was particularly observable in the aftermath of the launch of China's BRI in 2013 and Sri Lanka's participation in that initiative. In sum, as Pant (2017) has aptly observed, India's attitude towards China's involvement in postwar Sri Lanka took the following form: the more intense China's activities in postwar Sri Lanka, the more these activities triggered India's concern about China-Sri Lanka ties. Thus, it is safe to contend that Sri Lanka's foreign policy regarding China and India from 2005 to 2019 exhibits a stark shift in orientation from an Asia-centric policy to a China-centric policy at first, and then, to an India-centric policy. At the same time, this purported policy shift is largely the outcome of the interplay of Sino-Indian strategic competition and the resultant China-India involvement in Sri Lanka. The next chapter provides an analytical account of Indo-Sri Lanka relations in the context of China's involvement.

CHAPTER SIX

Indo-Sri Lanka Relations in the Context of China's Increased Involvement: An Analytical Account

6.1. Introduction

This chapter contains a systematic analysis of data regarding the impact and implications of China's engagement with Sri Lanka vis-à-vis Indo-Sri Lanka bilateral ties from 2005 to 2019. Since this chapter forms the core of the entire thesis, the data gathered from primary and secondary sources are analysed to answer the research questions of the study. In doing so, the study applies the analytical framework based on strategic rivalry theory and hedging strategy as an interpretive lens. Hedging here is coded as a middle-path foreign policy, situated between balancing and bandwagoning, that allows Sri Lanka to maximize benefits while minimising risks in navigating the Sino-Indian strategic competition. This analysis enables the study to arrive at findings and draw conclusions. To this end, the chapter proceeds through three important, inter-related phases: data display, data analysis, and data interpretation. To ensure a systematic and nuanced analysis, the chapter retrospectively blends the findings related to Indo-Sri Lanka relations and China's involvement in Sri Lanka discussed in chapters four and five.

6.2. China and India's Parallel Involvement in Sri Lanka

This section analyses the nature and the key dynamics of the parallel involvement of China and India in Sri Lanka from 2005 to 2019. It further analyses how this involvement impacts the relations between India and Sri Lanka. In doing so, the parallel involvement, which is treated as the overarching independent variable, is dissected into a set of supplementary variables including geo-strategic location; hedging (active hedging and passive hedging); type of regime; geo-strategic space; and capability gap.

Change and continuity of relations between two states depend on the parallel involvement of competing states in the geopolitical, geo-strategic, and geoeconomic space of a particular state, known as dyadic relations (Thompson et al., 2021). It is this dyadic nature which makes China and India's involvement in Sri Lanka appear to be parallel and

competitive. However, the initial involvement of the two states exhibited co-occurrence than competition in the years leading to the conclusion of the civil war.

Furthermore, when treated in this manner the independent variables convert the Sino-Indian involvement in Sri Lanka into a triangular relationship characterised by interaction. It is these triangular dynamics of the Sino-Indian dyadic involvement which translate their parallel involvement into a competitive one, thereby making it a complex phenomenon. This is to say that Sri Lanka plays a dual role as host and arbiter in the Sino-Indian parallel involvement. This dual role places Sri Lanka at the centre due to certain attributes of the state: its geo-strategic location in the Indian Ocean; its hedging policy alternating between active hedging and passive hedging; and the type of regime in Sri Lanka. The figure 6.1 clearly illustrates the above.

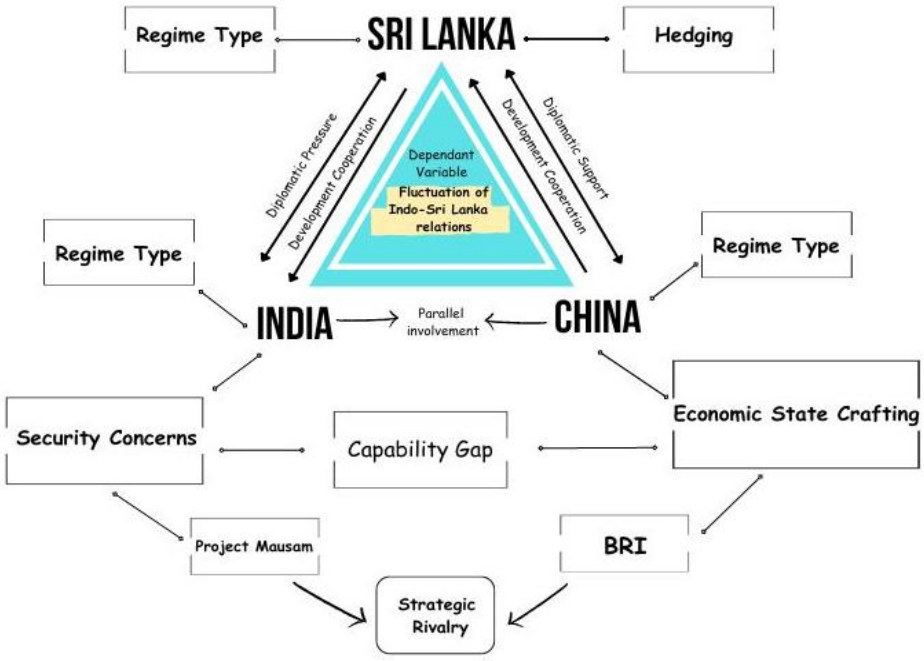

Figure 6. 1 The Triangular Interaction between China, India, and Sri Lanka in the Context of Sino-Indian Involvement in Sri Lanka

Source: Author (2023)

Sri Lanka's relations with China and India from 2005 to 2019 show a triangular interaction. This triangular interaction saw the simultaneous involvement of China and India against the backdrop of the final civil war, and in the postwar context, their involvement turned into a competitive one (Patel, 2021). Similarly, as the analysis of

empirical evidence reveals, the triangular interaction enables Sri Lanka to navigate between China and India to capitalise on their competition for strategic presence and attendant strategic space. The way in which Sri Lanka hedged between China and India brought new dynamics into their parallel involvement in Sri Lanka— for instance, keeping the two competitors on the same footing or giving them differential treatment. China used economic statecraft composed of development cooperation backed by diplomatic support to get close to Sri Lanka, while India resorted to political and diplomatic channels coupled with limited development cooperation (Lim & Mukherjee, 2019b).

The latest version of this strategy came in the form of the BRI and Project Mousam launched by China and India respectively. It could be argued that the nature and the effects of the triangular interaction involving the three states, therefore, depended on a certain set of factors (i.e., regime type, capability gap, and hedging policy) which defined the scale and intensity of interaction between the three states in the face of China and India's involvement in Sri Lanka. The parallel involvement of China and India in Sri Lanka came to scholarly attention after MR's accession to power as the President of Sri Lanka in 2005 in general and his administration's all-out military campaign against the LTTE in 2007. Based on the nature and the dynamics, the parallel involvement could be periodised as follows:

- 2005 to 2009: This can be described as the initial or early period of involvement during which the MR administration tried to accommodate both China and India on an almost equal footing as war funder (China) and war supporter (India).

  As respondent MP 8 states: "*When MR became prime minister and then president, he maintained close rapport with India and China to defeat the LTTE and both states supported his administration by providing economic and military assistance*" (personal communication, July 2, 2019).
- 2010 to 2015: This can be considered the second period of parallel involvement during which China's and India's involvement shifted from a noncompetitive to a competitive one. Two background factors contributed to this shift in the nature of the involvement. They are the convergence of national development strategy (*Mahinda Chinthana: Vision for the Future*) between the MR war victor regime and China's economic expansion through the BRI; and the mounting pressure from the West over war crimes and human rights violation issues and pressure from India demanding a

political solution to the ethnic issue.

- 2015 to 2019: This can be considered the third period of parallel involvement during which time the parallel involvement turned into fierce competition between China and India. Two background factors were at play here: the advent of the NU government led by MS and RW vowing to undo the MR regime's China-dependent foreign policy and replace it with an India-centric policy; and India's Neighbourhood First policy under the NDA government of India. Initially, the NU government antagonised China by favouring India, but later, the NU government brought China back into the picture, thereby balancing its relations with the two competitors. Director of a print media (private) (MP8) commented on it as follows, "[*The] policy of the NU government, which altered Sri Lanka's choice from China to India as the preferred development partner, eventually served neither Sri Lanka's national interest nor the interests of its development partners during its regime* (personal communication, July 2, 2020).

Due to the variation noted above, it becomes apparent that it is important to analyse the parallel involvement of both states. India became involved in Sri Lanka from 2007 almost in parallel to China although China entered the scenario a little earlier by signing a set of agreements with the MR government regarding economic assistance in 2005 (Hein, 2017). However, in the beginning of their parallel involvement, no sufficient evidence is there to indicate a sense of competition behind their involvement, but rather, China's initial involvement occurred almost in isolation as it had no relation to India's involvement. After the war, this parallel engagement turned into a competitive engagement with India increasingly viewing Chinese activity in Sri Lanka as a strategic move aimed at undermining India's leverage over the island (Shivamurthy et al., 2022). China made itself fully available to Sri Lanka in terms of development cooperation as well as diplomatic support whereas India experienced difficulty in engaging constructively with Sri Lanka due to its own constraints and compulsions. In particular, the Tamil Nadu factor restrained India from extending its support to Sri Lanka economically and diplomatically in response to Chinese competition (Mayilvaganan, 2012). After the war, India knew that China was trying to become close to Sri Lanka by providing diplomatic and economic assistance. As respondent PA3 states:

> From the beginning, India had suspicions about China's sudden interest in Sri Lanka to provide economic and military assistance without any tangible

> conditions attached. Usually when a state provides assistance of military nature, at least it tends to have second thoughts as to whether to entertain request for such assistance from a third state (personal communication, November 05, 2019).

This clearly shows how eager China was for the right opportunity to make incursions into the IOR as a means of securing a foothold in South Asia due to its vital geostrategic significance. Against this backdrop, Sri Lanka's willingness to accommodate large-scale Chinese projects without fully excluding India illustrates a hedging approach that leans towards benefit-maximizing. Despite appearing to gravitate towards China's economic statecraft, Sri Lanka simultaneously preserved enough diplomatic space to mitigate the risks of alienating India, a hallmark of balanced hedging. From a hedging perspective, Sri Lanka's role as both host and arbiter in the triangular interaction reflects an active hedging strategy in the early years (2005-2009), when it kept both China and India engaged on almost equal terms. Over time, hedging shifted in form, oscillating between benefit-maximizing moves towards China and risk-minimising recalibrations to maintain India's goodwill.

6.2.1 China's Expansionist Ambitions in the IOR

With the booming of its economy in the 1990s, China developed its trade, security, and political relations with states within and beyond Asia (Roy, 1993). The phenomenal growth of China's economy in early 2000 compelled the Chinese leaders to seriously contemplate the security of energy and raw material supply from outside on which its economy largely depends (Lam, 2005). Left with limited options for seaborne transportation, China is heavily dependent on the Malacca Strait for oil and energy from the oil-rich Gulf states as these resources are transported through choke points which pose supply interruption and threats of piracy (Samaranayake, 2011). China's exigency of securing new and alternative sea lines of communication, therefore, pushed it towards the Indian Ocean, which occupies a vital place in seaborne trade and navigation (Brewster, 2015a). This development directly fed into the broader strategic rivalry between China and India as maritime expansion by one was perceived as encroachment by the other.

Being an important strategic hub in the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka became one of the potential maritime partners which could closely collaborate with China's expansionist intention towards the Indian Ocean and South Asia. As respondent PA5, a senior lecturer in Political Science stated,

> China's growing involvement in South Asia has become a major threat to India in the recent past. Thus, India needed to compete with China and establish its dominance in South Asia. India had to compete with China in South Asia on economic and security matters. This is the reason behind India's covert assistance to Sri Lanka against the LTTE (personal communication, June17, 2020).

This statement illustrates how Sri Lanka became a contested arena of the Sino-Indian strategic rivalry. Thus, China's entry into Sri Lanka in mid-2000 was a result of its move towards South Asia including the IOR; India's involvement with the MR administration during this period was also a response to China's engagement in Sri Lanka (Destradi, 2012a). A retired diplomat (SLDP3) presented a critical view regarding Indo - China influence in Sri Lanka in this way:

> Both China and India want to ensure their security in Sri Lanka using our geographical location. India supported the GoSL to fight against the LTTE for her own sake and not for Sri Lanka's security. This is the case in China as they need to distance India from Sri Lanka for their security interests. So, we need to understand this ground reality (personal communication November 14, 2019).

> As the statement reveals, the mutual suspicion between China and India highlights the security dilemma at the heart of the strategic rivalry.

The phenomenal growth in the Sino-Sri Lanka bilateral relations during this period transformed ties from traditional normal bilateral relations to a special bilateral relationship. In particular, the BRI and Sri Lanka becoming part of it meant that the Sino-Sri Lanka relations had reached new heights characterised by a strategic cooperative partnership (Mishra & Mishra, 2021). Strategically well-equipped, Sri Lanka assertively conducted its foreign relations. Even though it is a small state, Sri Lanka resisted India's pressure to bring Sri Lanka into India's orbit of influence (Philp, 2009). Furthermore, the

closer and more engaged with Sri Lanka China became, the more assertive Sri Lanka became towards India and the West, especially during the MR administration (2010-2015). As respondent CDP4, stated,

> With regard to China's participation in reconstruction in particular and postwar Sri Lanka in general, China has been enthusiastically involved in sectors like infrastructure reconstruction and investment since the end of the war, marking phenomenal engagement with Sri Lanka in the entire history of the bilateral ties between both states (personal communication, November 20, 2019).

In other words, the gradual increase of China's presence in Sri Lanka deepened and widened the scope of its engagement in Sri Lanka, thereby carving out geo-strategic space for China (Kumar, 2017a, p.1120). There are two main reasons as to why China sought to change the existing dynamics of the Indian Ocean. The first is China's geo-strategic vulnerability. China's geographical isolation from the Indian Ocean makes it feel strongly vulnerable in terms of strategic advantage. Therefore, as respondent SLDP 3 elaborates,

> Sri Lanka is, of course, at a crucial juncture, and it cannot align with one power at the expense of the other for the simple reason that Sri Lanka is not in a situation to do so. Sri Lanka cannot ignore India because, after all, India is our neighbour and, by far, it is a strong state in the region. It is important that Sri Lanka understands the geopolitical realities. Likewise, Sri Lanka needs China as well. China is all set to become the the most powerful regional actor in world politics, and the Belt and Road initiative will by far be the most successful initiative carried out by a state in its entire history. Therefore, the most crucial challenge Sri Lanka is facing now is balancing between the two powers (personal communication, November 14, 2019).

According to Storey (2006), this fear was clearly mentioned by the former Chinese President Hu Jintao in 2003 when he described it as China's Malaccan dilemma. As a result, China cultivated diplomatic, trade, and security relationships with states that are friendly and cooperative. China, for the first time, set up overseas outposts in Djibouti and began to permanently patrol the Indian Ocean (Jain, 2022). The second reason is strategic primacy which has two important aspects. One is China's attempt to carve out its own

sphere of influence in the Indian Ocean through political and economic influence. As lamented by MP12, a political columnist of a leading English newspaper.

> China is a superpower and China's interest in Sri Lanka is rooted in her strategic location in the Silk Route. Sri Lanka seems to have sought Chinese assistance and influence when faced with economic and diplomatic pressure from other states (personal communication, July 24, 2020).

India's strategic pushback against Chinese initiatives intensified the value of Sri Lanka's hedging posture. Sri Lanka leveraged Indian security concerns to negotiate favourable terms from both sides, exemplifying the risk-minimising component of hedging-maintaining relations with each rival to avoid strategic overdependence. This demonstrates how the strategic rivalry between China and India magnified Sri Lanka's role as a pivotal balancer.

The second aspect refers to China's attempt to increase and strengthen security ties with the states in the IOR, especially the littoral states. As White (2020) posits, China desires to establish military and commercial relationships with states whereby it seeks to increase its economic, military, diplomatic, and political presence in the IOR (White, 2020). By doing so, China intends to become a security provider in the IOR in place of India which has performed that role for a long time. Due to China's intention or ambition, it has initiated a set of new historic missions including the deployment of the PLAN (the People's Liberation Army Navy) in the Gulf of Aden (Henry, 2016). This marked a change in the Sino-Indian maritime dynamics and raised the idea of the String of Pearls through which China attempted to reach out to the states in the Indian Ocean by connecting strategically located ports and other maritime facilities. These maritime expansions and counter-responses clearly reflect the strategic rivalry between China and India as it plays out in the Indian Ocean domain.

6.2.2 India's Intent to Preserve its Dominance in the IOR

Due to China's expansionist ambitions, India is compelled and challenged to demonstrate its strategic leadership in the IOR and South Asia (Brewster, 2015a). As the traditional hegemon in the IOR, India was become defensive and thought that it had to

regain its traditional position, i.e., preservation of the status quo. According to respondent MP7, who is attached to Sri Lanka College of Journalism stated, *"India is particularly interested in Sri Lanka as her closest neighbour and, therefore, India is always concerned [about] China's involvement in Sri Lanka. Chinese investments in the state are seen as a threat by India*" (personal communication, July 2, 2020).

From India's point of view, China's expansionist ambitions and attitudes brought on immense pressure as they undermined India's image as the regional superpower and its security interests in the IOR (Dutta, 2024). India's reaction towards China's moves in the IOR became evident when Chinese research vessels were forced by Indian forces to retreat from operating inside the exclusive economic zone of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in September 2019 (Saxena, 2024).

During the interview, an international news reporter (MP12) based in Colombo shared the following opinion: "*In India's view, any strategic move by China, in South Asia in general and the presence of China in the Indian ocean in particular is a trespass which is inimical to its hegemonic ambitions in the region* (personal communication, July 24, 2020).

Similarly, in 2015, when a Chinese research vessel was spotted in the sea close to Bangladesh, India lodged a protest over the ship's movement. As these examples show, both China and India engaged in a strategic competition for influence and dominance in the IOR, while refusing to cede any strategic ground (Mukherjee, 2020). This strategic rivalry reflects, as in the preceding paragraphs, where India interprets China's expansionist ambitions in South Asia and IOR as an existential challenge to its hegemonic status.

The complex nature of the phenomenon of parallel involvement thus leads to the identification of a related set of supplementary variables which exert a direct impact on Indo-Sri Lanka relations. The factors and dynamics of Indo-Sri Lanka relations have shifted from time to time depending on domestic, regional, and international circumstances (Manoharan & Chakravarty, 2016). The most recent shift in these relations is China's increasing presence in the IOR and South Asia along with its complex involvement with Sri Lanka. The China factor tends to cause security and strategic concerns for India which is the regional superpower. Due to Sri Lanka's close ties with China, India's concerns were heightened. For instance, when MR gave the Hambantota Port development project to

China, it became a point of contention for India (Patel, 2021, p.150). While this move was enough to send ripples across to India, the NU Government giving the Hambantota Port to China on a 99-year lease became even more of a concern to India (Hillman, 2018, p.2). Accordingly, Sri Lanka decided to pause or slow down some of the development projects which involved India and Japan (Rajagopalan, 2020; Hanada, 2021). The Japanese-funded light rail project and the East Container Terminal (ECT) project in Colombo are examples of such projects.

The year 2007 is important in two respects. Firstly, it was when China decided to gain a foothold in Sri Lanka as the latter was in dire need of external assistance in the form of money and weapons for its outright military campaign against the LTTE (Wheeler, 2012). As such, sensing Sri Lanka's exigencies and grabbing the opportunity, China readily made its support available for the state by supplying arms and ammunition which Sri Lanka desperately needed to pursue military assaults first in the Eastern province and then in the Northern province (Chellaney, 2009). Second, coincidentally, this support came at the same period when India, which remained passive toward Sri Lanka's ethnic affairs for some time, became involved in the former's military campaign by providing limited assistance (Destradi, 2012a).

To corroborate this fact, it is interesting to note that in one way or the other, there has been an increased Chinese involvement in Sri Lanka since 2005 in general and during the postwar period although respondents differ significantly in their assessment of China's contribution. The respondents with close Chinese affiliations see China's involvement in Sri Lanka as normal in terms of the state's involvement elsewhere in the Asian region, a view which is contrary to the Chinese view. That is, China's increased presence in the island state is part of China's proclaimed 'grand strategy' to play a bigger role in economic, defence, and political arenas in the Asian region (Weerasinghe, 2024, p. 9).

Thus, China's engagement in Sri Lanka is both normal and circumstantial. It is circumstantial because China found Sri Lanka to be a potential market and strategic partner in the former's quest for an Asian order dominated by China. The historical baggage that the Sino-Indian bilateral ties have carried for the past six decades, coupled with contemporary spontaneous competition sparked by parallel economic booming of both the states, inevitably pitted one against the other as they seek to expand their market, partners,

and leverage (Long et al., 2023). This is particularly the case with China as it assertively and aggressively makes inroads into states and regions which hitherto maintained a low profile in China's foreign policy consideration. These developments in Sri Lanka reflect how third-party states are turned into strategic arenas within larger rivalries, making Sri Lanka a proxy site of Sino-Indian competition.

When we look at the tangible manifestation of China's reaching out to states and regions to strengthen its ties, the BRI is one instance where Sri Lanka occupies an important place. Here, Sri Lanka is metaphorically described as the queen pearl in the BRI crown (Wang & Ye, 2019). In an interview with PO6, the following views were shared:

> The geo-strategic significance of Sri Lanka has long been reckoned with by great powers. During the US-USSR cold war in the Indian ocean theatre, the competing rivals (both principal and their regional proxies) had strove to get foothold in the island state. […] China and India's parallel engagement has reiterated this fact (personal communication, July 19, 2020).

Considering the parallel involvement of China and India, especially in the aftermath of the war, India began to feel immense pressure from Sino- Sri Lanka relations. This pressure, in turn, posed a foreign policy challenge regarding how best to deal with Sri Lanka (Sultana, 2015). The staggering nature of India's foreign policy is well demonstrated in the manner in which India acted in the UNHRC, where India first supported Sri Lanka, but on the second- and third-time resolutions were tabled, it voted against Sri Lanka (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2012, 2013). This pattern clearly depicts the changing relationship between Sri Lanka and India on the one hand and shows growing influence of China in Sri Lanka on the other hand. The following statement attests this fact. As respondent PO3 observed that,

> [a]s war crime allegations against [the] GoSL continued, the US-led Western states prepared to bring a UN resolution to investigate the allegations, which received overwhelming publicity and support from South Indian politics and the Tamil diaspora. In this context, India began to support the UN resolution against Sri Lanka, despite its various practical support for the civil war (personal communication, November 2, 2019).

Before development projects including Project Mausam were initiated by India, China did not pay much attention to India. However, after these projects were launched, China also took certain actions to provoke India including the docking of Chinese naval vessels in 2014 (Aneez & Sirilal, 2014). Thus, after 2015, this rivalry became more complex mainly because China has massive resources in terms of gaining economic development which India does not possess because it has limited resources in relation to this area (Sultana, 2016).

Therefore, India tried to counter Chinese influence in Sri Lanka by forging bonds with states that were against China. Accordingly, India entered a security alliance with Australia, Japan, and the US called the Quad (Jaishankar, 2023). After this alliance was made, China acted to intentionally hurt India. Thus, the emergence of a strategic rivalry between these two states can be seen clearly. Political observer (PO4) mentioned commented that

> China, which had [a] free ride, sometimes monopolising strategic investments and infrastructure development and appeared not to bother about India in Sri Lanka. However, China began to take India seriously when the former saw the latter's moves in Sri Lanka curtailing its strategic presence in the island state (personal communication, November 2, 2019).

It is against this backdrop that China and India increased their involvement in Sri Lanka by expanding and strengthening their bilateral cooperation in traditional as well as strategic domains. For instance, India was highly enthusiastic about bolstering its security ties by engaging in joint Indian-Sri Lankan naval exercises in the sea around Sri Lanka (NDTV, 2021), whilst China resorted to docking a warship, nuclear submarine, and counterpiracy vessels in Sri Lankan ports (Chansoria, 2016).

It is possible to argue that the Indo-Sri Lanka relations from 2005 to 2019 tend to become the hostage of the Sino-India parallel involvement in Sri Lanka. This happened when the parallel involvement translates into Sino-Indian competition. The intensity of the parallel involvement of India and China in Sri Lanka exhibits a triangular relationship involving China, India, and Sri Lanka. Based on the theories applied for this study, as discussed in chapter 2, the following set of independent variables were derived to analyse the link between the parallel involvement of India and China and Indo-Sri Lanka relations.

The triangular relationship of India-China-Sri Lanka optimizes how strategic rivalry spills over into the domestic and foreign policy of smaller states caught in between two powerful rivals.

These independent variables are identified as determinants of the scale and intensity of the parallel involvement of China and India, which together account for the change and continuity of Indo-Sri Lanka relations. This parallelism, on the other hand, is a hallmark of strategic rivalry, as each side interprets the other's advances as threats that demand counter-balancing measures.

6.3. Regime Type

Regime type refers mainly to the national ideology and resultant foreign policy of China, India, and Sri Lanka. China is essentially a communist state with a party-state system dominating socio-economic, political, and cultural life (Tsang & Cheung, 2022). People's interest and aspirations are rallied around the agenda of the Communist Party which is hierarchically organised with the President, Premier and ministers at the centre of governmental activity (Lawrence, 2013). Therefore, in China, top leaders decide government policies and people just follow them in a top-down approach to policy making. In contrast, both Indian and Sri Lankan political systems follow a democratic system where policies are decided upon people's needs and aspirations by both leaders and people in various forms and magnitudes (Tsou, 1995). That is, unlike in China where policies are decided by the high ranks of the Communist party and people have little say in any decision including foreign policy matters, in India and Sri Lanka, governments are responsive to public opinion due democratic practices in all spheres (Subrata, 2017; Uyangoda, 2010).

Unlike the governments of India and Sri Lanka, China's regime, which is essentially a communist one, demonstrates a great deal of consistency in terms of national ideology and foreign policy despite changes in the leadership in different regimes since the establishment of the PRC in 1949 (Clarke & Sussex, 2023). However, from 2005 onwards, with the change in the outlook of Chinese leaders regarding sustaining China's economic development and expanding its international role, a shift in China's traditional foreign policy can be discerned (Aoyama, 2022). For instance, President Deng Xiao Ping pursued a more inward-looking policy in terms of development and security which was

characterised by domestic stability and security as preconditions for economic development. President Hu Jintao (2003-2013), the predecessor of the incumbent President Xi Jinping, focused mostly on Asia for China's geo-strategic and geoeconomic dominance, whereas President Xi Jinping put more weight on the externalisation of China's security and economy to reach out to the globe, thus deviating from his predecessor (Wong, 2019b). These Chinese strategies need to be seen as part of China's competitive positioning against India. Xi Jingping's externalization of Chinese power not only aimed at global reach but also enhanced China's presence in South Asia and IOR, sharpening the contours of strategic rivalry with India over spheres of influence like Sri Lanka.

As for the regime of India, from 2005 to 2014 under the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, India's Sri Lanka policy showed a stark shift from noninterference to interference in terms of the island state's internal affairs, especially the ethnic conflict (Destradi, 2012a). From 2014 to 2019, the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government with its Neighbourhood First policy, while seeking to continue its predecessor's noninterference policy to some extent, pursued a strategy of development engagement aimed at cultivating soft power and leverage alike (Sultana, 2017a). During an interview, PA4 expressed the following.

> The convergence and coincidence of political and ideological tenets between China and Sri Lanka enabled their relations to grow rapidly. On the other hand, lack of such convergence between India and Sri Lanka, made India to seek bridge this gap through development engagement (personal communication, November 08, 2019).

From this statement, it can be understood that the lack of compatibility between India and Sri Lanka over political ideology (because the former was democratic, while the latter was authoritarian) made it difficult for them to cooperate in the aftermath of the war. However, the ideological and developmental choices between China and Sri Lanka were compatible, and Sri Lanka readily followed China's directives for postwar development initiatives.

Given the nature and attributes of the regimes of the three states, commonalities as well as differences can be seen, except for China whose regime remained almost constant throughout. The divergent nature of the regime type, in turn, affects the nature of the Sino-

Indian parallel involvement in Sri Lanka, thereby shaping Indo-Sri Lanka relations. It is argued that bilateral ties between India and Sri Lanka were characterised mainly by mutual trust and suspicion depending on the type of regime in Sri Lanka (for instance, under the UNP government, Sri Lanka cautiously pursued its foreign relations with India as the former saw the latter as a bully (Manoharan & Chakravarty, 2016). When asked about the change-continuity dichotomy of Indo-Sri Lanka bilateral ties.

One respondent (PO6) opined that *"[in] Sri Lanka's foreign relations, Indo-Sri Lanka relations form the cornerstone which revolved around amity and suspicion from the outset of the relations depending on the political regime in Colombo*" (personal communication, July 19, 2020).

Further, in an interview with MP2, he stated that "[i*]n Indo-Sri Lanka relations, the elements of tensions and cordiality [are not constant]. Rather, it is fluid depending on who and which party sits in power* (personal communication, November 14, 2019).

When examining the regime type, there are two related aspects. The first one particularly concerns Sri Lanka's postwar reconstruction ideology which is treated as the extension of the national ideology held by the incumbent regimes. The second one relates to India's national ideology reflected in its foreign policy especially toward its South Asian neighbours (Basrur, 2023). Based on this study, we can see either compatibility or incompatibility of India's foreign policy in relation to postwar reconstruction in Sri Lanka between the different regimes in power simultaneously in both states. The present study reveals that depending on the regime that was in power in India and Sri Lanka, India's foreign policy became either compatible or incompatible with Sri Lanka's postwar reconstruction initiatives. Unlike in the case of India and Sri Lanka, compatibility and incompatibility are relatively less relevant to China where change of regime rarely brings a complete change of ideology or foreign policy.

To be precise, from 2005 to 2015, the MR regime's foreign policy towards China and India demonstrates a tendency towards disparate engagement. From 2005 to 2009, the MR regime's policy employed active hedging as it managed to get both China and India to support its war campaign against the LTTE (Behuria & Sultana, 2013). In contrast, from 2010 to 2015, Sri Lanka sought to strengthen its ties with China in the wake of mounting pressure from the West and India alike, thereby undermining India's leverage on Sri Lanka.

This shows how Sri Lanka consciously exercised the strategy of 'active hedging' (Goh, 2016; Patel, 2021). Under the NU government in its initial phase, Sri Lanka pursued policy that leaned towards India (Dharmawardhane, 2016). Initially, the NU government criticised China on the grounds that it had funded projects that were of no monetary value and halted many of the projects (Dharmawardhane, 2016). Therefore, Sri Lanka's hedging behaviour is a direct product of the Sino-Indian strategic rivalry, where Colombo balances between the two rivals to maximize its strategic autonomy and extract resources from both.

However, later, due to the leverage China had in Sri Lanka, the NU government was compelled to restart the projects which improved the soured relations between the two states (Kumar, 2017). As a result, Sri Lanka also became close to China and Sri Lankan foreign policy returned to its previous position vis-à-vis China and India. In that sense, Sri Lanka's attempt at deploying hedging between China and India during this period revolved around passive hedging (first path). By and large, these actions led to a deterioration in the Indo-Sri Lanka relations to the extent where India even considered unseating the very government it sought to bring to power. In short, changes in regime type directly influenced whether Sri Lanka pursued active or passive hedging. In other words, the regime-driven shifts in Sri Lanka's foreign policy underline how hedging by a small state interacts with great power strategic rivalry. Small states accomplish this by, using rivalry as leverage, but they are also constrained by the same rivalry when the competition between external powers intensifies.

6.4. The Capability Gap

Amongst the dynamics of the Sino-Indian parallel involvement in Sri Lanka, the asymmetry underlying their competition can be identified as the prominent parameter and the likely outcome of their interaction. The capability gap essentially refers to two things that are different but related to the Sino-Indian parallel involvement. The gap relates to the apparent gulf between China and India vis-à-vis material and nonmaterial resources (Pardesi, 2021). The material resources concern economic and other substantiative means employed to wield leverage on a target state, whereas the nonmaterial resources involve political and diplomatic influence upon a target state.

In terms of China and India's involvement in Sri Lanka, there exists a significant capability gap over both material and nonmaterial resources which, in turn, affects the strategic equation between the two states. Sri Lanka perceives China as possessing the required resources it needs and as being willing to dispatch them on request through its multidimensional engagement with Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka's perception has enabled China to make unmatched and unthwarted inroads into what is traditionally seen as India's strategic backyard, Sri Lanka. As PA2 states:

> Due to China's ability in funding massive projects (due to the capital and material resources it has) made [it] easy for China to fund projects in a postwar society like Sri Lanka. Certain development aid was granted without serious monetary conditions and through providing massive funding, China has been able to build serious inroads into Sri Lanka's geopolitical space, which challenged India's regional dominance. (personal communication, November 3, 2019).

This view was also supported by MP9 and 11. On the other hand, Sri Lanka views India as the big neighbour and sometimes as a bully, depending on the regime in power in India and Sri Lanka (Navaratna-Bandara, 1995). Possessing limited economic resources, Sri Lanka required development assistance from China, especially in the postwar period. The fluctuations in India's strategic space mirrors shifts in Sri Lanka's hedging strategies. Periods of equal engagement represent active hedging, while phases of tilt towards China or India indicate passive hedging, where Sri Lanka adjusted to shifting diplomatic and economic pressures.

The non-material resources capability gap denotes Sri Lanka's, especially the MR regime's, calculus of China and India in terms of the relative diplomatic and political support they could render to the war victor regime's postwar endeavours (Behuria & Sultana, 2013). Two background factors influenced the cost-benefit calculus of the MR regime. The first influence was human rights allegations against the regime and the attendant pressure from the West along with the pressure exerted by India upon the regime demanding a political solution to the ethnic issue (Sahu, 2016a). The second influence was China's encouragement of the regime's postwar reconstruction and reconciliation efforts

through the provision of material support (economic and development assistance) along with unconditional support to the regime at the UNHRC.

As a result, the MR administration considered China as a compatible companion, while viewing India as a hostile neighbour. This was due to the generous support rendered by China and India within the UN, especially the UNHRC respectively (Abeyagoonasekera, 2021c; Hein, 2017). On the contrary, India's behaviour showed inconsistency as its approached alternated between supporting, not supporting, and staying neutral on the resolutions over Sri Lanka (Abeyagoonasekera, 2021c; Hein, 2017; Subramanian, 2021). The divergent and sometimes opposite positions taken by China and India left the war victor government with two options: either heeding India's pressure to engage with the Tamils of the island state to devise a political solution to the ethnic issue or tilting toward China, who was readily available in Sri Lanka's hour of need, thus disregarding India (Arangalla, 2017).

As for the war victor regime, it needed China's diplomatic and political support for two reasons: first, Sri Lanka needed China's help to tackle the human rights allegations and criticism within the UN, including the UNHRC, and secondly, the war victor regime felt the need for some sort of outside support (politically and diplomatically) to implement its postwar reconstruction and reconciliation projects which faced criticism and opposition from a section of the population within the state itself and from the international community (Abi-Habib, 2018). Interestingly, the way Sri Lanka faced the human rights allegations against the country with China's support and India's hostilities, demonstrates how Sri Lanka's postwar human rights crises laid the foundation for increased economic and security interdependence with China. Sri Lanka not only tended to see China as an all-weather friend (The Economic Times, 2015b), but it also reciprocated China's support by allowing it to undertake mega-infrastructure development projects at strategically important locations, an alignment which India found to be a serious threat to its security (Brewster, 2015b). As respondent CDP4 states,

> In this context, India began to support the UN resolution against Sri Lanka, despite its various practical support for the civil war. However, China, as a long-time ally backed Sri Lanka against the UN resolution, which led to

> strong Sino-Sri Lanka relations under the Rajapaksa government (personal communication, November 20, 2019).

This respondent further stated that China's support for Sri Lanka against the UN resolution "…led to strong Sino-Sri Lanka relations under the Rajapaksa government" (CDP4, personal communication, November 20, 2019). Moreover, historical baggage was another important factor that also shaped Sri Lanka's relations with China and India. The MR regime perceived this as irksome to Sino-Sri Lanka relations. However, the historical baggage which India carries owing to its Tamil population in the state of Tamil Nadu, and India's uninvited involvement in the ethnic conflict pushed the MR regime to drift away from India and towards China (Ranjan & Chattoraj, 2022). In this way, Sri Lanka was relinquishing the hitherto accommodative variant of its hedging strategy in order to become more capable of securing the resources that Sri Lanka badly needed, given the backdrop of the imperatives noted above.

In relation to this situation, there is also a capability gap. The capability gap can be analysed in both ways in terms of India and Sri Lanka relations. When constructing the Hambantota Port, Sri Lanka first awarded the contract to India (The Hindu, 2018a). However, India declined the offer, stating that it did not have adequate resources to carry out such a project (Jones & Hameiri, 2020). Likewise, India cannot engage with Sri Lanka in the same way that China does because it cannot match China in relation to development assistance and scale (Patel, 2021). Overall, the disparity between the capabilities of China and India forced Sri Lanka into an asymmetrical hedging strategy. Accordingly, Sri Lanka maximized economic benefits from China's greater resources while sustaining political-diplomatic engagement with India to mitigate geopolitical risks.

6.5. Sri Lanka's Geo-Strategic Location in the IOR

Sri Lanka's strategic position in the IOR depicts its relevance and association to other regional and international powers (Awad & Todkar, 2021b). Sri Lanka plays a major role in the strategic competition between China and India. Because of this, many states and regional powers are competing for influence in Sri Lanka to gain access to and benefit from its strategic port placement, transhipment routes, and its potential for naval bases (Caliskan, 2022). Sri Lanka's geographical location in the Indian Ocean is on one of the

crucial sea lines of communication that offers significant bases for projecting power, positioning, and protecting key trade routes (Attanayake, 2024; Awad & Todkar, 2021a). As Chinese maritime strategy aims at a rapid expansion in the IPR, MSR offers an exclusive corridor for it to access strategic ports such as Hambantota and the surrounding IOR. As respondent PA5 expressed:

> Sri Lanka has become a strategically important state for China and India due to Sri Lanka's geopolitical location in the Indian Ocean. China and India understand that if they get the control of geo-strategically important places in Sri Lanka, they can control the entire region (personal communication, June 17, 2020).

Supporting this argument, respondent PA5 further stated that "with its significant geo-strategic location and amicable economic geography, Sri Lanka attracts a great deal of concern from regional and global powers. Sri Lanka is a bone of contention between India and China in their strategic competition" (personal communication, June 17, 2020, 2019). Hence, given the location of Sri Lanka, as the traditional hub of Indian Ocean maritime transportation, it has been given a key position in the BRI project (Wang & Ye, 2019).

The discussion below shows how Indo-Sri Lanka relations changed after 2005 in the wake of China's dominance in the IOR.

6.6. India's Geopolitical Interest and Indo-Sri Lanka Ties

Since the time when Panikkar (1945) conceived the idea of the 'strategic unity of India', India has always considered Sri Lanka as its strategic backyard, and more, India sought to conduct its foreign relations with states within the region (Ali, 2011). In this regard, India was assertive particularly during the time when Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi were the prime ministers of India although Jawaharlal Nehru based his foreign relations with neighbours on idealism-induced nonalignment (Aryal & Bharti, 2023; Roy, 2016). Overall, India had remained preoccupied with maintaining its regional dominance by various means and approaches at different points in time depending on the regime type and leaders' ideology. As a result, India has never appeared to tolerate meddling by any external power, i.e., an extra-regional power, into the region's affairs. According to PA2,

> Due to the centrality of her position in South Asia, India tends to think that the entire region is its sphere of interest on one hand, and the Indian Ocean as its own ocean on the other hand. Thus, China's entry into Sri Lanka during the final civil war and ensuing Sino-Sri Lanka bilateral ties aftermath of the civil war's end meant a set of serious challenges for India. Of these, India's traditional strategic space figures paramount. This fact became evident […] and […] India reacted to Sri Lanka's move to look to China for support, marking a radical shift in her noninterference policy towards South Asian neighbours constantly touted by different political regimes since the early 1990s (personal communication, November 03, 2019).

The table 6.1 given below shows the way China's engagement with Sri Lanka affects India's strategic primacy in Sri Lanka and Indo-Sri Lanka relations.

Period	2005-2009	2009-2015	2015-2019
Effect on India's strategic space	Maintenance of its space	Loss of its space	Regaining its space
Strategy (Indian)	Engaging in limited collaboration. Limiting political & diplomatic support	Exert pressure. Applying more pressure and extending less political & diplomatic support	Employing more political and diplomatic support
Nature of ties	Peaceful	Contentious	Cooperative

Table 6. 1 China and the Shifting Equation of Indo-Sri Lanka Relations

Source: Author (2024)

Both China and India's involvement in Sri Lanka from 2005 onwards intersected at some point in the years leading to the conclusion of the Sri Lankan civil war in 2009. From 2009, the approach the two states adopted made them view each other as competitors for strategic influence in Sri Lanka. China's unconditional support to Sri Lanka enabled it to get closer to Sri Lanka, while India's persistent pressure on postwar policies distanced

it from the former (Abi-Habib, 2018; Gupta & Balakrishnan, 2010). From 2015 to 2019, a change of Indian approach brought the state back into the picture which had been dominated by China for some time, thereby pushing the latter to take the back seat. In brief, 2005-2019 Indo-Sri Lanka relations exhibit a constant fluctuation (from peaceful engagement to contentious engagement to cooperative engagement) in parallel to the shift in India's strategic primacy (from maintaining, to losing, to regaining) in the face of China's involvement in Sri Lanka (Manoharan & Chakravarty, 2016).

To be precise, India lost its leverage in Sri Lanka – its own backyard – and at some point, realised that in the wake of growing Chinese engagement, it could no longer effectively exert pressure on Sri Lanka. As regards the spheres of influence of China and India that Sri Lanka faces in the contemporary era, China's role and influence have outdone the influence of India in terms of economic engagement in the forms of financial assistance through loans, infrastructure development, tourism, and FDI (Abeyagoonasekera, 2021b). This position was made possible by the BRI as it seeks to secure strategic space for China mainly in the IOR and beyond. As the signature element of China's economic state crafting, the BRI has significant implications for both Sino-Sri Lanka and Indo-Sri Lanka relations (Jain, 2022). By linking three major economic areas such as trade, investment, and lending, the BRI has the potential to devise deeper and close economic relations with states along the land and sea routes of the Silk Road, including Sri Lanka (Jain, 2022).

This fact was evident when China offered Sri Lanka the strategic Port City project, a Chinese flagship project under the BRI with funding of US$1.4 billion, which stands as China's biggest ever mega-project in Sri Lanka (Sultana, 2016). What is more, the BRI was instrumental in transforming Sino-Sri Lanka relations from their traditional normal development cooperation to strategic development cooperation where the bilateral ties secured a special place in Sri Lanka's foreign relations. Sri Lanka's enthusiasm to join the BRI reflected the co-occurrence of two things: MR's personal and close rapport with Chinese President Xi, and his administration's strong optimism that strengthening ties with China would benefit it in two major ways. First, it would enable delivery of the development promises pledged to the people under the Mahinda Chintana: Vision for the Future manifesto during the 2010 presidential elections. Second, its relationship with China would shield Sri Lanka from international pressure, especially from the UNHRC over the human rights issue (Hein, 2017).

Sri Lanka's close relations with China in the aftermath of the BRI meant two things for the island state: on the one hand, Sri Lanka's joining of the BRI increased its geo-strategic significance to an unprecedented level, and on the other hand, Sri Lanka's dependence on China politically and economically increased further. Although it often touted a non-aligned foreign policy (Abeyagoonasekera, 2021b), the MR government openly pursued a China-centric foreign policy during its second term. Consequently, the impact of China's capabilities also increased drastically (Abeyagoonasekera, 2021b). That is, China's heavy presence in Sri Lanka through diplomatic and strategic engagement during MR's tenure, followed by the NUG and Gotabhaya Rajapakse regimes, culminated in Sri Lanka becoming heavily reliant on China for economic and diplomatic support (Attanayake & Atmakuri, 2020). Hence, the present study argues that this reliance, in turn, increased China's leverage in Sri Lanka, which meant that as it moved closer to China it drifted further apart from India, with the result that India lost its leverage over Sri Lanka to China.

In the security domain, too, the BRI has significant implications for Indo-Sri Lanka relations. As Chinese President Xi Jinping stated, through the BRI, China as well as participant states can ensure and gain greater prosperity and enhance greater security (Arugay, 2017). With the launch of the BRI and Sri Lanka's participation in it, India began to believe that Sri Lanka had become the platform for Sino-India strategic competition since the island is an important node for China's maritime strategy (Kumar, 2019). At the same time, Indo-Sri Lanka ties suddenly deteriorated when Sri Lanka leased the Hambantota International Port to China. While this lease is strategically significant for China, it has become a highly sensitive issue for India. India appeared to be shaken following the launch of the BRI as China's grand strategy since India believes that the BRI will alter the existing structural arrangements in Asia and beyond (Bharti, 2024). There is a possibility that such an eventuality must have alarmed India, and this concern is reflected in its reaction to the BRI.

India opposes the BRI because the BRI together with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is China's flagship initiative, violates India's sovereignty and territorial integrity as the corridor of the project runs through the Pakistan administered Kashmir which India considers an integral part of India illegally occupied by Pakistan (Dharvi, 2022). During the study period of this thesis, i.e., 2005-2019, it can be seen that

India's strategic space in Sri Lanka fluctuated. When it comes to strategic space, there are two dimensions. One relates to security concerns, and the other relates to leverage. When examining these two dimensions, India always framed its strategic space as a security concern and did not overtly show that it was worried about losing its strategic space in Sri Lanka (Estrada, 2023).

However, India was concerned about losing its strategic space and ability to wield leverage over Sri Lanka during this period, and its interventions were mainly to regain its strategic space, which it did under the covert guise of security concerns. During MR's first term, India was concerned about maintaining its strategic space in Sri Lanka. India focused on this aspect and did everything in Sri Lanka in accordance with its hands-off policy and noninterference policy in relation to Sri Lanka. It also wanted to help Sri Lanka in the best possible way, even in the wake of strong pressure from Tamil Nadu, a strong coalition ally in the Indian Central Government (Ranjan & Chattoraj, 2022).

Nevertheless, India still tried to help MR's regime carry out its military campaign. This position is indicative of how India attempted to maintain its strategic space within Sri Lanka while China was making serious inroads into Sri Lanka (Rosendal, 2021). During Rajapaksha's second term, India was placed in a situation where it attempted to retain its influence in Sri Lanka because Sri Lanka took a U-turn, ignoring India and getting close to China (Chandran, 2019). Thus, India lost its strategic space and leverage in Sri Lanka China was always there to provide both diplomatic and economic support to Sri Lanka. China then became a friend in need to Sri Lanka and their close relationship could not be easily severed by India (Smith, 2016).

During the third period (under the NU government), India again regained a chance to recover its strategic space. Modi was the Prime Minister of India, and the Modi government had a two-thirds majority in parliament. Therefore, Modi's government did not have pressure from the Tamil Nadu government as it was not a strong ally in Modi's government (Jeganaathan, 2015). That made the NDA government assertive towards Sri Lanka in terms of its policy. So, the NDA government was comfortable with establishing close ties with the Sirisena-Wickremasinghe led NUG (Dharmawardhane, 2016). India did not pressure Sri Lanka in relation to reconciliation or the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, and this led to the two states' reestablishing friendly ties with each other.

Furthermore, development cooperation between India and Sri Lanka also witnessed remarkable growth compared to before. Initially, the Sirisena-Wickremasinghe led NUG administration sought to follow a balanced foreign policy which was neither pro- nor anti-India and China (Wang & Ye, 2019). Thus, it maintained a close and friendly relationship with India which led to the deterioration in the relations between China in the first two years starting from 2015. During the last period of the NUG, China was brought back into the scene through the renegotiating of Chinese-funded mega-projects (Arangalla, 2017). As a result, Indo-Sri Lanka relations once again turned bitter, especially with the leasing of the Hambantota Port to China.

When examining this policy from the perspective of hedging, no features in relation to consistency can be observed. The policy was always fluctuating, and the hedging strategy was employed and exercised in line with that fluctuation. Thus, from 2005 to 2009, Sri Lanka followed a balanced hedging policy keeping both China and India at an equidistance (Destradi, 2012a). However, during MR's second tenure, the hedging turned into a weak hedging policy because he got close to China and paid no attention to India. Under the NU government, however, a form of passive hedging (adopting the second path) is seen. Here, the attempt was to retain economic and diplomatic relations with China while also maintaining close relations with its rival state, India. Under the NU government, although relations with China were reduced, Sri Lanka renegotiated its positions and created a strong relationship with India and China. This approach resembles what certain commentators describe as double-edged hedging (De Silva, 2017; Kandaudahewa, 2020).

Thus, the hedging policy fluctuated and changed in tandem with the regime changes. Mainly, the regimes in India and Sri Lanka were responsible for this fluctuation. When there was a coalition government in India, and when the war victor government was in power in Sri Lanka, the hedging policy turned to 'passive hedging' (IPCS, 2013a). It was at this stage that Sri Lanka became close to China due to China's status as a rising power. When the NDA and NUG were in power in India and Sri Lanka respectively, the hedging policy shifted in between 'passive hedging' (first path) and 'active hedging'. Thus, balanced relations were kept between the rising power, China, and the established power, India. Therefore, hedging, in the Sri Lankan context, exhibits a mix of typical as well as distinct features.

This study further argues that the competition between China and India in and over the IOR where Sri Lanka is strategically located has intensified the struggle between Asia's two biggest powers. To put it in another way, if China's involvement in Sri Lanka is the immediate factor shaping Indo-Lanka bilateral ties in the post-2009 period, then it is the Sino-Indian competition for strategic primacy in the Indian Ocean which serves as the distant factor affecting the trends of Indo-Lanka ties (Narayanan, n.d.). This fact becomes even clearer when analysing the following areas.

6.7. China's Strategic Presence in the IOR and Sino-Sri Lanka Relations

Strategic analysts and IR experts generally tend to claim that, under President Xi, China has adopted a grand strategy consisting of three major components: the String of Pearls, the BRI, and MSR (Akimoto, 2021; Goldstein, 2020). While the String of Pearls relates to China's pursuit of economic and strategic preponderance in Asia and beyond, the BRI and MSR launched in 2013 constitute China's global and grand strategy (Kumar, 2019). It is a strategy by which China seeks to achieve global dominance by building infrastructure networks across Eurasia and East Africa.

China's String of Pearls strategy mainly serves China's regional interests and ambitions by monopolising key choke points in the IOR by investing in geopolitically important ports from Hong Kong to Sudan (Verma, 2017). The term 'String of Pearls' was first used in 2005 by defence contractor Booz Allen Hamilton (Ghani & Ali, 2020, p.51). He alleged that China was following the strategy of a String of Pearls, making bases from the Middle East to Southern China. As such, the strategy aims at encircling neighbouring states, especially India (Verma, 2017). Here, the logic of strategic rivalry is clear: China's attempt at encirclement intensifies India's fears of encirclement and drives competitive policies in the IOR. It is argued that the dramatic expansion carried out by China in the Asian and African regions through its grand strategy pushed Sri Lanka to become closer to China for economic and political gains, disregarding historical ties with India at least at some points. Thus, China's strategic investment and economic support in the region helped Beijing to gain more support among South Asian states including Sri Lanka.

According to a well-known Sri Lankan analyst, China's String of Pearls is a geopolitical strategy to expand Chinese influence in the IOR (Kelegama, 2014a). There

are maritime centres around this region including Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the Maldives, and Somalia. As some scholars claim, the Indian strategic community, however, views the String of Pearls and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a threat to Indian national security (Green, 2018). This perception underscores the strategic rivalry dimensions, where Chinese infrastructure projects are not seen as benign development but as potential instruments of strategic encirclement. As shown in the map (Figure 6.2), among the ports in China's String of Pearls strategy, the Hambantota deep-sea port in Sri Lanka serves as one of the vital components. Apart from the naval bases elsewhere in the Indian Ocean, the ports in Hambantota and Chittagong in Bangladesh serve to consolidate China's position in the Indian Ocean Region. Hambantota, therefore, is not only a development project but also a symbol of strategic rivalry, whereby China secures strategic space. India perceives this as an attempt of encirclement. The figure 6.2 given below shows China's String of Pearls route.

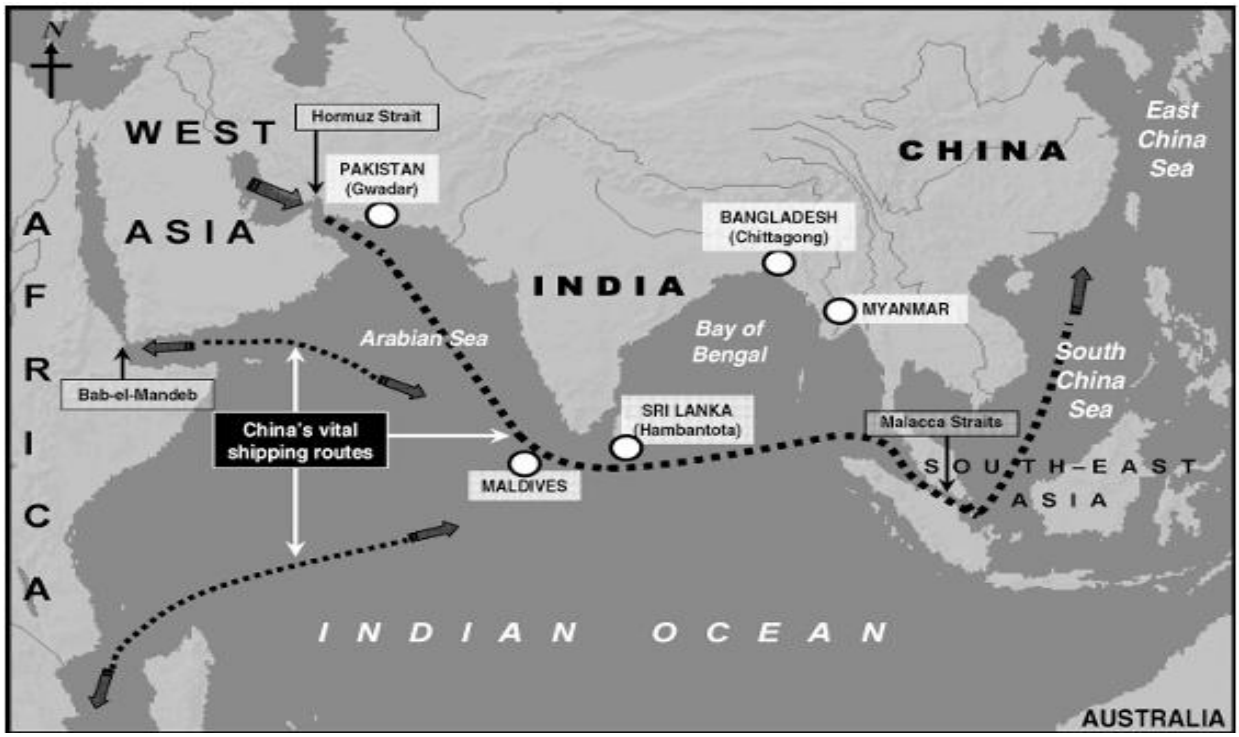

Figure 6. 2 Map of China's 'String of Pearls' Route.

Source: Khurana 2008

According to PA3, a respondent of this study,

> Sri Lanka has become an important part of China's Maritime Silk Road (MSR) and the String of Pearls strategy. China invested to develop Hambantota Port as the String of Pearls in the Indian Ocean. Hambantota port is considered as the most vital infrastructure development of the region due to its adjoining geopolitical location in the Indian Ocean East-West shipping route. Linking Hambantota Port as a key port in the string of pearls (personal communication, November 05, 2019).

Additionally, China has also engaged in its String of Pearls strategy using various methods. One medium is through the establishment of multilateral organisations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) which is a security, political, and economic alliance founded in 2001 by China, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan (Kelegama, 2014a, p.145). In recent years, China has asked Sri Lanka to actively participate in the SCO (Green, 2018), and so, Sri Lanka became an SCO dialogue partner in 2009 when Rajapaksa's pro-China government was in power (Kelegama, 2014a, p.145). However, though Sri Lanka applied to become a full member in 2019, it has not yet received approval (Green, 2018). It is safe to argue that such trade and security agreements increase Sri Lanka's prominence and engagement in the international community through multilateral organisations like the SCO.

Due to its geopolitical and geo-strategic location on the Indian Ocean, one of the busiest maritime routes in the world. Sri Lanka's participation in the above Chinese initiative is highly regarded by China (Finnigan, 2019). Realising the potential of the initiatives, Sri Lanka responded favourably without taking much time to contemplate the pros and cons of joining the initiative. It must be noted that China succeeded in persuading Sri Lanka to join the initiative at a very early stage, thus paving the way for other maritime states to follow suit (Samaranayake, 2011).

In the context of parallel China-India involvement in Sri Lanka, the empirical literature on China-Sri Lanka relations provides evidence in support of the claim that Sino-Sri Lanka ties are the result of a firm footing characterised by mutual trust, friendship, and corporation in the infrastructure development, military, economic, and political domains (IPCS, 2013b). Supporting this claim, the then Sri Lankan leader, Prime Minister Sirimavo

Bandaranayake once referred to Sino-Sri Lanka ties as a model of interstate relations (Singh, 2000a). Insofar as, Sino-Sri Lanka relations have exhibited an uninterrupted and consistent mutuality, rendering the top leaders of both states to be metaphorically dubbed as 'all-weather friends' (Daily FT, 2014; The Sunday Times, 2015). From the turbulent aftermath of the civil war to 2019, their bilateral ties remained steadfast, except for a brief period of strain during the NUG time. This demonstrates the fact that the intriguing trajectory of Sino-Sri Lanka relations is contingent on the convergence of interest touted by the elites from both sides.

In 2005, with the advent of the MR administration, the two states entered the Comprehensive Cooperative Partnership redefining Sino-Sri Lanka relations, thereby upgrading the ties from traditional bilateral relations to a special bilateral relationship (Wang & Ye, 2019). After the war, due to China's participation as a war funder and diplomatic supporter of Sri Lanka, the bilateral relations grew remarkably, making China Sri Lanka's most preferred, trusted, and reliable partner (Uppal, 2010). Sri Lanka desperately needed China for its development drive and to tackle international criticism and the attendant pressure on it over human rights abuses allegedly committed in the final civil war. Against this backdrop, China's launch of the BRI in 2014 brought the two states even closer in terms of close collaboration on mutually beneficial strategic projects, i.e., the Port City project, the expansion of Hambantota Port, and the Mattala International Airport. As respondent PA 5 states,

> China has carried out a number of geopolitically important infrastructure development projects in Sri Lanka under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) such as the Port City, Mattala International Airport, Colombo Lotus Tower […] China's involvement of infrastructure development of Sri Lanka is to be a part of her grand strategy to secure its interest within the Indian Ocean Region (personal communication, June 17, 2020).

While it increased Sri Lanka's strategic significance as an Indian Ocean littoral state, it enabled Sri Lanka to assume a critical role as the queen pearl in the String of Pearls (Seneviratne et al., 2017). The contemporary equivalence of the above metaphor is found when visiting Chinese President Xi Jinping remarked on the Sino-Sri Lanka relations saying that "China and Sri Lanka should be praised for setting an example of friendly

coexistence and mutually benefitable cooperation between states" (Daily News, 2022). As part of the larger BRI, while enhancing regional connectivity, the MSR hopes to revive China's historical and cultural linkages with states along the ancient Silk Road-affiliated Sea routes. The String of Pearls strategy seeks to carve out strategic space for China in the Indian Ocean by connecting the littoral states in the IOR with China economically and strategically (Khurana, 2008). The Hambantota Port, built in Sri Lanka, was the MSR inception project. "In China's grand strategy, Hambantota is an important foothold and part of its "String of Pearls strategy" for the Indo-Pacific" (Anwar, 2020, p. 261).

As respondent MP4 who is an electronic media partner in the Eastern part of Sri Lanka as well as a frequent commentator of international political dynamics, coming from an ethnic minority background states;

> China's strategic interests made Beijing a vital strategic player in the IOR in all fields including security, trade, and the military and any of these could be the motives behind China's friendly approach toward President Rajapaksa. To this effect, China's BRI figures the central strategy which facilitates Sri Lankan strategic infrastructure development projects is a part of (personal communication, June 20, 2020).

In sum, China's involvement in Sri Lanka from 2005 to 2019 stands predominantly an economic one in character, given the co-occurrence of the engagement with its (China) economic boom in the 2000s. This, in turn, prompted China's economic expansion beyond/outside its national border to sustain and stabilise national economy, thereby enhancing its influence in the region i.e., Asia and beyond (Hang, 2017). Sri Lanka, due to its centrality in the Indian Ocean, which India considers its exclusive sphere of interest and influence, grabbed the emerging opportunity for its own needs and imperatives. Against this backdrop, India, knowing that the more pressure exerted on Sri Lanka the more it would sway toward China, opted to follow a middle path in its approach to the postwar Sri Lanka. In that, the former openly greeted, supported, and encouraged the latter on its war victory, the West's move to punish GoSL, and its efforts to achieve postwar reconstruction.

However, the GoSL disregarded India's concerns over addressing the Tamil issue and human rights allegations, among others, in the wake of increased Chinese economic

engagement and diplomatic support (Behuria & Sultana, 2013; Chellaney, 2015). In response to mounting pressure from the Tamil constituency in Tamil Nadu and DMK, coupled with GoSL's lack of interest in political settlement of the ethnic issue, India resorted to diplomatic leverage albeit in vain (Manoharan & Chakravarty, 2016; Patel, 2021). Growing Sri Lanka's dependence on China made India realise that, given the MR regime, it would not be easy to nudge Sri Lanka towards India's ambit as long as Sri Lanka sought China's help for its postwar needs and requirements, i.e., preserving the victor's peace, facing the human rights abuses accusations, and rebuilding the economy of Sri Lanka (Campbell et al., 2012).

In particular, the launch of the BRI in 2014 and Sri Lanka's joining the initiative as one of the first participant states marked a new era in the entire history of Sino-Sri Lanka relations which severely irked India, which reacted fiercely with its diplomatic leverage (Jain, 2022).

As respondent MP5 observed,

> China's grand strategy in general and the BRI in particular, which aims to establish China's influence in global economics and diplomacy, led to acceleration of several infrastructure development projects across the Indian Ocean region. Further, China has been "studiously developing strong ties" with the Indian Ocean region states including Sri Lanka, not only to counter India's Monroe Doctrine but also to emerge as a solitary superpower in the IOR (personal communication, June 23, 2020).

BRI forms the core of China's grand strategy which aims to boost its economic state crafting and give effect to President Xi Jinping's 'Chinese Dream' of making China great again (Hall & Krolikowski, 2022; Shinn, 2021). Further, BRI is a trillion-dollar infrastructure project of unprecedented geographical and financial scale to bolster China's connectivity and cooperation from Eurasia to Africa, although its major states lie in South Asia. BRI could thus reduce China's dependence on the Strait of Malacca waterway and secure its energy supply via another route (Anwar, 2020, p. 261). Hence, although BRI is packed with economic dividends, it aims to achieve its political, security, and strategic purposes using economic means. The creation of the China-funded Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in 2016 stands as a concrete example for this scenario. Due to Sri

Lanka's geo-strategic and geo-economic profile as a maritime state located in the middle of the Indian Ocean, China's strategic interests made Sri Lanka a vital strategic player in the IOR in all sectors—security, trade, and the military—and any of these could be a motive behind China's friendly approach during the MR era (Abeyagoonasekera, 2021a).

As far as China's engagement in Sri Lanka is concerned, it has exhibited different forms and dimensions over the period from 2005 to 2019 ranging from a top trading partner to Sri Lanka's biggest partner in development (Abeyagoonasekera, 2021b). Hence, Sino-Sri Lanka economic relations have always taken precedence over any other aspect of their relations, thus making this relationship special among Sri Lanka's foreign relations, especially in the postwar period (Kohona, 2024). China's engagement with Sri Lanka in this sense pertains primarily to such unique economic elements as infrastructure development and strategic investment backed by diplomatic cooperation (Weerasinghe, 2023). Having begun with normal development cooperation, China's engagement with Sri Lanka rapidly transformed into 'strategic cooperation' in the aftermath of the civil war under the MR regime (Kumar, 2017a). This purported shift in China's engagement with Sri Lanka is widely attributed to the most important dimension of its economic engagement, namely, economic statecraft.

According to Pacheco (2018), China's economic state crafting is commonly understood as China's use of economic policy and resources to gain and realise its foreign policy aims. As a foreign policy toolkit to advance, influence, and promote China's economic expansion and dominance, economic statecraft became a more prominent feature of China's foreign policy in the 2000s although it evolved gradually in parallel to China's economic boom in the 1990s (Yueh, 2007). In particular, with the 2008-2009 economic crisis, China became more ambitious and confident in its economic statecraft, making Chinese leaders see China's status as the world's second largest economy (Men & Chen, 2020). However, it was under President Xi Jinping that China initiated a more aggressive form of economic statecraft (Wong, 2019a). Embedded in economic diplomacy, economics continues to play a prominent role in China's foreign policy, in that economic efforts are closely intertwined with economic state crafting (Norris, 2016).

Therefore, China's encouragement of Sri Lanka to participate BRI arguably is a part of China's strategy to securely keep Sri Lanka under its influence by facilitating Sri

Lankan strategic infrastructure development projects (Myers, 2020a). This move together with the other two initiatives, i.e., MSR and String of Pearls, envision building a China-centric Asian order and China-dominated global order by building infrastructure networks across Asia, Eurasia, and East Africa. As for the String of Pearls strategy which is aimed at linking China with the rest of Asia through maritime and naval ports and points also targets to encircle neighbouring states, especially India. Due to this, the Indian strategic community views the String of Pearls and the CPEC as a threat to Indian national security (Green, 2018).

What follows next is a brief account on the Sino-Indian Strategic Rivalry in the IOR.

6.8. The Sino-Indian Strategic Rivalry in the Indian Ocean

This section discusses in brief the aspects that make the Sino-Indian competition in the IOR relevant to the China-India parallel involvement in Sri Lanka. The Sino-Indian rivalry per se is a multi-faceted phenomenon in many respects. It encompasses the features of enduring and strategic rivalries in the first place. Similarly, it exhibits the attributes of strategic rivalry of spatial, positional, and perceptual character. In addition, the Sino-Indian rivalry is also dissected primarily into traditional rivalry and contemporary rivalry in terms of temporality and form of the rivalry. While traditional rivalry concerns land-borne rivalry over the territorial border between the two states which once fought a full-scale war against each other. However, the contemporary rivalry involves sea-borne competition for strategic influence in the IOR in particular (Brewster, 2015a). These temporal shifts reflect how enduring rivalries adapt to changing material balances, a hallmark of strategic rivalry dynamics.

It is evident that the Sino-Indian border dispute is one of the key triggers pushing the two giants toward a collision path, while the two states strive to keep their economy steady and strong. As Kochhar (2022) argues, despite the growth in trade volume between China and India, the overall momentum of strategic issues continues to have an impact on relations. To quote him, “we cannot deny the fact that the border issue remains crucial to overall ties” (as quoted in Sharma, 2022).

However, the border dispute is still a major driving factor in the contemporary Sino-Indian rivalry which has been taking place in and around the Indian Ocean. As Banerjee (2022) opines, the rise of border tension portends a new era of uncertainty where bilateral interaction will be more adversarial, conflict-prone, and volatile (Banerjee, 2022). For this reason, India's threat perception on China has not changed yet since its post-1962 turn. In the meantime, some studies tend to suggest that the Sino-Indian rivalry emerged in the first place as a positional contest when Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Chairman of the Communist China Mao Zedong adopted a divergent outlook of each other's standing in Asia (Ganguly et al., 2023).

However, the latent nature of the rivalry turned to an open conflict when the two states fought a border war in 1962 which transformed the bilateral relations between the two states into a dyadic interaction, although the rivalry remained confined to their (mainly India's) northern theatre (Shankar, 2015). The Sino-Indian rivalry began to assume its contemporary character of intense and diffused rivalry covering most of South Asia and the IOR with the recent economic and military rise of China at the turn of the twentieth century (Ganguly, 2018b). Consequently, the Sino-Indian rivalry has acquired new dynamics and dimensions in addition to its conventional ones (Jetly, 2013). Seeking to forge strategic cooperation (bilaterally and multilaterally) with maritime states in the IOR demonstrates how intense their dyadic relationship is, which also reflects the contemporary episode of the Sino-Indian rivalry. Scholars who have been following China-India relations opine that the recent encounter of the two powers in the IOR underscores the expanding nature of their rivalry into a new theatre (Mohan 2012; Vaughn 2018).

The Sino-Indian competition in and over the IOR has widened the rift between Asia's two biggest powers, thereby bearing important impact and implications for the states in the region insofar as, peace, stability and prosperity of Asia has become the hostage of the China-India strategic rivalry. Since Sri Lanka is located on the world's busiest sea-line of communication in the Indian Ocean, it faces both boons and banes of the escalating rivalry in the IOR theatre. Threats and incentives of the Sino-Indian rivalry for Sri Lanka clearly manifest in Sri Lanka's bilateral relations with New Delhi. To be precise, development of the Sino-Indian rivalry into sea-born rivalry has deeper implications for Indo-Sri Lanka relations in the following ways. According to respondent CDP2, "since 1978, China has made a significant progress in its economic frontier, and

geopolitically Sri Lanka remains highly significant. Having understood this significance, China has been able to strengthen its relations with Sri Lanka particularly through economic diplomacy". This demonstrates a defining feature of strategic rivalry; spill over effects on third states.

Likewise, respondent CDP2 pointed out that,

> China's approach when it comes to foreign relations has been different and unique. China uses its economic diplomacy to fulfil its interests rather than relying on its military power. China is more than happy to use its economic strength to appeal to states like Sri Lanka, unlike India at times who showed imminent aggression and bullying (personal communication, November 13, 2019).

Therefore, when investigating both primary and secondary data, it is obvious that there exists some sort of action-reaction-based interaction involving moves and countermoves between China and India, particularly in Sri Lanka and in Southern Asia in general. Some of the respondents are of the view that whatever China and India do in South Asia and the IOR to make inroads into their traditional and new areas of involvement comes with some form of competition. Respondent SLDP1, comments that

> China has become a major import partner, the largest lender state as well as the second largest tourist generating state for states like Sri Lanka. This then makes China an influential force in Sri Lanka. India is Sri Lanka's neighbour, but the question is whether it has the potential to contribute to Sri Lanka's economy in this case. For example, Sri Lanka is striving hard to develop the state during the post-conflict era and China has provided the support required (personal communication, November 01, 2019).

When carefully analysing the comments and opinions expressed by the respondents over the question how China's moves in postwar Sri Lanka trigger India's response and reaction and vice versa, every interaction between China and India in South Asia and the IOR in general is nothing other than competition to increase their respective dominance and influence essentially in two different ways. According to respondent PO1, who is a freelance consultant of a research institute,

> both states are very much concerned about Sri Lanka for different reasons. For India, Sri Lanka is a state in South Asia where the former remains the most powerful and does not like any external power to have significant influence in South Asia. On the other hand, for China, Sri Lanka remains significant, as it plays a significant role in China's Belt and Road initiative. Thus, Sino-India rivalry continues to play in Sri Lanka (personal communication, November 01, 2019).

Meanwhile, the contemporary rivalry between the two longstanding rivals (China and India) is deepened by their rivalry in the Indian Ocean, partly because of their competitive investments in ports, docks, and trans-shipment facilities along the basin. This became evident after China's submarine incursion into Sri Lanka in 2014 (Jain, 2022). India viewed this incident as an open threat and challenge to its dominance in the Indian Ocean, which it considers as the exclusive sphere of its influence. In response, India took measures to bolster its military technology, spending US$8.1 billion to purchase six diesel electric submarines (Jain, 2022). Sittwe, one of Myanmar`s busiest ports, has received an Indian-sponsored facelift worth about US$100 million (Detsch, 2015, n.p). It is a part of the Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project, which is a larger development project that includes the construction of an inland waterway on the Kaladan (Bhattacharyya, 2024). This reciprocal competitive behaviour illustrates how strategic rivalries unfold across multiple domains and theatres.

Thus, the Indian navy can promptly control maritime traffic in shipping lanes, and get access to the Strait of Malacca, the world's second largest potential oil choke point via an easy route (Long et al., 2022). China's official media spokespersons have released warnings of an imminent "short and swift war" to teach India a "bitter lesson" and inflict "greater losses" than the Sino-Indian War of 1962 (Malik, 2017). This conflict was the worst in decades between Asia's old rivals. Traditionally, China has long viewed India as an irritant that likes to show off its power as the successor of the British *Raj* and needs to be constantly reminded of its place (Li, 2010).

Much of China's strategic penetration into Southern Asia has clearly been at India's expense. Therefore, what China mainly attempts is to prevent the rise of a rival (India) who

could challenge China's status as the Asia-Pacific's sole 'Middle Kingdom' (Malik, 2017). As respondent PA6 stated that:

> China appears to be building a profile as an alternative superpower to the West e.g., by [the] Belt and Road Initiative, while India is trying to consolidate her power in the South Asia region. India is particularly interested in Sri Lanka as her closest neighbour and, therefore, India is always concerned of China's involvement in Sri Lanka. Chinese investments in the state are seen as a threat by India (personal communication, June 27, 2020).

This situation arises because China's strategic culture imposes a distrust of strong, powerful neighbours and has a preference for small, weak, and subordinate states. As some China experts opine, India's efforts to take counter-balancing measures are perceived as challenging and threatening in China (Khan, 2023, p.107). As respondent PA5 states,

> Sri Lanka became a strategically interesting state for China and India due to Sri Lanka's geopolitical location in the Indian Ocean Region. [H]ere, both states understand that if they got the control of geopolitical important places in Sri Lanka, they could control the entire region (personal communication, June 17, 2020).

The nature and dynamics of the Sino-Indian rivalry (both traditional and contemporary) have evolved to expand from a narrow space (the Indo-China border) to a wider location, i.e., the IPR. In this process, the Sino-Indian rivalry has transformed from a traditional interstate conflict into a real interstate strategic rivalry focusing on the IOR in which Sri Lanka occupies a prominent position (Pardesi, 2017a). This particular manner of transformation of the rivalry renders it a two-sided typical strategic rivalry in that China reciprocates the moves made by India in one way or the other. For instance, as Wang (2010) posits, certain Beijing's blunt statements like that 'the Indian Ocean is not India's Ocean' is a clearer indication of the extent to which China views India as the challenger of its realist scheme for the Indo-Pacific (Scott, 2008, p.248).

For this reason, the Sino-Indian parallel involvement in Sri Lanka from 2005 to 2019 exhibits a great deal of competitive elements embedded in the Sino-Indian strategic

rivalry played out elsewhere in the region, i.e., South Asia and the IOR (Attanayake & Atmakuri, 2020). Therefore, what is currently seen in the South Asian and Indian Ocean theatres is not simply a border dispute or economic contest, but a long-term structured rivalry that consistently shapes China's and India's behaviour towards each other and towards third states, including Sri Lanka. That is, China's naval expansion and BRI projects, and India's counterinvestments and naval-build-up, demonstrate the enduring adaptability of the rivalry. Thus, the transition from Himalayas to IOR underscores the broadening scope of strategic rivalry.

6.9. Changing Dynamics of Indo-Sri Lanka Relations

This section systematically analyses the factors and dynamics of the trends in Indo-Sri Lanka relations in the context of Chinese involvement in Sri Lanka from 2005 to 2019. On the surface, the Sino-Indian competition in the Indian Ocean appears to be a regional variant of the larger global power rivalry among the great powers (Scott, 2008). The Sino-Indian competition thus becomes one of the hotspots of the global power rivalry involving China and India within the Asian region.

To tackle China, India adopted a strategy which yielded a mixed outcome (Pardesi, 2022). India engaged with Sri Lanka in a friendlier and more cooperative manner i.e., infrastructure development engagement and strengthening sociocultural interaction as opposed to its traditional method of influence, i.e., bullying, enabling India to maintain its leverage over Sri Lanka (Kumar, 2017a; Sultana, 2017a). This trend is particularly witnessed during the final war and NUG-NDA regimes. As a response, Sri Lanka has always tried to be sensitive in its foreign relations to India's interest and concerns. As former Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapaksa once said, "Sri Lanka offered Hambantota Port first to India but was declined and it was then handed over to China" (Roy-Chaudhury, 2019, p. 157).

However, a change of attitude between India and Sri Lanka occurred when India became suspicious and sceptical of Sri Lanka's dealings with China. Sri Lanka saw India as an annoyance, especially concerning China's intensified engagement in Sri Lanka in the postwar period (Patel, 2021). China's entry into Sri Lanka, which India considers as its strategic backyard, first as a funder for the final civil war and then as a development funder

in the postwar era meant a challenge for India and opportunities for Sri Lanka. China's quiet military and economic support in the final years of the civil war, which India was hesitant to provide Sri Lanka with, enabled China to get an initial foothold in the island state (Destradi, 2012a; Manoharan & Chakravarty, 2016). With the MR regime's postwar endeavour to rebuild the economy in the wake of mounting international (Western) and regional (Indian) pressure, China capitalised on the unfolding opportunities to carve out strategic space for itself in Sri Lanka.

Employing a two-pronged approach of unconditional diplomatic support, along with the policy of not meddling into the internal affairs and initiating close development cooperation with massive financing for infrastructure development, China became Sri Lanka's preferred development partner (Attanayake, 2023; Uppal, 2010; Wheeler, 2012). The significant fact is that China and India's involvement in the postwar development drive came about against a disparate backdrop. In the case of China, its involvement was largely seen as mutually beneficial and thus was mostly invited by the Sri Lankan regime. In contrast, India focused its postwar reconstruction efforts largely on the war-ravaged areas, reflecting its vested interest in the island state, as it is an integral element in India's national security and strategic unity (Manoharan, 2010). Thus, Chinese involvement was a solicited one, while India's involvement was unsolicited in the eyes of Sri Lanka.

Against this backdrop, the launch of the BRI further strengthened China's profile as an alternative development partner for Sri Lanka, thereby causing Sri Lanka to drift away towards China (Jayathilaka, 2021). However, the political overturn of the government in 2015, which resulted in the advent of NUG, also meant an overturn of the leverage wielded towards its South Asian neighbour. Under its Neighbourhood First policy, India regained the leverage it had lost to China during the previous MR regime. In the later years, however, China, whose leverage reduced in the initial years, returned to the centre stage when the NUG regime balanced its foreign policy to accommodate Chinese interests and concerns in the face of a cash shortage caused by the suspension of Chinese-funded mega-projects.

Grabbing the opportunity for unfolding their hegemonic ambition, China and India engaged in Sri Lanka on a different scale and footing depending on their different profiles. China, with its long-cherished spirit of Rubber-Rice Pact coupled with a carrot strategy, as

opposed to India's mixed strategy (carrot and stick), engaged in postwar Sri Lanka in a way that corresponded with its expansionist ambition (Ramachandran, 2018). Focused more on economic means and instruments backed by non-meddling diplomatic and political support at a time when Sri Lanka faced mammoth challenges, China was seen as 'a friend in need'. Besides this economic engagement complemented by diplomatic and political support, China, in response to India's mounting effort to strengthen its sociocultural bond with Sri Lanka, attempted to cultivate cultural ties with Sri Lanka. This manifested in acts such as launching centres for Chinese and Confucius studies in Sri Lankan universities, and organising events including food festivals, and fashion shows showcasing Chinese culture (Jayasundara, 2023).

In contrast, India attempted to capitalise on its historical and sociocultural ties with Sri Lanka by employing a novel strategy called 'cultural diplomacy' under its Project Mausam (Scott, 2016) which involved religious tourism, cultural exchange, and the launching of a cultural centre, i.e., the Tagore Centre. India believed that China's involvement in Sri Lanka and its increasing influence on the island was part of an encirclement strategy to contain India. Because as leading Indian strategic analysts Mohan Malik, C. Raja Mohan, T.P. Sreenivasan, Brahma Chellany argue, for India, China is the number one threat (Panda, 2018, p.91).

China's massive volume of trade has compelled it to secure a strategic position in the Indian Ocean for protection of its interests. Moreover, China's growing economic stature at the global level necessitates its power projections in the Indian Ocean. This pushed India to assertively engage in Sri Lanka to strengthen its ties using trade, connectivity, investment, and security arrangements with Sri Lanka. Faced with the competitive Sino-Indian parallel involvement, Sri Lanka has attempted to employ hedging as its signature foreign policy towards China and India. The way in which Sri Lanka navigated the two Asian giants shows that Sri Lanka's hedging alternated between active hedging and passive hedging throughout the period from 2005 to 2019.

6.10. The parallel involvement of China and India, and its impact on Indo-Sri Lanka relations

Of the factors shaping Indo-Sri Lanka relations during this period, the parallel involvement of China and India figures prominently as it encompasses the dynamics affiliated with all other factors, i.e., type of regime and hedging policy. The MR regime's war campaign paved the way for China and India to contribute to the campaign that the MR administration pursued in its initial years (2005-2009) in power. Against the background of the final civil war, Sri Lanka was required to engage closely with China and India as the two principal powers which were helpful to Sri Lanka in its war campaign. As a result, the MR regime strengthened its ties with the two regional powers on almost an equal footing. Therefore, Indo-Sri Lanka bilateral relations remained largely unchanged, meaning they were cordial and cooperative.

However, during the MR regime's second tenure (2010-2015), Indo-Sri Lanka relations witnessed a significant setback while China-Sri Lanka reached a new height on political and economic domains including the solidarity built in dealing with human rights and ethnic issues. As an evading strategy in the face of the mounting pressure from India to address the alleged human rights abuse and bring a political solution to the ethnic conflict, the MR regime maintained a safe distance from India while strengthening its relations with China. Moreover, the ideological and strategic (development) compatibility between China and Sri Lanka further cemented China's engagement in Sri Lanka (Devotta, 2016a), while inflicting pressure on Indo-Sri Lanka relations because India viewed MR regime's ideology and postwar development strategy as at odds with its own. The role Tamil Nadu played in the shaping of India's Sri Lanka policy is noteworthy.

When China undertook development projects in southern Sri Lanka, an area which remained largely unaffected by the civil war, India, in contrast, focused its postwar undertaking on northern Sri Lanka, a war-ravaged area, owing to the pressure from Tamil Nadu which was sympathetic to the Tamil cause from the outset. Therefore, the MR regime viewed China as a benign collaborator, and India as a regional bully.

India tried to put pressure on Sri Lanka to bring it into its orbit of influence when India saw China's engagement with Sri Lanka as threatening its security and strategic interest in Sri Lanka. This pressure, in turn, led to the strengthening of Sino-Sri Lanka ties

on a renewed spirit and scale, while it adversely affected Indo-Sri Lanka relations. Nevertheless, at some point, sensing India's domestic compulsion behind its Sri Lanka policy, the MR regime showed a great deal of sensitivity towards India whenever the latter complained of security concerns caused by China's presence in the island state in an attempt to sooth India (Ranjan & Chattoraj, 2022).

The convergence and compatibility of ideology and attendant foreign policy between India's NDA government and Sri Lanka's NU government which came to power in late 2014 and early 2015 respectively meant a sea-change in Indo-Sri Lanka bilateral ties. The NDA's Neighbourhood First policy, on the one hand, which portrays India not as the age-old 'big brother' but as an 'elder brother' (Aryal & Bharti, 2023), and NU government's pro-India foreign policy, on the other hand, brought India back to centre stage in Sri Lanka's foreign relations (Jayasekera, 2015). The convergence and compatibility of ideology, therefore, enabled India to regain the leverage it had lost to China, thereby strengthening Indo-Sri Lanka ties in the initial years of the NU government.

However, the situation soon changed when China changed NU government's anti-China attitude by coming up with new terms and conditions for its commercial loans for development projects which Sri Lanka had put on hold, citing a lack of transparency (Abi-Habib, 2018; Stacey, 2017). Left with no option other than heeding to China's pressure, the NU government let China resume its infrastructure projects in a bid to balance its relations between China and India (De Silva, 2023). For the same purpose it accommodated India's strategic interest by leasing Mattala International Airport (Sengar, 2017). Therefore, Indo-Sri Lanka ties during the NU government (2015 to 2019) were renewed and mutual trust and mutual respect were in place. However, it turned out to be a short-lived episode because of China's growing leverage in Sri Lanka, meaning that Indo-Sri Lanka bilateral ties are a hostage of Sino-Indian parallel involvement in Sri Lanka.

6.11. Summary

Indo-Sri Lanka relations from 2005 to 2019 were affected by China's involvement in Sri Lanka. Indo-Sri Lanka relations became problematic and controversial due to the Sino-Indian parallel involvement whose dynamics ranged from noncompetition to competition depending on how Sri Lanka hedged between the two regional giants. From

2005 to 2010, Indo-Sri Lanka ties remained largely unaffected in the face of the noncompetitive nature of the Sino-Indian parallel involvement. From 2010 to 2015, against the backdrop of Sri Lanka's postwar development undertakings coupled with its alleged war crimes, the Sino-Indian parallel involvement turned to competitive involvement, significantly affecting Indo-Sri Lanka relations. Consequently, the growing Chinese economic and strategic involvement in Sri Lanka made India feel that the latter had fallen into China's orbit. Between 2015 and 2019, the advent of mutually compatible regimes in India and Sri Lanka against the backdrop of growing Chinese presence fuelled the Sino-Indian parallel involvement, thereby turning Sri Lanka into an arena for the Sino-Indian strategic competition.

As for the strategic rivalry dimension of the China-India parallel involvement in Sri Lanka, the above discussion shows that as China has drastically expanded its involvement in Sri Lanka, whereas India has tried to balance China's influence by changing its foreign policy-related goals and behaviour. Further, the relationship between China and Sri Lanka is a clear indication to understand how Sri Lanka has actively brought China into the South Asian power dynamics.

CONCLUSION

a. Introduction

Indo-Sri Lanka relations from 2005 to 2019 have undergone unprecedented pressure and challenges in the face of China's increased involvement in Sri Lanka. As this study depicted, throughout their history, Indo-Sri Lanka relations have been subject to constant fluctuation due to the divergent outlooks of both states, shaped by national interest, ideology, and type of political regime. In this context, this study posed two interrelated questions: what are the effects of China's engagement with Sri Lanka on Indo-Sri Lanka relations, and how does Sri Lanka, located in the strategic backyard of India, conduct its relations with China and India in the wake of their rivalry in the IOR? To address these research questions, the study analysed Indo-Sri Lanka relations by looking at its contemporary trajectories beginning from the independence of the two states. The first part of this concluding chapter provides an overview of the research questions and the methodology of the study. The second part involves a summary of the findings of the study which will shed light on the research questions. The subsequent section concerns the implications of the study and the future direction of research followed by delimitations and limitations of the research.

b. Recapping Research Questions and Method

The research questions were derived from a systematic review of empirical literature on three different themes, namely, Sri Lanka's relations with China and India, strategic rivalry between China and India, and the hedging policy of alliance theory. This review was further supplemented using a theoretical framework built on the strategic rivalry theory and hedging policy, as discussed in chapter 2. Accordingly, the predominant trend in Indo-Sri Lanka relations, i.e., the change and continuity of the relations captured by the mainstream scholarship on the theme, is placed within the theoretical framework of the theory of strategic rivalry and hedging policy.

China's initial entry into Sri Lanka as a development partner and then as a strategic investor caused great concern to India, as the former's presence in Sri Lanka challenges the latter's strategic supremacy in its strategic backyard. India's concern increased further

when the MR regime carried out its war campaign against the LTTE, a campaign to which China extended considerable military and financial support. To contain China in its own backyard, India came to the GoSL's help in its civil war thereby renouncing its policy of political disengagement in matters concerning Sri Lanka's ethnic problem. The GoSL's military victory coupled with the MR regime's template for post-war development provided China, which was actively focused on gaining a strategic foothold for its economic expansion, with an opportunity to closely engage with Sri Lanka.

The relationship between the three states, however, began to change under the NUG which reoriented Sri Lanka's foreign policy by making India occupy centre stage in response to India's proactive Neighbourhood First engagement policy. Later, however, the regime sought to balance its relations with China and India in the face of mounting Chinese pressure to undertake its strategic development projects that the regime had suspended in response to Indian pressure. Against this backdrop, the research problem of the study was formulated to investigate the extent to which China's increased involvement in Sri Lanka influenced Indo-Sri Lanka relations from 2005 to 2019. To pinpoint the problematic of the study, the following research questions were formulated.

1) What are the salient features of Sri Lanka's bilateral ties with India and China after 2005?
2) How does China's economic engagement shape Sri Lanka's foreign policy towards India?
3) What are the dynamics of the Sino-Indian parallel involvement in Sri Lanka?
4) To what extent does the Sino-Indian competing involvement in Sri Lanka reflect the Sino-Indian strategic rivalry in the IOR?

To explore these research questions, the study adopted a qualitative methodology. The study embraced two main techniques for data collection: i.e., semi-structured interviews and textual/documentary investigation. As for the secondary data, sources such as journal articles, books, parliamentary research papers, foreign ministry periodical reports written on relations among Sri Lanka, India, and China, and media reports were all consulted. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with thirty-six respondents that included political observers, political analysts, diplomats, government officials, and media

personnel who were residing in Sri Lanka in 2019. This study is qualitative in nature, and interpretative and thematic analyses were used to perform the data analysis.

c. Major Findings of the Research

The overall findings of the study are presented under the following four headings: (i) salient trends of the Indo-Sri Lanka relations from 2005 to 2019, (ii) China's economic engagement and Sino-Sri Lanka relations, and (iii) China-India parallel engagement and Indo-Sri Lanka relations.

i. **The salient trends of the Indo-Sri Lanka relations from 2005 to 2019.** The salient trends consist of the following aspects: patterns of fluctuations, domains of fluctuations, and impact of fluctuations.

Pattern of fluctuations

In general, Sri Lanka's relations with China and India from 2005 to 2019 are marked by steady fluctuations along the change-continuity continuum with varying degrees under the two different regimes. The change phenomenon was more dominant in Sri Lanka's relations with India than with China regardless of the type of regime although there was variation in scale/magnitude of the change. For example, Indo-Sri Lanka relations endured (at least twice) fluctuations during the period in question, plunging the relations to remarkable decline. Under the MR regime, especially in its second tenure, Indo-Sri Lanka relations reached an unprecedented point of strain while Sino-Sri Lanka relations ascended to a new height when the regime opted for passive hedging between the two rivals.

However, under the NUG, especially in the initial years after it came to power, Indo-Sri Lanka relations witnessed a heyday when the regime chose to bring India to the centre stage of Sri Lanka's bilateral ties. Nonetheless, once again Indo-Lanka relations were affected adversely under the NUG although the scale was not in par with the earlier instance. This time it was due to the NUG's decision to maintain equidistance between China and India. However, the continuity phenomenon, by and large, exhibited a striking trend in which Sri Lanka's relations with both China and India from 2005 to 2019 remained

relatively steadfast. This is particularly the case with the bilateral relations in socio-economic and cultural fields.

Regime	Period	Fluctuation Pattern	Specific Backdrop
MR	2005-2009	Equidistance	Final civil war
MR	2010-2015	Ascending (Sino-Sri Lanka) Descending (Indo-Sri Lanka)	Postwar undertakings Pressure from West-led international community
NUG	2015-2019	Ascending (Indo-Sri Lanka) Descending (Sino-Sri Lanka) Equidistance	India's Neighbourhood First Policy Establishing Good Governance in Sri Lanka

Table 7. 1 Summary of pattern of fluctuations

Source: Author (2024)

As illustrated in the table 7.1, the ascending-descending pattern between the two pairs, China-Sri Lanka and India-Sri Lanka, are strongly evident throughout the period on which the present study focuses. This pattern characterises the predominant feature embedded in Sri Lanka's relations with China and India during the period under study. Another remarkable feature of the trend lies in the strategy of equidistance Sri Lanka resorted to between China and India as the damage control tactic in the face of fierce China-India competition and ensuing pressure.

In sum, the distinct patterns of Sri Lanka's relations with China and India from 2005 to 2019 are more contingent on the hedging behaviour of the respective regime in Sri Lanka. The back-and-forth shift between active hedging (tightrope) and passive hedging (loose equidistance) is the function of the convergence-divergence binary of the ideology they (regimes) subscribed to.

Domains of fluctuations

Since the central focus of the present study is to analyse the Indo-Sri Lanka relations against the backdrop of the China-India parallel engagement in Sri Lanka, the Indo-Sri Lanka pair of the China-India-Sri Lanka triangular relationship was paid special attention. In the case of Indo-Sri Lanka relations, change and continuity are more common features than seen in Sino-Sri Lanka relations, although variations in scale were evident between regimes. That is, even when one domain of the relations is strained, relations are kept moving by other domains of the relations which may experience occasional shock.

Moreover, fluctuations are more commonly seen in the political and security domains in bilateral relations between India and Sri Lanka, despite the fact that economic and trade relations between them continued smoothly over the period in question and across different political regimes. In contrast, as far as Sri Lanka's relations with China is concerned, change was not as frequent as with Indo-Sri Lanka relations, despite the relative not 'absolute' continuity informs the more progressive nature of the bilateral ties. This relative phenomenal growth was observed in almost all domains of Sino-Sri Lanka bilateral relations transforming it from normal cooperative relations to strategic cooperative partnership within a short period of time. Especially, economic and political relations along with development cooperation underwent tremendous growth in the period from 2005 to 2019 regardless of the type of regime in power, notwithstanding a brief interruption of the bilateral relations during the NUG's administration.

Impact of the fluctuation on Indo-Sri Lanka relations

China-Sri Lanka relations, just as Indo-Sri Lanka ties, are essentially bilateral relations involving a big power and small state. The asymmetry in these relations places Sri Lanka in a vulnerable position, compelling it to hedge between two regional powers with differing profiles. While India is a regional power, China is an extra-regional power, meaning Sri Lanka must treat the two powers as an immediate neighbour and a distant neighbour respectively. In the actual practice, this was not the case due to the convergence-divergence binary of the political ideologies subscribed by the Sri Lankan regimes and the regimes of China and India.

The rare convergence of interest among China, India, and Sri Lanka was evident during the first tenure of the MR regime when they were involved in the final civil war waged by the Sri Lankan government against the LTTE. However, this convergence soon faded away with the end of the civil war, thereby complicating Sri Lanka's bilateral ties with the two protagonists in the post conflict period. India, which offered some sort of critical support to Sri Lanka (MR regime) to defeat the LTTE, sought to hold it accountable for alleged war crimes at UNHRC. This was because MR regime opted for biased hedging toward China while maintaining distance with India.

Furthermore, fluctuations informed the decline and improvement of bilateral ties affecting otherwise traditional normal bilateral ties evolving it to the next level. For example, the ascending pattern predominant in Sino-Sri Lanka relations during the MR regime meant both countries transformed their normal cooperative relations to strategic cooperative partnership whereby Sri Lanka became a strategic partner of China. On the other hand, however, during the same period (MR regime's second tenure), Indo-Sri Lanka relations, especially political relations, experienced considerable strain to the extent that India even sought to unseat the MR regime.

II. China's Economic Engagement and Sino-Sri Lanka Ties

Both China-Sri Lanka relations and Indo-Sri Lanka relations are predominantly economic in nature. Sri Lanka's relations with India were significantly affected due to China's increased economic involvement during Sri Lanka's civil war and in the postwar context as well. Whenever Sino-Sri Lankan relations were strengthened, especially in the economic and strategic fields, Indo-Sri Lanka ties were affected by either challenges and pressure or by opportunities, depending on how Sri Lanka balanced its relations (deployment of hedging) between both states (i.e., China and India). For instance, Sri Lanka used to play the 'China Card' whenever it was pressurised by India. Likewise, Sri Lanka also played the 'China Card' to extract economic and political benefits from India. This was the case during and after the war when Sri Lanka wanted to get India to be a close or distant ally.

China's economic engagement began in 2005 with a series of economic pacts signed with Sri Lanka including the construction of the Hambantota International Port, an important Chinese flagship project in Sri Lanka, which later became a bone of contention

in Sri Lanka's ties with India and China. As explored in chapters 4 and 5, China, whose economic means are translated into economic state crafting, devised diverse approaches and strategies to reach out to target states which had hitherto remained of low-profile importance in Chinese foreign and strategic circles. China attempted to extend its relations among maritime states like Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean.

In other words, China employed economic statecraft as a tool to penetrate and carve out strategic space for itself in states where its strategic presence was either non-existent or dormant. Sri Lanka, due to its vital geo-strategic and geoeconomic location on one of the world's major trade and shipping routes, had become one of the key targets of Chinese foreign policy and strategic calculus. China's fast-tracked and unrestricted supply of weapons and money during the final civil war along with its fast-tracked and unmatched infrastructure development assistance in the aftermath of the war paved the way for it to become a major player in the economic and development affairs of Sri Lanka. Its increased economic engagement turned China into Sri Lanka's economic master, thereby causing India to view China as a grave security threat. This is because unlike the situation before 2005, Chinese engagement in Sri Lanka increased exponentially, which India viewed as a strategic challenge and a grave threat to its image as the most powerful regional actor. This situation, in turn, adversely affected Indo-Sri Lanka ties, as India tended to see Chinese Influence in Sri Lanka as an attempt to encircle India.

Therefore, China's economic expansion in Sri Lanka is tantamount to the saying 'effect later, cause first'. This is to say that China's economic statecraft through which it embarked on economic expansion to ultimately achieve its strategic ambitions is linked to its political, diplomatic, and security ties. Unlike India, China, as a strategy to deepen its ties with Sri Lanka, showed no interest in internal developments in Sri Lanka, while steadfastly defending President MR at the UNHRC and other UN fora. This support further cemented Sino-Sri Lanka relations to the extent that both states considered each other as an 'all-weather friend'. This friendship exerted immense pressure on Indo-Sri Lanka ties, which underwent a setback.

The MR regime openly pursued a China favoured foreign policy, despite its often-touted non-aligned (active hedging) foreign policy. As a result, the impact of China's capabilities also increased drastically. That is, China's presence in Sri Lanka through

strategic engagement during the MR presidency culminated in Sri Lanka becoming heavily reliant on China for economic and diplomatic support. Further strengthening its economic engagement to advance strategic ambitions, China, in 2013, launched the BRI, an initiative to which Sri Lanka immediately joined, doubling India's concerns in the wake of advancing Sino-Sri Lanka ties.

To counter Chinese influence in its immediate neighbourhood, India, through its just-launched Project Mausam, attempted to strengthen its cultural ties with Sri Lanka, which was on the verge of falling into China's orbit. This move shows the gravity of the impact China's economic engagement with Sri Lanka inflicted on India and which, in turn, adversely affected Indo-Sri Lanka bilateral ties by shifting them from limited positive ties to more contentious ties. That is, when China's economic engagement increased in Sri Lanka, India viewed this engagement as reducing its leverage over Sri Lanka, thereby creating a dilemma for India as to how to deal with Sri Lanka.

III. The Sino-Indian Parallel Involvement and Indo-Sri Lanka Relations

As chapter 5 elucidated, China and India's parallel involvement in Sri Lanka stands as the single most substantive variable influencing the dependent variable, i.e., the change and continuity of Indo-Sri Lanka relations. The parallel involvement constitutes a set of variables, namely, strategic space, geopolitical interest, geo-strategic location, economic statecraft, regime type, hedging policy, and the capability gap between the two competing powers.

The strategic space primarily refers to China's strategic ambitions regarding the Indian Ocean region, as it seeks to turn the IOR into a sphere of Chinese influence, an ambition which India fiercely resists and strives to thwart using its own economic and other means. India views China's increasing presence in the IOR (including Sri Lanka) as a grave security threat and challenge to its standing as the most powerful regional actor. With economic state crafting, China seeks to turn its strategic presence into strategic primacy by replacing India, which has traditionally enjoyed that position.

Like China's, India's involvement in Sri Lanka came about for two reasons: to protect India's strategic interest in the Indian Ocean, including Sri Lanka, and to thwart China's footprint in Sri Lanka. This fact became evident when India forced the Chinese research vessels to retreat from operating inside the exclusive economic zone of the

Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the September of 2019. India's concerns became heightened as it felt disturbed whenever Sri Lanka maintained close ties with China. To illustrate this point, when MR gave the Hambantota Port development project to China, it opened avenues for contention between Sri Lanka and India, leading to steady deterioration of their relationship. Therefore, the closer Sri Lanka gets to China, the more India's Sri Lanka policy becomes benign. This fact was clearly seen when India announced its Neighbourhood First policy to strengthen its strained relations with Sri Lanka by replacing its 'big brother' façade with that of an 'elder brother'.

The regime type across the three states was another important dynamic at play in shaping the impact of the China-India parallel involvement upon Indo-Sri Lanka ties. Convergence of regimes in India and Sri Lanka and the compatibility of their ideology influenced the hedging policy of Sri Lanka to fluctuate between 'active hedging' and 'passive' hedging. As chapter 5 illustrated, when President Mahinda Rajapaksa found China to be compatible with his ideological and developmental strategy, he decided to lean towards the former in his second tenure. Similarly, the NUG with its pro-India policy initially maintained closer ties with India, while putting major Chinese mega-projects on hold. Thus, the ups and downs in bilateral ties between India and Sri Lanka were direct outcomes of mutual trust and suspicion, which were determined by the type of regime and its ideology in Sri Lanka and India, and which, in turn, influenced Sri Lanka's hedging policy.

For instance, from 2005 to 2009, the MR regime pursued active hedging in that it accommodated both China and India into its war campaign against the LTTE. From 2010 to 2015, in contrast, it pursued passive hedging by moving closer to China while at the same time distancing itself from India. The capability gap comes into play when Sri Lanka sees a gulf between China and India in terms of material and nonmaterial resources at their disposal for the former's needs and requirements. When Sri Lanka found that China had more resources and was more willing to make them available to Sri Lanka, the state tended to favour the latter. This fact became evident in several instances where Sri Lanka relied heavily on China to overcome international pressure over the alleged war crimes.

Moreover, even in postwar development undertakings, the MR regime preferred China over India as its development partner since the latter lacked both the required resources and the political will to provide Sri Lanka with these due to domestic constraints. Therefore, India's failure to fulfil the material and nonmaterial requirements of Sri Lanka

enabled China to fill the vacuum by building a positive image as a reliable economic partner. Of the non-material capability gap, to tackle the unfolding pressure at UN forums such as UNSC and UNHRC, the MR regime identified China as the most reliable source of diplomatic support and protection.

The existence of capability gap thus reinforces the claim of 'structural asymmetry' by Manjeet Pardesi (2022) and 'power asymmetry' by Xiaoyu Pu (2022) on the asymmetric elements or dimensions of the Sino-Indian rivalry which adds a fresh dynamic to the rivalry, thereby making it more complex. Furthermore, the open power play by China and India through their parallel and competitive engagement in Sri Lanka since 2009 stands a clear testimony of expanding nature of the decades-old (land-borne) Sino-Indian rivalry in novel forms (sea-borne economic rivalry) and in a new theatre (the Indian Ocean). Therefore, the findings of the study only partially corroborate the theoretical proposition that strategic rivalry comes about when complex and competitive interaction between roughly equally capable states strive for a pre-eminent position economically, militarily, and ideologically (Diehl & Goertz, 2001). Because the above proposition reveals only one side of the story as it neglects the other side of the strategic rivalry.

As some of the recent literature posits (Pardesi, 2017a), the emergence of strategic rivalry is possible even among states with disparity of capabilities. When this claim is applied to the Sino-Indian rivalry, it can be seen that there are obvious asymmetries between the rivals in multiple respects ranging from military, economic, perceptual, and ideological aspects (Mohan, 2012; Pardesi, 2017a). This disparity not only affects the dyadic interaction between the rivals (China and India) but also their respective relationship with Sri Lanka as elucidated in the above section. To reiterate the conclusion, the ups and downs pattern of the Indo-Sri Lanka relations are predominantly contingent on the hedging strategy of Sri Lanka in the face of China-India strategic competition driven by the Sino-Indian rivalry in the IOR.

d. Implications of the Study

The present study, which rests on the established theories of strategic rivalry and hedging, has implications for the body of knowledge pertaining to the field in the following ways.

I. Levels of Analysis

The present study concerns the application of theory to an actual case to analyse and understand the phenomenon in question— the trends in Indo-Sri Lankan relations in the context of China's increased involvement in Sri Lanka— followed by an explanation of the findings in line with the theoretical propositions held by strategic rivalry theory. The present study proceeded through two levels such as regional and domestic levels of analysis and in two different contexts. The setting includes the Sri Lankan context and the larger IOR. Conducting a study linking two different settings and levels provides a solid base for the study.

II. Scope of Theory Application

Strategic rivalry theory when situated within the major IR theory of realism, especially neoclassical realism, provides ample room for systematic and nuanced analysis of interstate strategic rivalry. Moreover, the theoretical framework built on blending of Alliance sub-theory-hedging with realist theory of IR helped capture the important power dynamics of the Sino-Indian rivalry in the Sri Lankan context. In particular, the theory adopted was instrumental to identify the complex interaction between powerful players and powerless player in a triangular relationship. Thus, the two-part theoretical framework was capable to capture a complex phenomenon eclipsed by the China-India parallel engagement and Sri Lanka's hedging.

However, there are some important and interesting aspects and issues of the Sino-Indian rivalry which the theory the present study adopted barely captured due to its prepositions and preoccupation with power politics defined by competition and conflict. That is, the Sino-Indian rivalry and ensuing China-India competing engagement in Sri Lanka exhibits some level of cooperation which functions as the conflict or confrontation mitigator which the theory of the present study cannot explain. Therefore, future study on the relations between great powers and small powers should place the study within a novel framework which is capable of adequately capturing the conflict-cooperation binary of the dyadic relations between great or major powers and its impact on smaller states.

III. Hedging as the Second Part of the Analytical Framework

The adoption of hedging policy facilitated a detailed and nuanced analysis of Sri Lanka's foreign policy behaviour in the context of China-India parallel engagement in Sri Lanka in the post-2005 period. As an analytical framework, hedging helped capture the foreign policy choices of Sri Lanka which is trapped between the power rivalry between China and India.

The present study revealed the fact that Sri Lanka used hedging as a foreign policy strategy in two different ways, i.e., in the conventional way and in a context-specific way. The conventional way refers to the middle path policy of active hedging or tightrope hedging wherein Sri Lanka effectively balanced both China and India. The context-specific manner spells the regime-based, stylised hedging by Sri Lanka to deal with China and India in line with their own terms which blur the dividing line between engagement and disengagement. That is, the way Sri Lanka pursued hedging policy vis-à-vis India and China shows fluidity between 'active' hedging and 'passive' hedging.

Therefore, it is safe to claim that just as the trends of Indo-Sri Lanka relations are conditioned by China's engagement with Sri Lanka, Indo-Sri Lanka relations are equally affected by how Sri Lanka hedged to deal with the two regional giants and extract benefits from both by playing the China card against India and the India card against China.

Another complexity of the Sino-Indian rivalry is that it has hardly any significant effect on their economic relations even in the face of intense strategic competition involving serious verbal exchanges against each other. Therefore, there is ample space for a future study that deals with the complex aspect of the phenomenon, i.e., Sino-Indian rivalry, so that the potential impact of the rivalry in the Sri Lankan context can be mapped out comprehensively. This study also calls for further investigation on the Sino-Indian rivalry in South Asia and its impact on the region at large and beyond the IPR.

e. Future Direction of Research

The findings of the study pave the way for future studies on the subject of Indo-Sri Lanka relations in the context of Sino-Indian rivalry in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. The present could be expanded by building on the following important issues:

i. how and to what extent Sri Lanka's foreign policy behaviour or responses, as a small state, influenced/shaped larger powers' (regional superpowers) foreign policy approaches towards it (Sri Lanka). In other words, how the way Sri Lanka employed hedging vis-à-vis China and India caused them to change their intended course of action. In the case of India, from a 'hands off' policy to 'hands on' policy, and from 'big brother' to 'benign brother' approach.

ii. how resilient is Sri Lanka as a small state in retaining its strategic autonomy while engaging hostile regional superpowers by alternating between balancing and bandwagoning. This can be carried out vis-à-vis Sri Lanka's history of hedging which stands as the hallmark strategy of pragmatism in the conduct of its foreign relations under different governments (exp: SLFP, UNP, and SLPP).

iii. what lessons Sri Lanka could learn from other states hedging strategies between larger powers? What has been successful and what has not been?

iv. What can others learn from Sri Lanka's experience of employment of hedging strategy in the face of strategic competition between two rival powers with disparate profiles? This is particularly a worthy academic adventure for those who are interested in exploring foreign policy of smaller states as Maldives, Mauritius, and Seychelles in the Indian Ocean.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

The period covered by the present study was from 2005 to 2019. Thus, it consciously omitted the period after 2019 from examination. The reason is due to the need and rationale of confining the present study to cover the full length of tenure of two different regimes. Thus, it confined itself to the MR regime and the Sirisena-Wickramasinghe government. The Gotabhaya Rajapaksa administration was excluded from the focus of the present study as it started to crumble due to the mass protest campaign.

As for the geographical scope of the study, it is confined to China, India, and Sri Lanka, while purposively omitting certain other states such as Pakistan, Iran, Japan and the US which also play a role in the shaping and impact of the China-India parallel

involvement in Sri Lanka. China's BRI has already invited some regional and extra-regional powers like Japan, the US, and Australia to join India in a bid to counter China's inroads into the IPR and beyond Europe and Africa. This move became evident when the anti-China strategic alliance, the Quad, was formed recently. In addition, due to constraints of time, the present study's scope, and aims attempted to investigate the complex phenomenon by situating it only within the local and regional contexts, while at the same time focusing on the bilateral relations affecting the phenomenon. Future research, therefore, requires multilevel inquiry that focuses on bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral relations and local and regional contexts alike. This approach is called for because it is China and India rather than other potential state actors which play a decisive role in the parallel involvement affecting the Indo-Sri Lanka relations.

In terms of the study's dimensional scope, it restricted its focus to aspects such as the economic and strategic dynamics of the bilateral ties, and hence, pays no attention to various other aspects such as social and cultural relations which gained currency only after 2019. Therefore, future study on Indo-Sri Lanka relations needs to be situated within this evolving larger context, so that they will be able to capture the hitherto unobserved trends and dynamics of the relations. It is advisable for future studies to be conscious and cautious of the particularly complex nature of the Sino-Indian rivalry, to produce an ontologically nuanced study.

Another limitation of the study concerned the time frame which was adversely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, which caused the author to seek an extension to the time allocated for field data collection. In particular, the data gathering from the field faced disruptions due to movement restrictions due to the pandemic. To overcome this issue, the researcher contacted identified participants repeatedly to secure interview appointments at locations and times that were convenient for the respondents. Another important limitation involves live translation of the interviews where the interviewees' mother tongue differed from that of the researcher. To overcome this limitation, qualified translators were hired to ensure the accuracy of the interview content.

Equally important was access to virtual and on-site platforms containing the data needed for the study, especially the data related to economic and military capabilities.

Unfortunately, repeated attempts to access the data were denied by the diplomatic missions of the states concerned on the grounds of national security.

f. Finally, due to the limited scope of the study in terms of its geographical coverage (China, India, and Sri Lanka) and dimensional focus (economic, political, and strategic aspects of bilateral relations), it was difficult to generalise the study's findings in such a way as to make them relevant and applicable across various regions of the world. However, an analytical generalisation can be done on a specific region or context like that of the present study.

Future Implications

Sri Lanka's current economic crisis, bankruptcy, and governance failure are partly caused by the unwise and unbalanced foreign policy in general and the state's poor economic diplomacy specifically, which continued from 2005. Most importantly, economic diplomacy helps employ government recourses to foster the growth of the economy of a state through means such as increasing trade, promoting investments, collaboration, and bilateral and multilateral trade agreements. It also refers to the use of the economy to promote foreign policy objectives. Yet, as the study demonstrates, Sri Lanka's economic diplomacy from 2005 to 2015 has been more centred around China, which led to non-tradeable mega investments and economic benefits. Increased economic ties between China and Sri Lanka eventually enabled Sri Lanka to seek political support from China at the UNHRC and other fora. The evidence shows that the Chinese influence in the world largely takes the form of investments, infrastructure development, trade, and loan facilities.

On the contrary, India entered the arena by offering Sri Lanka investment, trade, business and loan facilities to prevent the Chinese presence and influence in the South Asian region. Nonetheless, after the regime change in 2015, there was a slight change in this pattern, that is, the NU government in Sri Lanka sought a balanced relationship with China, India, the West, and other development partners including Japan. However, the two powers— China and India— kept Sri Lanka entrapped to different magnitudes via influence and control, which, in turn, isolated Sri Lanka. Consequently, paving the way for accountability for human rights violations and war crime investigations became more

difficult. All these issues seem to have had a significant impact on Sri Lanka's economic development, growth, international trade, investments, and foreign relations.

Small vulnerable states like Sri Lanka need to pursue foreign policies and relations in a manner that enables it to balance major powers and maintain adequate relationships with all other states, while keeping their national interest and socioeconomic and political aspects in mind. The study, therefore, suggests that Sri Lanka's foreign policy since 2005 was problematic and suboptimal, lacking long term vision, and instead was personalist, partisan, influenced by ethno-religious nationalism, and was more centred around the ideology of the party in power. It is hoped that this study informs policymakers dealing with Sri Lanka's economic and foreign policy going forward by showing them that the state's postwar foreign policy lacked a comprehensive assessment that would allow it to thrive as a small state on the dynamic world stage. Also, the long-term impact and needs along with local and international dynamics.

The study further shows that the absence of an independent institution to analyse foreign policy dynamics, changes, and development all seem to affect the formulation of foreign policy to cope with the rapidly changing world, implying the necessity for a think tank to provide policy inputs. However, such an institute should not be established for partisan political reasons or to serve once party over another. The present study, in addition to its theoretical and policy implications, also bears on the actual practicing of foreign policy and diplomacy by actors at different levels. Academics teaching International Relations, especially foreign policy and diplomacy, can benefit from the findings of the study to expand the existing curriculum on Sri Lanka's foreign policy to provide a cutting-edge understanding of the impact and dynamics of the Sino-Indian power rivalry and to develop new courses to enable students to expand their understanding of small states' foreign policy behaviour in the face of regional power rivalry. The essential implications for foreign policy educators include the need to widen the scope of foreign policy courses taught to undergraduate and post-graduate students in Sri Lanka and other states concerned.

The findings of the present study, on the other hand, extend the understanding of the think tank community of the dynamics of the Indo-Sri Lanka relations in the context of the unfolding Sino-Indian power rivalry in the Indian Ocean. This, in turn, will enable

the community to explore future avenues to effectively navigate Sri Lanka's relations with China and India in the face of their competing engagement which is inescapably interwoven with the Sino-Indian rivalry in the IOR.

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Appendix 1: Cover Letter for Interviews

University of Waikato

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Recruitment of Participants (E-mail)

for the Ph.D. Research on "Change and Continuity of Indo-Sri Lanka Relations in the Context of China's Increased Involvement in Sri Lanka"

Dear Sir/Madam

I, W. K. Ranjith Dickwella, Doctoral student at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Waikato, New Zealand. My research is topic is on the **Indo-Sri Lanka Relations: Change and Continuity in the Context of China's Increased Involvement in Sri Lanka** for my Ph.D. dissertation. As per the requirement of the university, I am supposed to undertake some field research by involving informed and veteran individuals

who are either constantly following the above event or engaged in foreign policy making and implementation, and who can be a better source of the first-hand description of the complex theme under study.

While I'll highly value your participation, I do hereby pledge to you that the participant's identification will strictly be maintained with no compromise whatsoever throughout the research and its publication process.

I would much appreciate it, therefore, if you could inform me of your interest/willingness to take part in the research to make it a success at your earliest possible.

Thank you in advance,

Sincerely yours,

W.K.Ranjith Dickwella

Ph.D. candidate

Faculty of Arts/Social Sciences

University of Waikato

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet

Description of the researcher and research

I, W. K. Ranjith Dickwella, a Doctoral student at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Waikato, New Zealand, am conducting my research on "Indo-Sri Lanka Relations: Change and Continuity in the Context of China's Increased Involvement in Sri Lanka" as a partial requirement of my doctoral degree programme at the university.

This research is purely academic in content. It focuses primarily on the impact of China's expanding involvement in Sri Lanka from 2005 to 2019 on Indo-Sri Lanka bilateral ties. Also, the study seeks to place Indo-Sri Lanka relations within the context of Sino-India competition in the Indian Ocean Region. In doing so, the research examines various factors and dynamics affecting the Indo-Sri Lanka political, economic, and security relations.

Role of the participants

Participants are expected to extend their kind cooperation by way of providing detailed answers to each of the questions.

Participants' freedom to answer, refuse to answer, and withdraw information

Participants have the freedom to opt to answer questions fully or partially according to their wishes. Also, they can refuse to answer a question and withdraw any information that they have provided already.

Participants' decision to participate in the interview

During the interview, the researcher will ask some questions in relation to the discussion. Interview appointments are scheduled at the participant's convenience and the subsequent data collection will only be made known with the participant's acceptance or rejection of consent.

Protection of participants' identities

Prior to each interview, the interviewee will be clearly informed of the researcher's commitment and arrangements to maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of all forms of data they have provided. Further, the researcher will refrain from taking any personal information which may have a possibility to reveal the identity of interviewees. The researcher

is also conscious about concealing interviewee identity in the reporting by way of only mentioning their field/career of involvement/expertise.

For every actual participant, an anonymous designator will be assigned in the study and the subsequent data presentations in all forms of publication (the thesis, journal articles, and conference proceedings) will follow the assigned designator.

Contact Details

Local: Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

Interstate al: Department of Public Policy and Political Science, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand

Email: rdw18@students.waikato.ac.nz Mobile Phone : 0064225031360

Email: ranjithdickwella@gmail.com

Appendix 3: Consent Form for Participants

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO

FACULTY OF ARTS & SOCIAL SCIENCES

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

For the Ph.D. project on "Indo-Sri Lanka Relations : Change and Continuity in the Context of China's Increased Involvement in Sri Lanka"

Name of person interviewed:

_____

I have received a copy of the Information Sheet describing the research project. Any questions that I have, relating to the research, have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions about the research at any time during my participation and that I can withdraw my participation at any time *[up to three months]* after the interview.

During the interview, I understand that I do not have to answer questions unless I am happy to talk about the topic. I can stop the interview at any time, and I can ask to have the recording device turned off at any time.

When I sign this consent form, I will retain ownership of my interview, but I give consent for the researcher to use the interview for the purposes of the research outlined in the Information Sheet.

[I understand that my identity will remain confidential in the presentation of the research findings]

Please complete the following checklist. Tick [□] the appropriate box for each point.	**YES**	**NO**
[I wish to view the transcript of the interview.]		
[I wish to receive a copy of the findings.]		
[I wish to know the policy implications of the study]		

Participant :		Researcher :	
Signature :		Signature :	
Date :		Date :	
Contact Details :		Contact Details :	

Appendix 4: Interview Questionnaire 01

Interview Questionnaire for Political Analysts, Observers and Media Personnel

Interview guide to collect data on Indo-Sri Lanka Relations : Change and Continuity in the Context of China's Increased Involvement in Sri Lanka

The purpose of this study is to examine the Indo-Sri Lanka relations from 2005 to 2019 in the context of increased involvement by China in Sri Lanka. In doing so, the study focuses on how and to what extent China's involvement affects the Indo-Sri Lanka political, economic, and security ties under different political regimes within the period in question.

The sole ambition of the data you provide me in this regard is to use them only for the purpose of this study and not for any other programme.

Data will be treated as highly confidential and anonymous in order to avoid any kind of impact on you for providing such data. Please extend your kind cooperation to make this research a success.

Age:

I. Gender:

II. Designation category/Position:

III. Institutional/departmental/sectional affiliation:

IV. Career experience/length of service:

V. Length of current position:

VI. Professional credentials/qualifications:

▪

Q1 According to your observation of the foreign policy of post-independence Sri Lanka, what are the major turns and twists in relations to its bilateral ties with major powers in the region and beyond?

Q2 In your view, what characterises the trends and developments in India-Sri Lanka bilateral ties observed in the post 2005 context?

Q3 Could you elaborate how India's involvement and diplomatic relations varied since 2005?

Q4 To what do you attribute India's involvement (covert) in the final battle against the LTTE by giving up its so called 'hands off' policy towards the ethnic issue in the island state, signalling the beginning of increased Indian engagement in the fields of economy and security?

Q5 How do you see China`s involvement in Sri Lanka as a geo-strategically located state in the context of growing Sino-India strategic rivalry in the Indian Ocean Region in the recent past?

Q6 What distinct features do you notice in Sri Lanka`s bilateral ties with China before and after 2005? How do you compare and contrast them?

Q7 Given the massive money pumping by China for infrastructure development in Sri Lanka in general and in port construction in particular, what do you attribute to this state of affairs?

Q8 How do you comment on the way in which China conducts its economic state-crafting in Sri Lanka against the India-Sri Lanka bilateral ties?

Q9 Is the post-2005 parallel engagement by India and China in Sri Lanka another episode (extension) of the Sino-India rivalry for control of and influence in the Indo-Pacific Region?

Q10 In your view, what are the salient features and major dimensions of China's and India's involvement in postwar Sri Lanka in general?

Q11 What impacts and implications do you see resulting from the Sino-Indian strategic competition in the IOR, which have a direct bearing on postwar Sri Lanka's bilateral ties with the two most powerful regional actors?

Q12 As a small power with significant geo-strategic positioning, what particular foreign policy challenges do Sri Lanka face in maintaining its bilateral ties with China and India in the context of the growing Sino-Indian rivalry?

Q13 What qualifies the parallel economic engagement by China and India in postwar Sri Lanka for the new episode of the conventional Sino-Indian strategic rivalry in the Indo-Pacific Region?

Q14 To what extent does the involvement of China and India in postwar Sri Lanka shape the bilateral ties of the latter with the India and China in economic and security prioritisation as opposed to the domestic needs and pressure?

Q15 What strategic challenges does Sri Lanka's foreign policy pose to China and India in their pursuit of the goals and objectives of competitive engagement in postwar Sri Lanka?

Q16 How do you comment on the impacts and implications of the change of regime in 2015 in Sri Lanka on Sri Lanka's foreign policy toward China and India?

Appendix 5: Interview Questionnaire 02

Interview Questionnaire for Diplomatic Officials and Government Officials

Interview guide to collect data on Indo-Sri Lanka Relations : Change and Continuity in the Context of China's Increased Involvement in Sri Lanka

The purpose of this study is to examine the Indo-Sri Lanka relations from 2005 to 2019 in the context of increased involvement by China in Sri Lanka. In doing so, the study pays attention to how and to what extent China's economic engagement affects the Indo-Sri Lanka political, economic, and security relations under different political regimes within the period in question.

The sole ambition of the data you provide me in this regard is to use them only for the purposes of this study and not for any other programme.

Data will be treated as highly confidential and anonymous in order to avoid any kind of impact on you for providing such data. Please extend your kind cooperation to make this research a success.

I. Age:

II. Gender:

III. Designation/position:

IV. Career experience:

V. Institutional affiliation:

VI. Professional qualifications:

Q1 How do you distinguish the post 2005 India-Sri Lanka relations compared to the former bilateral ties between the two countries?

Q2 What distinct features do you notice in Sri Lanka's bilateral ties with China and India. How do you compare and contrast them?

Q3 In your view, what are the determinants of Sri Lanka's bilateral ties with China and India after 2005 in general and economic and security ties in particular?

Q4 What explains Sri Lanka's tendency to play of the `China Card` when faced with economic and diplomatic pressure?

Q5 Given the political influence China wields because of its economic engagement in Sri Lanka, how does China's economic state crafting put India in a defensive position in that India strives to check China's influence?

Q6 To what extent do you think the analogy that China's and India's involvement in Sri Lanka is prompted by the traditional Sino-Indian rivalry is valid and relevant in the context of Sri Lanka?

Q7 What particular features of China and India's parallel involvement in postwar Sri Lanka, as you see, signify the competitive nature of the engagement?

Q8 As a small maritime state, what prompts Sri Lanka's foreign policy options toward major powers in the region and beyond in the recent past decade?

Q9 In the recent past, how has Sri Lanka reacted through foreign policy instruments to pressures arising from regional shocks due to the Sino-Indian geo-strategic competition which is primarily grounded on maritime states like Sri Lanka?

Q10 To what scale do you think Sri Lanka is able to position itself to deal with the region's two major powers (China and India) who are engaged in power projection to extract economic and security benefits?

Q11 To what extent do you see Sri Lanka's foreign policy is capable of realising its domestic needs while being sensitive to regional power dynamics in the context of the Sino-Indian rivalry?

Q12 How do you evaluate Sri Lanka's diplomatic manoeuvring between China and India in the backdrop of the Sino-Indian parallel involvement?

Appendix 6: Details of Respondents Participated in the Interviews

	Respondents' Details	Code	Date of Interview
1	Indian Diplomat	(IDP1)	November 06, 2019
2	Indian Diplomat	(IDP2)	November 06, 2019
3	Indian Diplomat	(IDP3)	November 08, 2019
4	Indian Diplomat	(IDP4)	July 30, 2019
5	Chinese Diplomat	(CDP1)	November 12, 2019
6	Chinese Diplomat	(CDP2)	November 13, 2019
7	Chinese Diplomat	(CDP3)	November 13, 2019
8	Chinese Diplomat	(CDP4)	November 20, 2019
9	Sri Lankan Diplomat	(SLDP1)	November 01, 2019
10	Sri Lankan Diplomat	(SLDP2)	November 07, 2019
11	Sri Lankan Diplomat	(SLDP3)	November 14, 2019
12	Sri Lankan Diplomat	(SLDP4)	July 16, 2020
13	Political Analyst	(PA1)	November 03, 2019
14	Political Analyst	(PA2)	November 03, 2019
15	Political Analyst	(PA3)	November 05, 2019
16	Political Analyst	(PA4)	December 08, 2019
17	Political Analyst	(PA5)	June 17, 2020
18	Political Analyst	(PA6)	June 27, 2020
19	Political Observer	(PO1)	November 01, 2019

20	Political Observer	(PO2)	November 02, 2019
21	Political Observer	(PO3)	November 02, 2019
22	Political Observer	(PO4)	November 02, 2019
23	Political Observer	(PO5)	November 07, 2019
24	Political Observer	(PO6)	July 19, 2020
25	Media Personnel	(MP1)	November 14, 2019
26	Media Personnel	(MP2)	November 14, 2019
27	Media Personnel	(MP3)	June 20, 2020
28	Media Personnel	(MP4)	June 20, 2020
29	Media Personnel	(MP5)	June 23, 2020
30	Media Personnel	(MP6)	June 27, 2020
31	Media Personnel	(MP7)	July 02, 2020
32	Media Personnel	(MP8)	July 2, 2020
33	Media Personnel	(MP9)	July 10, 2020
34	Media Personnel	(MP10)	July 17, 2020
35	Media Personnel	(MP11)	July 17, 2020
36	Media Personnel	(MP12)	July 24, 2020