



A Critical Analysis of the Post-Cold War Era Maritime Security Challenges in the Indian Ocean: Special Reference to Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The geostrategic, geopolitical, economic, and diplomatic significance of the Indian Ocean Region is examined, as is India's involvement in resolving security issues. It draws attention to the conflicts around Palak Bay and Kachativu Island and emphasizes the necessity of legislative measures to lessen environmental harm and conflict. The maritime border between India and Sri Lanka, which was drawn in 1974 and 1976, is still tense in the Gulf of Manna and the Palak Strait, which puts Sri Lanka's economy and ecology at danger and poses security threats. Despite these problems, goodwill still prevails. Raising awareness and developing policies to save the environment are the goals of this study.

Keywords: India, Sri Lanka, International Relations, Maritime Boundary, Kachativu.

Introduction

Since the ninth century BC, India, a maritime nation with a coastline spanning more than 7,500 kilometers, has maintained a close relationship with the Indian Ocean. In order to preserve stability in the face of threats like terrorism, drug trafficking, human trafficking, and piracy, India is modernizing its naval capabilities and practicing maritime diplomacy. Because of their close proximity and advantageous location in the Indian Ocean, India and Sri Lanka have close cultural and linguistic ties.

The Historic Areas Agreement of 1974, Maritime Boundary Agreement between the Bay of Bengal and Gulf of Mannar, Tri-Junction Point Demarcation Agreement, and Supplementary Agreement of November 1976 all support the statements of Sri Lanka, India, and Maldives. However, Kachativu Island, a thriving prawn fishery, is a source of contention in the Indo-Lankan maritime dispute.

Notably, the fishing communities of both nations have contributed to the peace and harmony of the 75.375 nautical mile area covered by IMBL by being present and protecting it. However, by prohibiting "frontier" towns from entering "other" seas, the 1974 treaty that put the IMBL into effect restricted their rights. Without a visa or other travel documents, they permit devotees from the Indian fishing fleet to visit the island. The agreement to hand over Kachatheevu Island to Sri Lanka is one of the other significant topics brought up.

The Indian Ocean region, home to 2.5 billion people and 60% of global trade, faces maritime security threats like terrorism,

drug trafficking, piracy, human trafficking, and illegal fishing. Singapore is analyzing stakeholder views and proposing strategies to enhance security. Illegal immigration and climate change are major challenges, necessitating region-wide cooperation to combat these threats.

Literature Review

The review of marine safety research papers highlights the limited availability of such research.

- i). Dr. Priyadarsini Sahu discusses India's geographical location as a significant challenge in maritime security, with international organizations and states developing policies to improve safety.
- ii). India's Maritime Relations with Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean Lalmuana Guite-India and Sri Lanka are enhancing maritime relations in the Indian Ocean to maintain peace and security amid China's Belt and Road initiatives disrupting commercial ties.
- iii). U.G.G. Fernando's study examines maritime security issues in the Indian Ocean Region, utilizing Alfred Mayan's Sea Power Theory and deterrence theory, and legal frameworks like the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.
- iv). Dr. Mohd Ashraf Rather¹ and Dr. L. P. Jhariya discuss India-Sri Lanka's maritime issues, highlighting the historical and cultural ties between the two countries, despite their geographical differences.⁵ Maritime Issues and Security Implications for Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean Region

- v). Osantha Nayanapriya Thalpathwila-Sri Lanka grapples with maritime issues since independence, despite agreements with India, due to political interest in Katchatheevu Island, causing increased illegal activities, social, economic, health, and security problems.
- vi). Geopolitics of Indian Ocean and Indo-Sri Lanka Relationship-Asanga Abeyagoonasekera

The Indian Ocean's geopolitics will be influenced by the US, China, and India, with concerns over India's ownership arising from the Chinese submarine incident in Sri Lanka.

The Objective of the Study

This research aims to analyze current maritime security issues in the Indian Ocean, examining a diverse range of these challenges. The research aims to study traditional and non-traditional maritime security challenges, identify current challenges, and identify challenges in Sri Lanka and the Indian Ocean.

Research Methodology

This study utilized a quality research method, with experts and ethnographic methodology for specialty research and in-depth interviews. It highlighted the importance of experts, researchers, and policy makers in understanding policies and strategies in both countries. The study utilized descriptive analysis, detailed questionnaires, structured interviews, and voice mail to gather information about marine safety in Sri Lanka. Secondary data was collected from manuals, journals, publications, websites, and online journals.

Geostrategic Importance

The Indian Ocean, an important geopolitical region, is home to strategic choke points such as the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf. Its sea corridors are vulnerable to piracy and international disputes.

Geopolitics of the Indian Ocean and Indo-Sri Lanka

The Indian Ocean, a vital trade route and energy supply line for the United States, is moving toward a more structured regional system. India is facing challenges like the global pandemic, Afghanistan, diplomatic issues, territorial disputes with China and the volatile Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean region. Trade volume in the Indian Ocean region has grown 9.4% annually over the past 30 years, with the region expected to account for 20% of global GDP by 2025. India's maritime strategy, aimed at promoting the "blue economy", aims to harness coastal and marine resources for economic growth.

Sri Lanka, an Indian Ocean island nation, faces challenges in maritime security, including the Kachativu Islands and fishermen. Despite agreements, fishermen remain a challenge. India and Sri Lanka have been concerned about preserving the Indian Ocean region as a "zone of peace" since the 1960s. China and Pakistan's strategic influence raises concerns.

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) faces challenges in developing a security strategy due to geographical, historical, cultural, ethnic, racial, economic, political, and ideological factors. With 70% of international commercial shipping in the IOR, India has maintained peace since independence. China's Belt and Road Initiative intensifies competition, and India introduced the 'Neighbourhood First Policy' and 'SAGAR' to counter it. The region, comprising 48 countries, hosts important ports and is a major economic source for smaller islands.

Location of India-Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean

India declared the Indian Ocean a peace zone, but China's 2008 deployment in the Gulf of Aden changed maritime dynamics. India prioritizes maintaining peace and security due to its vital trade routes. However, China's expansionism, including claiming isolated islands, has led to countries like Sri Lanka losing confidence in China. India is seeking alternative players to challenge Beijing's expansionism in the region.

Maritime Security Challenges in the Indian Ocean

Global trade, piracy, territorial disputes, and environmental concerns are some of the obstacles to maritime security in the Indian Ocean. Developing policies for coastal states, navigating the international legal system, and evaluating naval power are all tasks for policymakers. International criminal organizations and nuclear energy pose a threat to Sri Lanka. The Indian Navy contributes significantly to heightened security.

India-Sri Lanka Maritime Cooperation

Sri Lanka proposed the Indian Ocean as a peace zone in 1971, but disputes over Katchatheevu Island remain unresolved. China's economic prosperity is attributed to territorial expansion, military submarine docking, and military bases in Djibouti, Bangladesh, and Myanmar.

China has used its economic prosperity for territorial expansion, deploying military submarines in ports in Sri Lanka and Pakistan, acquiring management rights of Gwadar port under CPEC, and establishing a military base in Djibouti. Chinese companies can reach Hambantota in the construction of Guwahati port in Bangladesh and Kukpu deep sea port in Myanmar.

India and Sri Lanka have revived maritime cooperation to counter China's expansion, with the Modi government prioritizing Chinese expansion in the Indian Ocean since 2014.

New Delhi has implemented a 'Neighbourhood First Policy' to strengthen relations with neighboring countries, offering financial assistance and infrastructure development projects. In 2017, negotiations for Trincomalee port were held despite the pro-India policies of Ranil Wickremesinghe and Sirisena. India's Ocean Policy, launched in 2016, reformed the maritime strategy by prioritizing peace, stability and prosperity in the Indian Ocean region, including neighboring countries such as Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka's strategic location, historical ties and proximity make it an ideal partner. Modi sees the Indian Ocean as a vital economic link for regional states.

The India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (ISFTA) was signed in 2000, leading to rapid growth in trade relations. In 2003, a Joint Study Group was established to expand the scope of ISFTA beyond trade in goods.

In February 2005, both India and China resumed trade talks under the Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement (ECTA) to enhance cooperation in technological areas, scientific expertise and research, quality improvement of products and services, and manpower training and human resource development.

In response to China's growing expansion, New Delhi has increased financial aid and investment in smaller neighboring countries, including the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Bhutan.

Sri Lanka is a major recipient of India's financial assistance and infrastructure development projects in education, health,

transport connectivity and development of small and medium enterprises. Bilateral trade to reach \$4.59 billion in 2019. Signing of ECTA will boost trade partnership. Close India-Sri Lankan military and security ties are vital for economic and commercial prosperity. New Delhi supports Colombo's maritime efforts and in 2006 and 2008 the Indian Coast Guard handed over two offshore patrol vessels to the Sri Lankan Coast Guard. In 2017, Sri Lanka acquired two advanced ships with the aim of strengthening strategic cooperation and making the Indian Ocean an area of peace. India and Sri Lanka conduct joint military exercises, including 'Mitra Shakti' for the Army and 'SLINEX' for the Navy and an anti-terrorism exercise in December 2019. Keeping in mind New Delhi's role in the Indian Ocean, India, Australia, France, Japan and the US have agreed to come together on the basis of security in the Indo-Pacific region. They aim to expand the container port of Colombo and develop the Trincomalee port in eastern Sri Lanka. During Sirisena's tenure, India and Sri Lanka have cultivated high levels of cooperation, including nuclear agreements and maritime cooperation. However, China's close relationship with Colombo has created a debt trap, forcing Sri Lanka to sell its port, Hambantota, to China. To counter China's influence, Sri Lanka needs a strategic balance with New Delhi. India, with the fastest economic growth rate, is seen as the ideal choice to counter China's strategic path. Sri Lankan President Rajapaksa views China's 'Belt and Road' initiative as undermining the island's sovereignty.

Recent Development

India has deployed submarines in the Indian Ocean region, demonstrating strength and courage. Sri Lanka's new foreign policy, 'India First Approach', aims to avoid harming India's strategic security interests. The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral and Technological Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is strengthening trade relations among member countries. India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands counter China's 'String of Pearls' strategy, addressing issues such as regional partnership, economic growth, stability, and sustainable debt.

Conclusion

India's maritime heritage, rooted in the ancient Indus Valley Civilization, is vital to its geopolitical, economic and security interests. After independence, India established its navy in the 1950s to deal with challenges such as piracy, terrorism and territorial disputes. Andaman and Nicobar Islands play an important role in countering China's influence. India's vision includes regional partnerships, strengthening domestic capabilities and strategic positioning to ensure relevance and security in the Indian Ocean. Faced the scrutiny of geopolitical competition and internal political instability. Sri Lanka's priority is to generate more GDP to service its debt and New Delhi and Colombo should focus on these issues to ensure progress. India should support a Marine Research Coordination Center for security purposes, which will serve as an information hub for Indian Ocean regional states. Both the countries should maintain good relations between the people by creating a feeling of unity in adverse circumstances. The principle of neutrality should be propagated in a more convenient and intelligent manner.

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