

China Growing Influence and India's Security Concern in Sri Lanka after 1990s

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ABSTRACT

The ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is affected by the regional power dynamic, with external powers seeking to increase their own, and counter the influence of others. Any involvement in any conflict of Sri Lanka may be viewed in the perspective of India's national security concerns. The post LTTE period, India finds China making inroads into Sri Lanka. China ties with Sri Lanka gave it a foothold near the critical sea lanes and also entry into what India considered being its backyard. China assertive diplomacy primarily get to establish its economic and security ties with Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Myanmar, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. In some cases this forming of times has left joint port construction or enlargement deals, example include Gwadar in Pakistan Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Chittagong in Bangladesh and sittwe port in Myanmar. The all weather friendship between China and Pakistan has been a cause of concern for India for a long time.

1. Introduction

In the post 1990 period, security concern of India and Sri Lanka took an entirely different form. India's threat perceptions have grown as Chinese has policy to become more aggressive in Sri Lanka. China's politico- economic initiatives and unrestrained supply of military aid to Sri Lanka has made India cautious.¹ India's is quite worried about the increasing role of Chinese the region.²

India has adopted hands off in the ethnic conflict since the withdrawals of IPKF, especially after The Assassination of Rajiv Gandhi by the LTTE. After this, LTTE had emerged as the biggest threat to both India and Sri Lanka. Since that LTTE had been banned in India.³ LTTE of the post 1990 period was qualitatively different being much more powerful in terms of its Axis to funds and Technology and superior arms and ammunitions. The LTTE has developed extensive contract with terrorist groups all over the world.⁴ LTTE's any attempt to establish an independent Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka was biggest threat to the India security and sovereignty.⁵ During Sri Lankan LTTE war, Sri Lanka foreign policy shift from the west to China has taken on a new dimension. There was new understanding between Sri Lanka and China. Sri Lanka and China have been discussing Sri Lanka ethnic conflict since 1983 China has considered ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka as Sri Lanka's internal affair and China want Sri Lanka to seek a political solution. In 1986, Sri Lanka short assistance to install defence manufacturing capacity for light arms and supply additional patrol boats, but was the denied.⁶

In 1987 Ranil Wikramasinghe of the UNP visited China to gain support but China preferred political solution to the ethnic conflict. China established the Bonded Warehouse of China North Industries Corporation (NCORINCO), a renowned International conglomerate, in the port city of Galle in 1994. As part of an agreement that is renewed every two years, the warehouse stores military equipment and ordnance for the Sri Lankan military and the supplies are made on payments.⁷

China Sri Lankan relationship extended remarkably after Mahinda Rajapaksa, became president in November 2005 under president Mahinda Rajapaksa, Chinese presence and influence in Sri Lanka have increased. During the Regime of Mahindra Rajapaksa China and Sri Lanka have watched a comprehensive strategic partnership. China's strategic interest and aid diplomacy have led to close cooperation between China and Sri Lanka.⁸ China came to rescue of Sri Lanka after the USA stopped direct aid to Sri Lanka because of its dismal human rights of record.⁹ An important reason for the close ties between the Mahindra Rajapaksa Government and China was Beijing robust endorsement and support of Colombo's conduct in the war against the LTTE. China was "instrumental to some extent in the Sri Lankan Government success in defeat of the Ltd Colombo was trying to purchase arms from abroad for years and only China supplied it with weaponry on a sustained basis."¹⁰ China Jian-7 fighter jets, anti- aircraft guns and JY-11 3d air surveillance radar theatre were major instrumental factor the Sri Lankan military success.¹¹

Furthermore, Sri Lankan president Mahinda Rajapaksa's while visiting to China from 26 February to March 2007 noted that "The two sides resolved to fight tires sly against the three Evil forces of terrorism, separatism, extremism and would step up consultation and coordination on regional and international level to counter-terrorism action." In April 2007 China and Sri Lanka signed a 37.6 million USD deal for supply of artillery guns, armored personnel carriers (acps) and infantry weapons. China also agreed to supply other systems to counter LTTE ambushes. China also agreed to sell six F-7 Jet fighters, considered critical to destroy the LTTE's fledgling air force and also demolish other military infrastructure such as command posts, underground bunkers, ammunition storages, boatbuilding yards and above all the airstrips. China also supplied the Sri Lankan Army the HJ-8 anti-tank missiles that were used against the LTTE hardened structure and PIL boxes.¹² In May 2007 there was an agreement between China Sri Lanka to 'establishment of friendship City relationship' relating to the Hambantota district for development of infrastructure

designated as the Hambantota Development Zone HDZ. There have been some concerns in India about China's help and assistance in the construction of the Hambantota port on the Indian Ocean in Sri Lanka.¹³ Hambantota will serve China in a number of strategic ways firstly it will provide facilities of Chinese flagged merchant ships, container vessels oil and gas tankers, and military vessels including nuclear submarines operating in the Indian Ocean. Secondly, China for monitoring Indian ocean military and civilian traffic, electronic transmissions from US base at Diego Garcia and the Indian Nuclear facilities that is likely to come up at Rambilli in the Bay of Bengal. Thirdly, Hambantota offers strategic location for China to set up its space monitoring system considered critical for its ballistic missiles, which can challenge us forces particularly the Aircraft carriers who may threaten Chinese shipping in the Indian Ocean. Fourthly, the Chinese fleet of fishing vessels that are also deployed for intelligence gathering duties can be staged from Hambantota.¹⁴

It was perceived that Hambantota could be harmful to India's strategic and security interests. Both, China and Sri Lanka claim that this is merely a commercial venture, its future utility as a strategic asset for China cannot be ruled out. Though, at present there is no talk of a Naval Base it could emerge ultimately to cater to the requirements of Chinese oil and gas tankers and anti piracy patrol.¹⁵ The Chinese presence in Sri Lanka has increased so much that there is no major infrastructure project in which the Chinese have not invested. Besides the Hambantota project China involved in several others on the island. It is constructing a second international airport at Hambantota, a \$248 million Expressway connecting the capital Colombo with the airport at Katunayake, \$855 million coal power plant at Norochcholai, and performing art theatre in Colombo China manages a special economic zone at Mirigama for Chinese investors. Since 2006, China has provided Sri Lanka with \$306 billion in financial assistance for various projects.¹⁶

India sees this Chinese maneuvering as an intrusion into its historic sphere of influence. China's support for India's foe Pakistan has also been a cause of concern for India for a long time. Pakistan is developing a straight equally important port at Guwahati with economic and Technical 8 and assistance from China since August 2006.¹⁸ China and Pakistan in talks to build a new nuclear reactor in Pakistan of the One Giga watt capacity, apparently without approval of IAEA or the NSG. China give the diplomatic support Pakistan against Indian interests. China and Pakistan have traditional values one another as strategic hedge against India. For Pakistan, China is a guarantor of security against India.¹⁹ China has been a major military supplier to Pakistan and its new military alliance with Pakistan has been a new worrisome factor. China also considered Pakistan critical to energy security. Gwadar along with the network of rail and roads through Pakistan shows that convenient transport of Middle East oil and gas to China via its Western province of Xinjiang Chinese premier during his visit 19 to 20 December, 2010 to Pakistan said, Pakistan and his country were "all weather strategic partners "that means "the Chinese Government and people of China will stand by Pakistan to face all challenge together." China and Pakistan signed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in 2006, as well as

numerous other agreements and Memorandums of understanding (MOU's), including Bilateral Investment Treaties (BIT) to increase mutual trade and investment. Pakistan provides China with cheap raw materials and the use of Pakistani ports in return for access to Chinese markets through preferential treatment under the FTA. Pakistan could very well become a hub in the region which may lead to considerable future transitive revenue and help Beijing the trade and energy corridor through Pakistan.²⁰ All those China does not have an FTA with Bangladesh, the two countries, granted each other Most Favoured Nation treatment in 1984. China provides duty-free access to a list of Bangladeshi products under the Asia Pacific Trade Agreement and Bangladesh has offered Oil exploration rights to China at Barakpuria. China has also been level access to the Bangladeshi Chittagong port, which will bring in China closer to me and Maa oil fields and the seas around India.²¹ the situation in North Eastern India can become precarious if Bangladesh has a pro-Pakistan pro-China Government.²²

Nepal is in effect India's security output. China has gained greater influence in Nepal with the emergence of Nepali Maoist as a political force.²³ it is possible china could move it's troops into to Nepal and threaten India through UP, Bihar and West Bengal. Chinese building Qingzang railway line from the Tibetan capital of Lhasa to Kathmandu. China is also one stop to the number of roads and year fields in Tibet and building Dams on Brahmaputra China is investing in infrastructure at the China Nepal border. China is also also eyeing on Malacca strait. It is one of the busiest maritime chokepoints in the world. All seaborne trade to and from Asia and Europe the Middle East must pass through it as other routes are longer.²⁴ China has secured a Naval base in Maldives. India has long maintain security with Maldives. India establishing a network of listening stations and other military facility there, as a direct response to China's development of Hambantota port in Sri Lanka. The Indian armed forces favour a base for the surveillance aircraft on the island of Gan, as well as basing for aircraft and ships in the capital Male and Hanimadhoo. Chinese movements include, the construction of a new Naval Base at Hanggyi island in the Bessein river at the mouth of the Irrawaddy; construction of Sona deep sea port at Cox Bazar and development of existing facilities at Sittwe near the Bangladesh border and development of Radar facilities in the Coco Island at a distance of 30 nautical miles from the Andaman chain of island of India are all significant Chinese moves.²⁵

India's primary concern is to counter the threat posed by Chinese encirclement point as a result, India's to policy trusts are the Indo us strategic partnership and and look East policy which is now transformed into act East policy. India's building close relations with Japan, Australia, and Singapore for offensive against China in Southeast Asia. India's on charm offensive in the region has also been bearing fruit, whether it is through the establishment of electronic monitoring system in Madagascar in 2007, or in August 2009 in the Maldives. India officials have also become more active to the attempt of their Chinese counterparts to move a small but strategically placed Nations such as the Seychelles or Mauritius. Countering China's growing presence in the Bay of Bengal, especially its new

forays in Bangladesh and Myanmar, the Indian government has Okayed to new naval bases on Eastern seaboard -Paradip in Orissa and Tuticorin in Tamilnadu. 66 Sri Lankan president, Mahinda Rajapakasa, has sought to allay Indian concerns about the growing Chinese influence in Sri Lanka, saying India's role in the Sri Lanka was a permanent feature. Unlike other players whose engagement was limited to Commercial project the execute.

"The Chinese will come to Sri Lanka, build some project and go, but the Indians will come here, they will build and they will stay. This is the difference in our relations with China and Sri Lanka."²⁶ Sri Lankan president told K Venkataramnan on the Times of India in an interview at his 'Temple tree' residence in Colombo on 28 June, 2010. Sri Lankan president while pointing out that China was only one of the countries which were involved in post-war development, Mahinda Rajapaksa further said that China factor was a bogey raised to upset the Indian public and undermine his regime's deepening ties with India.²⁷ Colombo envoy Prasad Kariyavasan told IANS told in an interview amidst concern about China growing influence in Sri Lanka," China is a old friend, but India is an older friend. Our political and economic friendship with China will not be at the expense of India. Sri Lanka will not be a party to any mechanism or effort to harming India's strategic interest. Harming India interests will be like harming our interests."²⁷ Sri Lanka envoy stressed that Sri Lanka's ties with India were set to acquire more economic and strategic weight in the days to come.

"Indian foreign minister S. M. Krishna during his visit to Sri Lanka in November 2010 stated that, "relationship between India and Sri Lanka will not be at the cost of other countries.

Our ultimate objective is to see a prosperous and stable Sri Lanka." During 3 days visit in December 2010 by Indian Defence Secretary Pradeep Kumar, the issues of discussion about the establishment of bilateral defence dialogue and joint Naval exercise for strengthening of coast guard services, extension of military training and assistance from energy infrastructure construction. All these affirmed that India will work with Sri Lanka together for Sri Lanka defence.

2. Conclusion

The growing external power influence in Sri Lanka and India's neighbouring countries has made it clear that particularly China's following a planned strategy to encircle India. Indian government is worried over the increasing Chinese influence and its implications for India Security. At the same time, Sri Lanka is right to develop close relations with China. Instead of being alarm that China's growing influence in the region. Indian needs to find new ways to win neighbours and increase influence in the region. India's Act East policies are paying very well. All region countries have post cultural calling sister, story price to India. As a result, it should not be possible for China principle India. In the post-LTTE Era, it seems that Sri Lanka will handle it relationship with other country without destabilizing India. Sri Lanka has taken care not to allow its Alliance with China to offened India. Sri Lanka has repeatedly clarified that it will keep India security concern in mind and will not compromise India's security interests. In the post-war period, Sri Lanka is strategically harmonizing its relationship with its neighbours and with the region.

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