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The Journal comprises of a mix of research articles, essays, topical commentaries, opinion pieces and book reviews. Each issue includes articles on diverse themes of relevance to national security and international security, including emerging security threats and



scenarios; civil-military relations; strategic defence planning according to threat perception; and other related issues in the area of defence and national security.

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FOREWARD**Message from the Vice-Chancellor**

I consider it a privilege to issue a message for the inaugural issue of the Journal of Defence and Policy Analysis (JDPA) published by the Department of Defence and Strategic Studies of the Faculty of Defence and Strategic Studies of the KDU.

Research in the field of defence and security policy is of immense value and significance for the military, and more so for policy makers and those involved in governance to introduce policies towards ensuring sustainable national security taking into account complex geopolitical and socio-economic realities of contemporary times into account. In this context, the publication of this journal by KDU, the country's only defence university will be recorded as a landmark event in the annals of our history. I believe that the journal would fill a significant lacuna in scholarship in this domain, and it would provide scholarly insights of military and civil practitioners to the policy community of Sri Lanka.

In the realm of Defence and Strategic Studies, the pursuit for excellence for research and its policy implications remains a fundamental challenge to advanced and developing nations alike. Sri Lanka's contemporary and future security landscape is evolving at an unprecedented speed; and thus, research published in this journal is expected to substantially contribute to both the academic and policy communities to chart a way forward.

Contributions to this journal will be significant as Sri Lanka has its own story of successfully defeating terrorism and of how it is navigating the turbulent diplomatic waters as a small power that is evolving its security architecture. The defence posture, professional advancement of defence services and developing a new generation of strategic thinkers are necessity for any country to face 21st century challenges. A journal of this nature will immensely benefit the researchers and readership alike to achieve the above objectives.

The journal is marking the very first effort of its kind in Sri Lanka, and I hope that it will reach the attention of scholarly communities and practitioners of regional as well as global levels. I



also hope that it will have a great impact on resolving burning security issues at various levels and on the policymaking of our times. Further, I wish that this journal would encourage research to an extent of having a positive influence on the policy community in a way that could change the future of humankind.

Finally, I extend my sincere appreciation to the editors and local and international authors who have contributed to this inaugural issue. Let the JDPA continuously grow in its stature and standard to be a leading journal in defence and security policy in the world.

Milinda Peiris

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Vice-chancellor

Chief Editor of the JDPA



THE GLOBALISATION OF MIDDLE EASTERN TERRORISM

Rohan Gunaratna

ABSTRACT

Contemporary global terrorism has its roots to Middle East, especially starting from 1960s. The Israel-Palestinian issue has geared up the wave of modern terrorism and then following the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan has garnished the terror atmosphere since 1980s, giving birth to al-Qaeda. With that, affiliates, and franchised organizations of al-Qaeda mushroomed in all corners of the world making it a global network. Therefore, al-Qaeda made a landmark in modern terrorism which is motivated by religious extremism. Having said that, this paper portrays how terrorism in the Middle East has its ramifications all around world making it globalized by collecting data from qualitative methods such as interviews, statements, books, journal articles, websites etc.

Keywords: Indo-Pacific, Indo-Pacific Strategies, Regional Stability

INTRODUCTION

Terrorism and political violence in the Middle East declined but expanded elsewhere. The continent of Africa is emerging as an epicentre of terrorism. Similarly, a part of Asia is experiencing a revival. Due to the pandemic starting in 2020, terrorism is on the decline worldwide including in the Middle East.

The threat in the Middle East peaked in 2014 with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) declaring a caliphate. With mastery of the Internet, the ISIS and Islamic State recruited worldwide bringing fighters and family members to Iraq and Syria. With the threat of political violence especially terrorism peaking, the world came together to fight a common enemy. With a coalition of 83 nations fighting the Islamic State for five years (2014-2019), their conventional fighting power declined steadfastly. Today, the virtual caliphate exists, and the far-flung provinces sustain. However, the Islamic State today is a shadow of its past. When the Islamic State emerged as the preeminent target, its predecessor, al Qaeda, another global terrorist movement, took the opportunity to revive.

The threat is likely to expand in the near future with the Islamic State entering a new phase of global expansion after losing in its physical battlespace in Syria-Iraq in March 2019 (Aslam and Gunaratna 2020). The Islamic State lost its last territorial stronghold in Baghouz, a small Syrian town in the province of Deir ez-Zor close to the Iraqi border. The motivated, skilled, and networked terrorist and guerrilla fighters are slowly and steadily returning home or to



neighbouring safe havens (Aslam and Gunaratna, 2020). The capabilities for mounting attacks - expertise in recruitment, financing, intelligence, and tactics, are proliferating. The threat to the west - North America, Europe, Australia - and the rest of the world - the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and Asia - is real, current, and sustained (Laqueur, 1999).

THE CONTEXT

On a global scale, the Islamic State and al Qaeda still operate as the most lethal entities. In the Middle East, both the groups survive dominating parts of Iraq and Syria. Although al Qaeda core is in Afghanistan, Al Qaeda's most formidable entity, Hayat Tehrir al Shiam (HTS) is located in Syria. Operating as a part of a larger coalition, HTS is the largest of all al Qaeda associated groups (Laqueur, 1999). Similarly, in Yemen both the Islamic State and al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) operates (Kruglanski, Belanger and Gunaratna, 2019). Meanwhile, new hotspots are emerging especially in Africa and Asia where both the Islamic State and al Qaeda affiliates notably al Shabab presents a formidable threat. Although Mozambique is not part of Central Africa, Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) attacked and took control of Mozambique's town of Palma starting in February 2021. Cabo Delgado province that host Palma is the home of the largest and richest Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) project in Africa.

THE BACKGROUND

The origins of the contemporary wave of modern international terrorism can be traced back to Six-Day War fought between 5 and 10 June 1967 between Israel and Jordan, Syria, and Egypt. With the conventional defeat of the Arab armies, the Palestinian threat groups started to mount attacks against Israeli civilian and commercial targets. It was evident that the Arab world was unable to challenge Israel militarily in open warfare. The Palestinians drew lessons from movements in Latin America, North Africa and Southeast Asia that had shifted from guerrilla warfare in rural areas towards terrorist attacks in urban environments. The series of aircraft hijackings, bombings and kidnappings gained traction. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) hijacked an Israeli El Al flight traveling from Rome in Italy to Tel Aviv in Israel on July 22, 1968 (Katjuscia, 2012). In addition to targeting El Al offices overseas, an international trend developed with Palestinian groups hijacking 16 airplanes from 1968 - 1976. Operating transnationally, Yasser Arafat's Fatah killed 11 Israeli athletes and a German policeman at the Olympics in Munich.

Gradually, the threat in the Middle East expanded from Palestinian to include Lebanese, Syrian, Egyptian and other threat groups. The first generation of Middle Eastern terrorism including by Palestinian and Lebanese threat groups were driven by ethnonationalist and left-wing ideologies. The second generation of Palestinian and Lebanese terrorism were driven by ethnonationalist and politico-religious ideology. The most notable examples were



Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas in the case of Palestine and al Dawa and the Hezbollah in the case of Lebanon.

The Muslim terrorist groups received an impetus in 1979. The left wing and ethnopolitical character were supplanted by politico religious ideology with three defining events that changed the global threat landscape. First, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on Christmas Day in 1979, witnessed 30,000 Muslims from Asia, Africa, Middle East, the Caucasus, Europe and North America traveling to Pakistan to fight against the Soviets. After a decade long fight, the Soviet forces were checkmated. The mujahidin (Fighters of God) claimed that the superpower was defeated. On February 11, 1979, the Iranian Revolution empowered the Iranian students to siege the US Embassy in Tehran and hold the Americans as hostages for 444 days. Although, a superpower, there was very little the United States could do to secure the rapid release of its citizens. Third, the siege of the Grand Mosque in Mecca by Mohamed Abdullah al Qahtani on November 20, 1979. Claiming to be the redeemer of Islam or Mahdi, his group sieged Islam's holiest site. The Saudi authorities working with the French commandos ended the siege on December 4, 1979. Saudi Kingdom beheaded 68 members of group. These three events influenced and formed the narrative of Muslim threat groups. In the decades that followed, the world witnessed the rise of politically-motivated violence by religious groups' predominantly Muslim groups.

THREAT TRAJECTORY

The centre of gravity of terrorism shifted from the Middle East to Asia with the anti-Soviet multi-national Afghan jihad campaign in the 1980s. From Asia, there were three waves of radicalized Muslims. In the first wave, several hundred Muslims travelled from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines and China to Pakistan and they fought against the Soviets in the 1980s (Gunaratna, 2015). When they returned, they formed threat groups or influenced existing groups to use violence to advance their aims and objectives. That is the contemporary beginning of the extremist and the terrorist groups in Southeast and Northeast Asia. In the second wave, Central, South, Southeast and Northeast Asians went to fight in Afghanistan against the US and its allies in the 2000s. In the third wave, they went to Iraq and Syria to build a caliphate. While many fought against multiple coalitions, a few hundred returned. Some of the returnees and deportees conducted attacks in their home and in neighbouring countries.

While thousands of Pakistanis participated in the anti-Soviet fight, none went from India. Although India hosts the second largest Muslim population, the pro-Soviet India under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi controlled the impact of the developments in Afghanistan in India. The Indian religious space is syncretic, integrated and well regulated. In contrast, Pakistan, a frontline state in the fight against the Soviets, became the home for several thousand fighters that settled down. Tribal Pakistan gave birth to al Qaeda on August 11,



1988. Consisting largely of Arab recruits that fought against the Soviets, al-Qaeda was formed. Led by Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda emerged as the first global terrorist movement. A religious cleric Abdullah Azzam was the mentor of Osama bin Laden, an engineer and his successor Aymen al Zawahiri, a medical doctor. In Afghanistan, successive al Qaeda leaders survived. Their host was the Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, who destroyed the Bamiyan Buddha images in March 2001. Although a religious illiterate, he held the title of commander of the faithful or Amir al-Mu'minin (Baylis, Smith and Owens, 2008).

The very same title hitherto reserved for the caliph was held by successive leaders of the Islamic State, the second global terrorist movement to emerge. They were Abu Umar al Baghdadi (2006-2010), Abu Bakr al Baghdadi (2010-2019) and Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi (2019). The genesis of IS can be traced back to March 2003, when the US intervened in Iraq. A common Jordanian criminal turned a jihadist, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, fought in the Afghan conflict. After US intervention in Afghanistan in 2001, he relocated to Khormal, the north of Iraq and established Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad. Abu Musab's mentor was Al-Maqdisi, the author of *Millat Ibrahim* (Religion of Abraham) that promoted two concepts - first, takfir, excommunicating Muslims, who did not follow Islam as "kufr" (unbelievers) so that they can be killed and second, "al wala wal bara", Muslims associating only Muslims and disassociating non-Muslims. To Maqdisi, Muslims believed in God alone and non-Muslims are polytheist. After excommunicating apostates as Kufr (unbelief) and labelling infidels as shirk (idolatry) respectively, they were permitted to be killed (Light, 2009).

Maqdisi and his followers championed the concept of Tawhid (oneness of god) where only Allah was permitted to be worshipped. Maqdisi and his followers regarded democracy as another religion as democracy permitted other religions to be practiced. After his release from Jordanian custody, Maqdisi toned down stating that suicide should be the last resort. Although they subsequently fell apart, Maqdisi's preaching's shaped thinking of Abu Musab and their writings influenced his successors who created the Islamic State of Iraq, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the Islamic State (Light, 2002). After proclaiming a caliphate on June 29, 2014, "Dawlah Islamiyah" or the Islamic State radicalized both Islamic organizations and Muslims worldwide. The Islamic State influence expanded worldwide creating two categories - the friends and enemies of God. Islamic State commanded its followers - the friends of God - to kill the enemies of God (Kruglanski, Hettiarachchi and Gelfand, 2019). The ensuing death and destruction disrupted Muslim-non-Muslim relations. Sri Lanka's Easter Sunday Attack is one such case.

Fired by the ideal of Islamist supremacy, Islamists believed that by invoking Allah, the Arabic word for God, they can fight and defeat its enemies. Driven by politico-religious aims and objectives, the threat groups from al Qaeda to the Islamic State unleashed an era of violence. The turn of the millennium saw the emergence of hundreds of Muslim extremist and terrorist groups in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. The conflict theatres where Muslims suffered



continue to attract Muslims from worldwide to come, train and fight for their faith and the faithful.

Today, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan are the epicentres of global terrorism. The violence in these theatres contribute to over half of global terrorist attacks. Often terrorism is a by-product of protracted armed conflicts (Hwang, 2018) . Conflict conditions create the milieu for the spawning and growth of terrorist groups. With the increase in the number and intensity of terrorist and guerrilla conflicts during the last decade, political violence affects two-thirds of the countries of the world.

UNDERSTANDING TERRORISM

The Middle Eastern terrorist groups learnt from their predecessors in West, Latin America, Africa and Southeast Asia. Terrorism is a unique form of political violence as it targets civilians (Baylis, Smith and Owens, 2008) . Politically violence is a campaign backed by threats and acts of violence against the state and the community (or communities). To generate fear in the other, politically motivated violence is systematic, and deliberate. It primarily targets civilians with the intention of competing for and controlling political power (Baylis, Smith and Owens, 2008) . Other forms of political violence include attacks against infrastructure (sabotage), political leaders (assassination), military (guerrilla warfare), and ethnic and religious communities (genocide). While attacks against civilians, or 'soft targets', are the most common in the initial wave of terrorist operations, terrorist groups subsequently develop the capability to attack security forces ('hard targets'). The tactical repertoire of contemporary terrorist groups includes forms of political violence other than terrorism. For instance, the National Liberation Army (ELN) sabotaged gas and oil pipelines in Colombia, Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA) assassinated moderate politicians in Spain, Tareek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) conducted guerrilla warfare against Pakistani security forces, and Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) 'cleansed' Sri Lanka's northern and eastern provinces of Muslims and Sinhalese (Kruglanski, Hettiarachchi and Gelfand, 2019).

Some terrorist groups are extremely complex and well organized. They often have elaborate infrastructures of leadership and highly developed methods of funding their work. Weaponry ranges from crude homemade devices to advanced high technology; equally the training terrorists receive can be equal to or arguably even exceed that of the most advanced government specialists.

Why do people choose to engage in behaviour that leads to the severe injury and death of sometimes thousands of civilians – men, women, and children alike? Terrorism differs from common crime: crime is often driven by economic motive, while terrorism is driven by political motive. However, with the decline of state sponsorship, terrorist groups increasingly resort to crime to build their capacities and capabilities. For instance, the Revolutionary



Armed forces of Colombia (FARC) extorts money from foreign companies in Colombia, the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) kidnaps foreigners, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan traffic narcotics, the Revolutionary United Force of Sierra Leone (RUF) smuggles diamonds, the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria (GIA) steals cars, and Al Qaeda engages in bank, credit card and cheque fraud. Therefore, contemporary terrorist groups traverse along the political violence-criminality nexus. Overall, terrorist groups are armed political parties. Strategically their goal is always political (Maharani, 2018). Operationally, they build support and operational infrastructure; tactically, they build military power, accumulate economic wealth, and gain political strength.

Over 100 definitions of terrorism exist. While no one definition has gained universal acceptance, there is agreement that terrorism is the threat or the act of politically motivated violence directed primarily against civilians. Some supporting the Palestinian, Kashmiri, Sikh and Kurdish struggles have argued that they are legitimate campaigns and therefore their actions against civilians are not terrorism (Gunaratna, 2018). They have also argued that when a campaign is legitimate, the fighters are 'freedom fighters' and not terrorists. Killing unarmed combatants, including women and children, is not an act worthy of a freedom fighter. Whether a campaign is legitimate or not, deliberate attacks against civilians to achieve a political goal is terrorism. Irrespective of legitimacy, perpetrator, location and time of the attack, terrorism is a means to an end.

Driven by needs, narratives and networks, the environment, grievances and ideology create exclusivists, extremists and terrorists. As opposed to criminals engaging in violence for personal gain, terrorists are politically motivated. Political violence - including terrorism - is a political message and seeks to influence a wide audience. Unless and until government and their partners understand the causes and drivers of politically-motivated violence, terrorism presents an apex threat. While most groups operate nationally, others are active regionally and globally.

TERRORIST IDEOLOGIES

The Middle East threat groups borrowed from ideologies not indigenous to the region. Although terrorism as a tactic became popular in the Middle East, its origins rested in the West and Latin America. Terrorist groups develop secular and religious ideologies or belief systems to politicize, radicalize and mobilize their actual and potential followers. By conducting a terrorist campaign within an ideological framework, a terrorist group seeks to advance its aims and objectives. Although the aims differ according to the ideological orientations of the groups, the objectives range from gaining recognition at local, community, national and international levels; intimidating and coercing both the target population and the government; and provoking the government to overreact for the purpose of generating greater public support. Three principal ideological strands have generated the ideological



fuel required to spawn and sustain terrorist campaigns around the world, namely ideological terrorism, ethno-nationalist terrorism, and politico-religious terrorism. The next sections discuss each of these in turn.

Ideological Terrorism: Ideological terrorism is driven by both left wing and right-wing ideologies. Marxism, Leninism and Maoism provide the ideological fuel to left wing terrorist groups to advance their aims and objectives. They seek to overthrow existing regimes and establish communist and socialist states. Most of the groups driven by left wing ideologies - Communist Combatant Cells (CCC) of Belgium, Red Army Faction (RAF) of Germany, Red Brigades (RB) of Italy, and Action Direct (AD) of France - disintegrated with the end of the Cold War (Baylis, Smith and Owens, 2008). Although the ideological justification for these groups to continue ended with the death of the Soviet Empire, a few groups driven by left wing ideologies survive in the poorer regions of the world. They include FARC in Colombia, Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA), Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path), New People's Army (NPA) in the Philippines, and People's War Group (PWG) in Andhra Pradesh in India. Of these groups, FARC, Nepal Maoists and NPA pose a severe national security threat to Colombia, Nepal and the Philippines. Among the left-wing groups still active in Europe are the Revolutionary Organisation 17 November and Revolutionary Nuclei, both of Greece, and the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party (DHKP-C) in Turkey.

Groups driven by right wing ideologies include the Ku Klux Klan, Aryan Nations (Church of Christian Aryan Nations, Church of Jesus Christ Christian), Aryan Liberation Front, Aryan Brotherhood, Arizona Patriots, the American Nazi Party (National Socialist Party, United Racist Front) and the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC). A group driven by a right-wing ideology conducted the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995 (Chia, 2016). Until the turn of the century, threat entities - groups and personalities- driven by right wing ideologies pose a low threat compared to other categories of terrorism. In contrast to the left-wing groups, the bulk of the right-wing groups are located in North America and in Western Europe. Most right-wing groups are neo-Nazi, neo-fascist, anti-Semitic and racist groups. These groups, dominated by 'skinheads', attack immigrants and refugees, mostly of Asian and Middle Eastern origin. After the '9-11' terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001, the pace of these attacks increased.

Ethno-nationalist terrorism: The first wave of ethno-nationalist campaigns was by national liberation movements directed against the Colonial rulers. They included the Irgun and Lehi opposing the British rule in Palestine in the 1940s and French rule in Algeria in the 1950s. Contemporary groups driven by ethno-nationalism can be divided into three sub-categories. These groups fight for autonomy, unification, or reunification (irredentism). For instance, Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, Jammu and Kashmiri Liberation Front (JKLF), and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam are fighting for independence from Israel, India, and Sri Lanka respectively (Shashikumar, 2021). The members of these groups are motivated by Palestinian, Kashmiri



and Tamil nationalism. Similarly, Continuity and Real IRA are fighting for reunification with the Republic of Ireland. Likewise, the PKK is fighting for linguistic and cultural autonomy for the Kurds in South-eastern Turkey. In comparison to other types of terrorism, ethno-nationalist conflicts produce the largest number of fatalities and casualties, the largest number of displaced persons and refugees, and the biggest human rights violations. Groups that have adopted virulent ethno-nationalist ideologies pose a significant threat to their opposing ethnic communities and governments.

Politico-religious Terrorism: Groups driven by religiosity include those from the Christian, Jewish, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic communities. They include Army of God in the US, Kach and Kahne Chai of Israel, Babbar Khalsa International of Punjab, India, Aum Shinrikyo (recently renamed Aleph) of Japan, Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and Armed Islamic Group of Algeria. Aum, an apocalyptic group, aimed to take over Japan and then the world (Post-War Security Challenges, 2019). In contrast to other Islamist groups campaigning within their territories, Al Qaeda and (to a lesser extent) Lebanese Hezbollah have a global or a universalistic Islamic agenda. To justify violence, politically motivated religious leaders propagate corrupt versions of religious texts, often misinterpreting and misrepresenting the larger religions.

Of the religious category of groups, Islamists or groups motivated by radical Islamic ideology have been the most violent. Although Islamic Revolution in Iran was by the Shia and the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was by the Sunnis. By holding US hostages for 444 days, the Islamic Republic of Iran defied the US. Similarly, by defeating the largest land force, the Soviet Army, the anti-Soviet multi-national Afghan mujahidin demonstrated to the entire Muslim world the Islamist power! After successfully defeating one superpower, the Islamists turned their energies towards building a capability to defeat the remaining superpower - the United States of America, its Allies, and its friends in the Muslim world. The Islamists interpreted the collapse of the Soviet empire as the defeat of the Soviet bear, the US defeats in Iraq as the Eagle having crashed, and the next enemy as China, the dragon.

With suicide attacks - interpreted as martyrdom operations - becoming widespread and popular among Islamist groups throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the scale of violence these groups unleashed has surpassed secular ethno-nationalist, left wing, and right-wing groups. For instance, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Abu Nidal Organisation killed far fewer people than their Islamist counterparts, Hamas and PIJ. In the evolution of politico-religious groups, Al Qaeda and its family of groups are new actors, operating globally and willing to kill in large number (Resolution 2242, 2015).

Terrorist campaigns are also driven by ideologies that lack mass appeal and are therefore less common, for example state-sponsored, anarchist, and single-issue terrorism. As terrorism is



a low-cost high impact form of violence, states wishing to advance their foreign policy goals have supported terrorist groups to attack their inimical states. Due to sanctions imposed by the international community against states that sponsor terrorist groups, this clandestine surrogate form of warfare has declined throughout the 1990s into the 21st century (Resolution 2242, 2015). Although the US government accuses a range of countries for supporting terrorism, little evidence exists that North Korea, Sudan, or Cuba currently sponsors terrorism. Throughout the 1990s, Sudan and Libya were active sponsors of terrorism. Although the scale of sponsorship has declined, governments in Iran, Syria and to a lesser extent Lebanon continue to support terrorism. For instance, Iran has arranged a number of shipments of small arms and associated ammunition, rocket-propelled grenades, mortar rounds, 107-millimeter rockets, and plastic explosives, possibly including man-portable air defence systems, MANPADs to the Taliban since 2006. The politically coloured US list does not include another dozen of countries that support foreign terrorist groups clandestinely.

Single-issue terrorist groups include violent animal rights activists and anti-abortion groups that seek to change a specific policy or practice rather than the political system. Anarchist terrorists seek to overthrow established governments by waves of bombings and assassinations. The recent wave of protests against globalisation parallels anarchist violence from 1870-1920 (Resolution 2242, 2015). However, the trajectory of anti-globalisation movements is yet to be seen. State response to anti-globalisation movements will determine whether we are likely to witness the emergence of terrorist groups espousing the cause of anti-globalisation.

Some groups have overlapping ideologies. Although PKK is ethno-nationalist, it has a strong Marxist-Leninist orientation. Similarly, the original ideological disposition of the LTTE was Marxist-Leninist. Likewise, Hamas and PIJ are religious, but they have a strong nationalist dimension. Although Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade is ethno-nationalist, it has a strong religious dimension. Ideologies of groups tend to shift with the changes in the political environment. Groups in North America and Western Europe driven by left wing ideologies declined in strength and size at the end of the Cold War (Resolution 2242, 2015). Conversely, the post-Cold War period witnessed a resurgence of groups driven by ethnicity and religiosity. As a result, groups driven by ethnicity and religion account for about 70-80% of all terrorist groups. Furthermore, the ethno-nationalist and religious groups have the greatest staying power: unlike left or right-wing conflicts, ethno-nationalist and religious conflicts are protracted (Resolution 2242, 2015).

LIKELY FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

The recent advances in technologies and revolutionary technologies such as drones and encryption create daunting challenges for governments. Terrorism as a tactic reached its high



point in the Middle East. However, from its origins in 1968, the geography and lethality of terrorism changed start. Geographically, future threat will no longer be the Middle East. The Middle Eastern brand of terrorism will replicate elsewhere in the world. The threat had spread considerable to different parts of the world notable in the migrant and diaspora communities in the west and Muslim territorial communities beyond the Middle East. Increasingly, Africa and Asia, where large Muslim communities live experience violence and terrorism.

Unless governments and partners can reverse radicalisation, the threat of terrorism will spread. Although terrorism does not pose an existential threat to most nation-states, the tier-one national security threat facing many countries is from terrorism. With the rise of Muslim threat groups at the turn of the century, Saudi cleric Nasir al-Fahd, the former dean at Umm al-Qura University issued a decree titled the legal status of using weapons of mass destruction against infidels” in May 2003 (Sageman, 2004) . “If Muslims cannot defeat the kafir [unbelievers] in a different way, it is permissible to use weapons of mass destruction.... Even if it kills all of them and wipes them and their descendants off the face of the Earth.” The laptop of a Tunisian fighter in Syria included a 26-page decree by Fahd. With the Fahd attempt to justify WMD use, many threat groups, cells and personalities became interested and some invested in CBRN initiatives. Aman Abdur Rahman, the most influential Islamic State cleric in Asia ranked Fahd as one of the most influential clerics. Islamic State mounted chemical attacks after using the infrastructure in its controlled territory to embark on an ambitious program to develop other agents (Roberts, 2014).

In the 2000s, the threat in the Middle East proliferated in the use of unconventional weapons. Al Qaeda, Islamic State and other threat groups recruited rough scientists and developed special weapons programs. Since the declaration of a “caliphate” in 2014 and territorial control, Islamic State invested in chemical, biological and radiological programs. Starting with chlorine and mustard gas in Iraq and Syria, Islamic State emulated al Qaeda by exploring the development of biological agents (Aslam 2017). Also, in the same theatre, the laptop of an Islamic State Tunisian fighter contained a hidden 19-page document in Arabic on how to develop biological weapons and how to weaponize the bubonic plague from infected animals.

After al Qaeda moved to Taliban controlled Afghanistan, it recruited scientists running both chemical (cyanide) and biological (anthrax) programs, and discussed producing nuclear weapons (Sageman, 2004). After the Pakistani scientist Abdul Rauf was discontinued by the then al Qaeda deputy leader Dr Aymen al Zawahiri, US trained Malaysian biologist Captain Yazid Sufaat created al Qaeda’s second anthrax program. Although contemporary terrorist attacks and threats are mostly using the gun and the bomb, the threat of unconventional programs are real. The governments are unprepared and underprepared to deal with chemical, biological and radiological attacks. Today’s threat groups are interested to acquire, produce and use nuclear weapons although they lack the capabilities. Terrorist operatives and supporters have renewed their interest to use bubonic plague, anthrax and other special



agents. It was not in the Middle East but an Asian group in the US that used biological agents for the first time to attack its adversaries. In the 1980s, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh uses of Salmonella. The threat became pronounced in the 1990s with an Asian group Aum Shinrikyo used Sarin in the Tokyo subway (Korstanje and Clayton, 2012) .

DECLINE OF TERRORISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST

With the US, Russian and Arab coalitions targeting Islamic State infrastructure, their leadership suffered in its heartland of Iraq and Syria. In response, Islamic State decentralized its operations developing capabilities to strike overseas using its affiliate groups, networks, cells and personalities. From a caliphate building group, the Islamic State transformed into a global movement working with over hundred groups, thousands of members and tens of thousands of supporters. The Islamic State surpassed all the other threat groups in the number of attacks, fatalities, injuries and property damage. According to the figures provided by the Islamic State, between August 31, 2019, and August 19, 2020, IS fighters killed and wounded a total of 15,522 people in 4,722 operations, covering 25 countries, including the November 2019 knife attack in London; the November 2019 raid in Ishkobod, near the capital of Tajikistan, Dushanbe; and the torching of boats in the Maldives in April 2020. Iraq, Syria, and West Africa (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria) account for the top three most active "provinces" in terms of attack frequency and casualty toll, followed by Sinai and Khorasan (Afghanistan). The changing geography of attacks is significant- the Islamic State most violent in the Middle East, followed by Africa and then Asia. The global footprint of terrorism is changing - Africa is emerging as a new epicentre. South Asia and Southeast Asia remains threat arenas. The West is the safest, although any attack in the west, will attack global headlines.

Over half of the people, Islamic State and their associated groups killed were Muslims, they identified as apostates. Demonstrating the current and emerging threat to the Muslim world, the Islamic State presents an enduring threat to both the Muslims and the non-Muslims.

IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC

The pandemic during January-June 2020 led to a decline in global terrorism¹. With no gatherings and restrictions, the two largest global terrorist movements - Islamic State and al Qaeda - were challenged. The period marks the "most diminished attack regiment in 2020 at less than 25 operations across only four countries, including Iraq and Syria." The focus was largely in the Middle East and Africa with the exception of Afghanistan in Asia and a few attacks in the Philippines and Indonesia (Putra and Sukabdi, 2013) .

¹ Refer to the SITE Intelligence Group webpage <https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/>, "Recent Far-Right Updates on the COVID-19 PANDEMIC" on 13th to 26th May 2020.



Middle East: The largest numbers of operations were in Iraq and Syria. The al Qaeda aligned HTS in Syria and the Islamic State operations in Iraq continued to present a formidable threat. Ramadan witnessed Islamic State's fighters moving from Syria to Iraq and an uptick in high-casualty attacks. 'Battle of Attrition' surge by Islamic State fighters mounted "small-scale attacks targeting Iraqi forces and police, PMUs, Tribal Mobilization militiamen, and government members across the Anbar, Babil, Baghdad, Diyala, and Salah al-Din governorates." This included "high-casualty armed assault coupled with sniper fire targeting a group of Kaka'i religious sect civilians and responding Iraqi forces in Diyala." With several thousand underground and above ground fighters, the Islamic State threatens its heartland.

Islamic State remained active in several theatres especially Yemen and Egypt. In Egypt, Islamic State's Sinai Province mounted an attack on Egyptian naval forces off the Rafah Sea coast.

Africa: Africa emerged as an epicentre of threat with both Islamic State and al Qaeda affiliate groups establishing an even stronger foothold in Western, central, northern and Eastern Africa. With Islamic State expanding in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Christians were singled out and attacked and Congolese soldiers were attacked in Beni, North Kivu.

In the Sahel - Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger - the national forces led by the French coalition struck including killing the regional al Qaeda leader (Barcelona van attack suspect shot dead, police say, 2017).

Islamic State reported high levels of attacks in Nigeria, although they were exaggerated in terms of casualties and fatalities. As according to the Islamic State reporter "more than 110 Nigerian soldiers and Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) members as the result of two high-level armed assaults in its foothold Borno, one leading to the seizure of parts of Monguno." Both police and military personnel were captured between Maiduguri and Monguno, executed and shown on Islamic State official videos. The high-casualty attacks targeting Nigerian forces and aligned militiamen in IS' foothold Borno continued.

Asia: In Asia, Islamic State was most active in Afghanistan. With the Afghanistan's al Qaeda aligned Taliban entering into a ceasefire, Islamic State mounted devastating attacks against a Sikh shrine, hospital and other targets.

CONCLUSION

The threat is likely to grow in the foreseeable future with the Islamic State entering a new phase of global expansion after losing in its physical battle-space in Syria-Iraq in March 2019. In parallel, al Qaeda and its affiliates worldwide are likely to join, cooperate and collaborate with Islamic State and entities especially after the death of its apex leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi in October 2019. Both IS and its rival Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, the al Qaeda affiliate in



Syria and Iraq present a formidable threat. From their core in Syria and Iraq, the capabilities for mounting attacks - expertise in recruitment, financing, intelligence and tactics, are proliferating. The threat to the west - North America, Europe, Australia - and the rest of the world - the Middle East, Africa, Latin America and Asia - is real, current, and emerging (Schulze, 2009). The motivated, skilled and networked terrorist and guerrilla fighters are returning home or to neighbouring safe havens.

Muslims living in 121 countries worldwide travelled to fight in conflict zones. With their return, others who interact with them will be susceptible to the ideological virus. They live in the migrant and diaspora communities of North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. The territorial communities inhabit the regions of the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Although they are well integrated, Asia hosts 63% of the world's Muslim population (Schmid, 2005). Both Southeast Asia and South Asia hosts the world's biggest Muslim populations. These communities should be protected from ideologies from conflict zones radicalizing them.

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THE EMERGING REGIONAL POWER DILEMMA IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION: BANGLADESH AND SRI LANKAN PERSPECTIVES

Shahab E. Khan

ABSTRACT

Fluidity in economic equations, shifts in the balance of power, instability in geopolitical relations, and geoeconomics of disruptive technologies are four cornerstones of international relations of our time, as they determine the rise and fall of powers. For this article, two countries of South Asia were examined – Bangladesh and Sri Lanka as rising South Asian powers, and two major contending global powers – the U.S. and China that are setting the geo-economics and geostrategic courses in international political structure. In conclusion, economically strengthening the great power involvements within the Indo-Pacific context would mean ensuring a rule-based system that will deliver economic goods to the Indo-Pacific countries. Strategically, it would mean strengthening Bangladesh and Sri Lanka's strategic autonomy in the Bay of Bengal through economic, technological, and institutional cooperation. This article advances the debate about the rise of new regional powers and their dilemmas with the major powers involved in the Indo-Pacific region.

Keywords: Bangladesh, Indo-Pacific, Sri Lanka

INTRODUCTION: THE CHANGING REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE

Fluidity in economic equations, shifts in the balance of power, instability in geopolitical relations, and geoeconomics of disruptive technologies are four cornerstones of international relations of our time. These four cornerstones are the critical determinants of the rise and fall of powers in regional sub-systems and international systems as fluidity, shifts, instability, and technologies influence power distribution and thereby measure the relativity of power. If one takes John Mearsheimer's argument, either or global and regional hegemony are bound to go through a process of relative decline, or at least can maintain enough resources in the international or regional system to dominate its power orbit (Mearsheimer, 2001). Perhaps, the Offensive Realist theory would argue that dominant powers will attempt to share their power with regional hegemony to prevent the rise of competitors in other regions. In turn, the regional hegemonies, concerned about threats stemming from the rise of regional states, will resort to predatory political and defence strategies. It means, in a regional system, the linkage between the global power and the regional power is based on transactional realism in which national power is seen through indicators such as gross domestic product (GDP); military spending; or the Composite Indicator of National Capability (CINC) (Beckley, 2018). These combine military spending, troops, urban population, iron and steel production, and



energy consumption, often subject to systematic manipulation and exaggeration (Singer, Bremer, & Stuckey, 1972).

Beckley argued, even in the context of a regional setting, “a country with a big population might produce vast output and held a large army, but it also may bear massive welfare and security burdens that drain its wealth and bog down its military, leaving it with few resources for power projection abroad” (Beckley, 2018). That means the relationship between global power and regional power is aimed to establish the balance of power or a balance of threat. However, the balance of power remains the key influencer in international relations, even often referred to as the “balancing act between the East and the West” in South Asia. It is vital for economic and trade decisions, alliance politics, international and collective cooperation, multilateralism, and domestic politics. As states compete to project their national power, political decision-making and rational strategic choices require precision in understanding and measuring “limits of power” and “limits of interdependence” between the global and regional powers. This precise understanding can enable a realist political mind to undertake “vital decisions regarding grand strategy, alliance commitments, economic policy, military procurement, and the use of force hinge on estimates of relative power” (Beckley, 2018).

However, in the post-pandemic South Asia, the rising vacuum in power relations at the regional level, both for the perceived hegemon and the regional states, creates multifaceted tensions that accentuate a political and economic space for the presence of counter-balancers. The regional countries, then, “do not usually feel threatened” by an extra-balancer, and “they often seek its support” of external powers (Levy & Thompson, 2010). Perhaps, the counter-balancers or even the “counter-regional balancers” do not provoke “balancing coalitions against themselves” (Mearsheimer, 2001). That creates a space for the relative rise of new regional powers and a relative decline and strategic uncertainty for the existing regional power equation. Shiffrinson (2020) would argue that “as some states undergo a relative rise in power and others a relative decline, strategic uncertainty can increase; windows of opportunity or vulnerability may open and close; and patterns of cooperation and competition can change in terms of resources, specifically national resources and military assets” (Shiffrinson, 2020). Here, the argument is compelling that the new regional powers would offer political stability and economic growth to indicate wealth and well-calibrated relations with major powers as their strategic assets. Hence, these new powers can offer strategic deterrence to the major powers.

For this article, two countries of South Asia can be examined – Bangladesh and Sri Lanka as rising South Asian powers, and two major contending global powers – the U.S. and China that are setting the geo-economics and geostrategic courses in international political structure. The article asks a recent strategic question: How can the interlinked complex relations among Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the U.S., and China shape the waters of the Bay of Bengal in the coming



years? I take Bangladesh and Sri Lanka as the rising powers, given their ongoing political stability as a constant variable and the interests of the U.S. and China in engaging with these two countries through strategic, economic, and political prisms. Bangladesh and Sri Lanka offer access to the Bay of Bengal, an Indo-Pacific pivot crucial for the US-China naval and maritime interests. Interestingly, Bangladesh sees the Indo-Pacific as a source of common economic resource for the region even though the overall Indo-Pacific is emerging as a source of tension among significant powers. As Ross noted, “In contests between maritime and continental powers, the maritime power consistently responds to the emergent threat with resources sufficient to maintain supremacy. The continental power, on the other hand, unable to resolve its land border insecurity, cannot approach military parity with the maritime power” (Ross, 2009). Hence, the contest over the waters of the Indo-Pacific will continue to grow to exert either “naval nationalism” or “resource power” in which Bangladesh and Sri Lanka will continue to be a party.

THE GEOPOLITICS OF TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: RISE OF BANGLADESH AND SRI LANKA

South Asia witnessed three critical old fashioned geopolitical overtures over the past five years – the Doklam crisis that has reset the course of China-India strategic relations, a massive influx of refugees from Myanmar to Bangladesh redefining Bangladesh’s relations with the regional and international powers, and the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan that has fundamentally altered the geopolitics of Central-South Asian politics in and around Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka presented new-fashioned geopolitical determinants beyond the old-fashioned ones. After all, countries that rely on the market, multilateralism, and stable liberal capitalism are expected to rise as a regional power. The new geopolitics of the twenty-first century relies on economic development, technological advancement, and sound regional governance. That means, learning from the experiences of conservative political systems, it would be “too uncreative and unproductive to compete economically and militarily with liberal states or major powers. Their political regimes are also shaky since no social form other than liberal democracy or economic empowerment provides enough freedom and dignity for a contemporary society to remain stable” (Mead, 2014). Henceforth, rather than focusing on the misperception of ‘security,’ these two countries defined security in the context of development, social stability, and common regional stability.

Bangladesh emerged as a country that has remained politically stable so far, offering multilateral and bilateral economic and strategic resources to China and the U.S., allowing collective security and benefits for the region. Bangladesh remains the top trading partner of India in the region. Bangladesh’s import from China allows its export markets to benefit from cheaper goods. Its demographic resilience has helped keep the economy comparatively stable during and post-pandemic, along with its impressive human development indicators that have allowed foreign direct investment to grow. The United Nations Committee for



Development Policy (CDP) has confirmed that Bangladesh is eligible to exit from the Least Developed Country category, having crossed the threshold of three defining criteria, namely per capita GNI, Economic and Environmental Vulnerability Index (EVI), and Human Assets Index (HAI) (Bhattacharya, 2021). However, given the COVID-19 pandemic and taking note of a request by the Bangladesh government, the graduation year was deferred by two years, i.e., in 2026 (Bhattacharya, 2021).

Bangladesh's economic success and political stability have made it confident to seek increased participation in international trade and foster international strategic ties. The World Bank projects, "In Bangladesh, the recovery [pandemic] is expected to be gradual, with the growth of 3.6% in F.Y. 2020/21, which starts in July, and 5.1% in F.Y. 2021/22, as private consumption is supported by normalizing activity, moderate inflation, and rising garment exports" (The World Bank, 2021). Moreover, as part of its effort to ensure regional economic stability during the pandemic, the country has entered into an agreement with the Sri Lankan government for providing a bilateral loan in the form of a currency swap (The Daily Star, 2021). Such an initiative clarifies that the country has emerged as an influential regional power and increasingly becoming a critical factor in the Indo-Pacific region (Brewster, 2021). In the case of Sri Lanka, quite remarkably, three high ranking officials from Moscow, Beijing, and Washington (Chinese Foreign Minister and State Councillor Wang Yi and Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, the U.S. Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Alice Wells) visited Colombo on January 13, 2020 – to establish initial outreach to the new Rajapaksa dispensation in Sri Lanka (Khan, The New Geopolitical Reality in the Bay of Bengal: Implications of Competition and Cooperation on Bangladesh-Sri Lanka Bilateral Relations., 2020). The timing and sequence broadly underscored each of their growing focus on Colombo (Khan, The New Geopolitical Reality in the Bay of Bengal: Implications of Competition and Cooperation on Bangladesh-Sri Lanka Bilateral Relations., 2020). The US and China are essential partners in Bangladesh and the Sri Lankan political economy of national development and social stability.

REGIONAL POWER OUTLOOK: THE POWER FULCRUM IMPERATIVES

The waters between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka – hence the Bay of Bengal, became a critical factor with the rise of the US-backed Indo-Pacific strategic vocabulary that surfaced over the past few years. The Chinese-led magnum opus – the Belt Road Initiative (BRI) – collided with the Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) as both the initiatives have maritime and naval components as their integral objectives. The classic offensive realism fits in here. Hence, a growing narrative among the I.R. scholars in both countries seems to question the robustness and clarity of the Indo-Pacific Strategy and BRI's economic contents. Thus, the Bay has grown as an economic flashpoint and is increasingly becoming a geostrategic pivot. Hence, the domestic dimension of the U.S. and Chinese engagement with Bangladesh and Sri Lanka gradually became integrated with the IPS and the BRI dimensions.



Bangladesh has converted the Bay of Bengal, after peacefully resolving maritime disputes with India and Myanmar through the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) and the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA), as a significant investment bloc for the international community while retaining absolute 'strategic autonomy' and 'control' over its maritime territory. To ensure strategic autonomy, the armed forces have initiated diverse defence advancement and procurement strategy, attracting major powers to invest in Bangladesh's defence market. The Government of India and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) jointly undertook a research expedition to discover accumulations of natural gas hydrate in its maritime territory in July 2016. The expedition was comprised of scientists and representatives of Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited of India, the USGS, the Japan Drilling Company, and the Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology (Sarkar, 2020) (USGS, 2016). On the other hand, the Australian company Woodside Energy discovered gas off the coast of Myanmar (January 2016) in blocks shared with Myanmar Petroleum Resources and French oil major Total. A month later, Woodside made another gas discovery in a block operated by Daewoo International of Korea (Shin, 2016).

After settling the disputes with India and Myanmar, Bangladesh has a total number of 48 gas blocks. Of these, 22 are onshore, and 26 are offshore blocks. Of the offshore blocks, 11 are shallow blocs, while the remaining 15 are deep-sea blocks (The Financial Express, 2020). The U.S. companies produce over 55 percent of Bangladesh's domestic natural gas supply and are among the largest investors in power projects. The US-made power turbines currently provide 80 percent of Bangladesh's installed gas-fired power generation capacity (export.gov, 2018). In March 2017, without public tender, the government and state-run Petrobangla signed a Production Sharing Contract with POSCO Daewoo Corporation of South Korea for oil and gas exploration in deep-sea block 12 (export.gov, 2018). On February 17, 2014, India's largest international oil and gas E&P company ONGC Videsh (OVL), signed a Production Sharing Contract (PSC) with Bangladesh for two shallow-water exploration blocks SS-09 & SS-04 in the Bay of Bengal of Bangladesh (Offshore Energy, 2014). Australian Santos and Singapore's KrisEnergy jointly carried out a 3D seismic survey in block SS11 to explore hydrocarbon resources (The Financial Express, 2018).

While the Bay has become an open channel for investment, it has become a corridor for the IPS and BRI supply chain and maritime movements – ideally an alternate to the Chinese Malacca syndrome. The Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Myanmar in 2020, focusing on China-Myanmar Economic Corridor under B.R. projects, the Maldives and Sri Lanka in 2014, Pakistan in 2015, and Bangladesh in 2016 to sign BRI agreement, Nepal in 2019 and India in 2014, 2016, and 2019. In turn, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited China five times between 2014 and 2019 (Khan, The New Geopolitical Reality in the Bay of Bengal: Implications of Competition and Cooperation on Bangladesh-Sri Lanka Bilateral Relations., 2020). The Chinese government, under its flagship BRI, has initiated a deep-sea port at Kyaukphyu (Myanmar) on the Bay of Bengal, a railway project to connect the southwestern Chinese



province of Yunnan to Myanmar's coastal cities, an inland waterway through the Irrawaddy River and a mega-hydropower dam project are either stalled or making little progress (Yhome, 2020). Much of the investments in Myanmar are viewed as Beijing's securing footprint in the Bay.

Parallel to the Chinese investments, India completed the construction of a seaport and the inland water terminal in Sittwe, Rakhine State in Myanmar. This forms part of the US\$ 484 million Kaladan multi-modal transit transport project mooted in 2008, linking Kolkata Port (India) to Sittwe (Chern, 2019). Despite the Chinese and Indian efforts to build connectivity, the fact remains that the intra-regional connectivity among the BIMSTEC and SAARC countries remain absolutely below any rational level: while world exports in 2017 stood at around US\$ 17.8 trillion, rising from around \$ 16.1 trillion in the previous year, South Asian total trade is about 2.7% of the 'global trade (Khan, *The New Geopolitical Reality in the Bay of Bengal: Implications of Competition and Cooperation on Bangladesh-Sri Lanka Bilateral Relations.*, 2020). At present, intra-regional trade contributes only 5% of South Asia's total trade compared to 25% in ASEAN (The World Bank, 2021). It is 20% cheaper for India to trade with Brazil than Pakistan (Dasgupta, 2018). That shows that the regional connectivity, in which India plays a vital geographical role in terms of facilitating intra-regional trade, is inefficient compared to Southeast Asian countries. Bangladesh has embarked on developing Chittagong economic corridor and subsequently enhanced deep-sea port facilities toward the Bay and the Indo-Pacific. In this endeavour, Japan and China play critical roles as investors in infrastructure and market facilitators.

Bangladesh's maritime and eastward focus complement Sri Lanka's regional interests linked with harnessing ocean resources, extractions from the seabed, and control over supply chains – both in terms of commercial and strategic. Chinese built Port of Hambantota, situated in the strategic southwestern part of Sri Lanka and right along with the global merchant maritime traffic, dominates the Western discourse of national security and South Asian narrative of Indo-Pacific strategy or worries thereof (Khan, *The New Geopolitical Reality in the Bay of Bengal: Implications of Competition and Cooperation on Bangladesh-Sri Lanka Bilateral Relations.*, 2020). This is perhaps one reason when former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe's vision of positing Sri Lanka as a multi-dimensional hub in the Indian Ocean and consequently floating Sri Lanka's idea of securing the Indian Ocean as a zone of growth and prosperity since 2017 was markedly fraught with ambivalence by 'QUAD' which may have become a fragile coalition after the rise of a better equipped Indo-Pacific tri-lateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States (AUKUS). However, the Sri Lanka government has diversified its strategic investment portfolio, allowing Japan and India to invest in crucial areas.

The Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA) signed a Memorandum of Cooperation (MOC) to jointly develop the East Container Terminal (ECT) of the Colombo Port, next to the Chinese-run



container jetty in Colombo harbour. India and Japan will likely deepen and develop this facility to allow large container ships to enter seamlessly (Khan, *The New Geopolitical Reality in the Bay of Bengal: Implications of Competition and Cooperation on Bangladesh-Sri Lanka Bilateral Relations.*, 2020). Indian ports such as Vizhinjam and Colachel are entering the logistics chain. Two trans-shipment ports, the Vallarpadam port in Cochin and the under-construction Vizhinjam port in Trivandrum, are already in existence. The proposed Colachel port would be the third major trans-shipment port in the region. The logic of competing with Colombo port was used while building the Vallarpadam trans-shipment port at Cochin and in clearing the Vizhinjam trans-shipment port in Trivandrum (Jamwal, 2017). The Western powers, including Australia and the U.S., have sought to counter-balance China's growing influence across the region by launching their infrastructure funds, e.g., US\$ 113 million U.S. fund announced in August 2018 for the digital economy, energy, and infrastructure projects (Jeffrey, 2019).

While the balance and counter-balance efforts continued, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka continued to focus on domestic priorities. Bangladesh's foreign policy measured two challenges: (a) renewed potential for an escalated arms race and military engagement; and (b) strategic conflicts between BRI and IPS. These two dynamics are further linked with the Chinese Maritime Silk Route (MSR) that aspires to build alternative maritime governance rules and norms than the Western-led existing maritime governance systems, and international seabed authority's approval to allow exploration of polymetallic nodules, polymetallic sulphides, and cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts from the deep seabed. The exploration area will include the Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone, Central Indian Ocean Basin, and Western Pacific Ocean (International Seabed Authority, 2021). The contracts will eventually pave the way for unmanned competition for deep-sea exploration in the Indo-Pacific waters having strategic and geopolitical fallouts. Given these past, present, and future changes and assessing the capabilities of the regional countries, calibrating strategic relations with and balancing relations between Beijing and Washington has become vital priorities. Henceforth, the whole approach to the great power game has made Bangladesh and Sri Lanka emerging power fulcrums in the Bay of Bengal region over the past five years.

Reflecting on the geopolitical environment and economic priorities of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, it's clear that these two countries have provided robust opportunities for the major powers to invest in economic spheres. Both the countries have prioritized multilateralism and sought to maintain regional stability without being defence heavy. As seen earlier in this paper, the Bay of Bengal has become a critical factor for the major powers due to power competition among the major powers in the Indo-Pacific. While the traditional geopolitical sphere is important for Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, i.e., China and U.S.'s interests and presence in the region, non-traditional issues such as maritime piracy, climate change, pollution, illegal fishing, unmanned vessel movements, and human and narcotics trafficking through sea routes are the pressing issues that require regional solutions. In this interaction between



traditional and non-traditional security issues, historically, India has seen itself as the natural leader of the adjoining ocean that even carries its own name (Singh, 2018). While itself having a cartographic crisis with Nepal, border crisis with China and Pakistan, and mounting domestic pressures rising from the ultra-rights, India's perceived role as "net security provider," often backed by its diaspora, now requires strategic, economic, and political supports from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to sustain (Singh, 2018) (Kathmandu Post, 2020). Nonetheless, Singh (2018) rightly argued, "yet, neither historically nor now has India's assumed dominance been to the exclusion of the part played by other nations, most notably from outside the region. The arrival of China, however, sets this international context in a totally different light" (Singh, 2018).

Given the role of Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and India, then need to call for greater cooperation through existing regional settings in which Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, Myanmar, and Thailand are already stakeholders. What remains imperative is to strengthen the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the only South-Southeast Asian platform – Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), along with newly emerged institution such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). The SAARC comprises of 1.7 billion population, which is equivalent to 21% of the world's population, covers 3% of the world's area and 4.21% (US\$3.67 trillion) of the global economy (International Monetary Fund, 2019). BIMSTEC covers around 1.5 billion people and constitutes around 22% of the global population, with a combined gross domestic product (GDP) of 2.7 trillion (BIMSTEC, 2021). These two regions combined present the possibility of becoming a US\$10 trillion economy over the next decade. Modern technologies and economic opportunities, changing consumer attitudes, aging, women empowerment, and pandemic impacts are rapidly diversifying and segmenting the markets in these two regions (McKinsey Global Institute, 2021). Therefore, reforming SAARC and BIMSTEC, taking the business chambers and private sector on board, is necessary to deliver better regional cooperation.

What it means is that the regional power fulcrum has two dimensions – national strength and regional cooperation. Bangladesh has entered strategic dialogues with the U.S. and U.K. It has strategic partnerships with China and India. It has diversified its defence cooperation beyond binary Sino-US orbits, paving ways for an open and free Bay of Bengal. Therefore, these countries must manage more effectively this shared maritime domain (Hardy, 2019). Among these three countries, Bangladesh acts as a security provider to the Bay of Bengal, Burmese Rohingyas, Indian Northeast, regional economy, and overall, to the world as the largest peacekeeper in the U.N. missions. It, too, shows that the power fulcrum has significantly shifted. What is needed for these three countries, then, to allow regional cooperation to thrive and focus on the sustainable use of the ocean within the framework of the blue economy as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka see. As Hussain et al. identified, "the Bay is still at an emergent stage and there would undoubtedly be gains if the various states can agree



priorities and joint development. The preparation, for instance, of a zoning plan for the Bay would maximize yields on a sustainable basis” (Hussain, Failler, & A Al Karim, 2018).

In line with Hussain et al.’s arguments, the Bay should be seen through the prism of transparency and equitable governance. Larkin (2016) identified that “over the next decade, the market-driven explosion of surveillance sensors and data analytics will bring an unprecedented level of transparency to maritime affairs. Commercial satellites will capture daily images of the entire globe, offering inexpensive and automated reports on everything from crop yields to maritime activity” (Larkin, 2016). Therefore, it will be only rational to pursue an open and transparent Bay policy in the coming years. This transparency policy will be crucial for stability in South Asia, the Bay of Bengal region, and beyond. *Ceteris paribus*, the blurring space between geopolitics and geoeconomics, attests that Bangladesh is gradually, if not already, assuming political and economic leadership in the region (Khan, *The Bangladesh-US Bilateral Relations: Rethinking through the Blurring Space between Geopolitics and Geoeconomics in the Indo-Pacific Region*, 2021). While many developing countries have trumpeted balancing acts between superpowers, in most cases, the political economy did not meet the rhetoric, and the geostrategic conundrum gave way to compromises with either East or West. Bangladesh has shown an independent international stance (Khan, *The New Geopolitical Reality in the Bay of Bengal: Implications of Competition and Cooperation on Bangladesh-Sri Lanka Bilateral Relations.*, 2020). This is a classic example that must be factored in after reviewing the US-Chinese policies toward the Bay and the region (Khan, *The New Geopolitical Reality in the Bay of Bengal: Implications of Competition and Cooperation on Bangladesh-Sri Lanka Bilateral Relations.*, 2020).

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A NEW DISCOURSE OF RELIABILITY AND ALLIANCE?

In the economic realm, further strengthening the great power involvements within the Indo-Pacific context would mean ensuring a rule-based system that will deliver economic goods to the Indo-Pacific countries, whereas, in the strategic realm, Indo-Pacific cooperation would mean strengthening Bangladesh and Sri Lanka’s strategic autonomy in the Bay of Bengal through economic, technological, and institutional cooperation. This will have a positive economic spill over effect on its neighbouring countries too. Bangladesh is aware that negotiating Beijing’s role in the Indo-Pacific will be no option. However, some Indo-Pacific states may seek U.S. help to preserve their strategic interests in the face of China’s rise (Campbell & Doshi, 2021) (Khan, *The New Geopolitical Reality in the Bay of Bengal: Implications of Competition and Cooperation on Bangladesh-Sri Lanka Bilateral Relations.*, 2020). As discussed in this article, what is needed for all these four countries is to review the level of “alliance reliability” from their perspectives under this evolving and complex situation.

The ‘reliability’ factor has become a critical issue in foreign policymaking, public perception toward the powers, and political behaviour in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. With the growth of modern



technologies and shifts in demography, acceptability, and political implication of ‘tilt’ toward a power has become a fundamental concern for the political leadership, at least in Bangladesh. As a result, the reliability on a major power will depend on “the relative value of particular interests and the manner in which the interests should be pursued” (Henry, 2020). Given the histories of the U.S. strategic engagement in South Asia or the Sri Lankan experiences with the Chinese investment, the most critical manifestation of a dependable ally is that “it does not pose a risk of abandonment or entrapment” (Hardy, 2019). However, it does not automatically mean that the allies will have to agree on all the issues, but the magnitude of convergence and divergence of interests should be synchronized with national and regional stability.

Therefore, this article has advanced the debate about the rise of new regional powers and their dilemmas with the major powers involved in the Indo-Pacific region. Bangladesh and Sri Lanka’s presence in the Indo-Pacific has paved a new strategic power play that has gone unnoticed in media optics. In contrast, these two countries have emerged as a critical source of stability in the region. While the U.S. may argue on the political front that the Chinese are challenging the liberal order, but it will be hard to use this argument in South Asia with the rise of new forms of political practices – fundamentally different than liberal democracy to a great extent. On the other hand, the Chinese narrative that the U.S. is distorting the regional stability is relatively weak. Regional stability is linked mainly with domestic politics than regional interests. South Asian countries expose a classic example of an absence of regional consensus on the basic principles of trade, investment, and connectivity, let alone political cooperation, as evident from intra-regional trade. Henceforth, China’s relationship to international and regional orders is a reality; the U.S. projection of power in the Indo-Pacific will continue to grow is another set of reality. Amid these two sets of structures, the Bay of Bengal can potentially offer a ‘stability buffer’ shall ‘alliance reliability’ be used accurately. This will require strengthening the regional institutions, establishing regional norms and governance regimes, and an inclusive approach to regional traditional and non-traditional security issues. At the end of the day, the global economic system will continue to remain highly interdependent, despite future pandemics or catastrophes of any form, and the Indo-Pacific will serve as a crucial pivotal in facilitating and sustaining international economy and human connectivity across the world.

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CAN THE ISLAMIC STATE - KHORASAN PROVINCE RESURRECT THE CALIPHATE IN AFGHANISTAN?

Asif Fuard

ABSTRACT

Following major losses and military setbacks in Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria's (ISIS) Afghan affiliate – Islamic State of Khorasan Province (IS-K) shows signs of gaining momentum in Afghanistan by exploiting the political uncertainty and volatile security environment in the country, in a bid to achieve its goal of resurrecting their so-called 'Caliphate'. In recent times, IS-K has been conducting a steady drive of radicalisation and recruitment of the local Afghan population, while engaging in building key alliances with Salafi Jihadist militant groups in the Central and South Asian region, while competing against the Afghan Taliban who are currently dominating the Jihadist landscape in Afghanistan. IS-K has also been attracting large numbers of foreign fighters to Afghanistan, which could become the new battleground to resurrect the so-called Islamic State Caliphate. Following the defeat of ISIS in multiple theatres of conflict which led to the group losing territory in Iraq and Syria, the transnational terror group has maintained resilience by evolving through its affiliates which are spread across the globe. This paper will detail the regional security implications of the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan following the withdrawal of troops attached to the United States of America (USA) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which will once again lead to the war-battered nation evolving into a hub for transnational terrorism. This study is qualitative research which uses both primary and secondary data to empirically analyse the trajectory followed by IS-K, based on the unfolding events in Afghanistan and the region. This paper will provide an in-depth analysis on the factors leading to the resurrection of the Islamic State caliphate in Afghanistan.

Key Words: Islamic State of Khorasan Province (IS-K), Taliban, Al-Qaeda, Afghanistan

INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the Taliban annexing control over vast territory in Afghanistan and overthrowing the Kabul regime of President Ashraf Ghani, the war-battered nation is once again on the verge of transcending into a hub of global terrorism and Jihadist militancy. The unfolding events in Afghanistan, stemming from a hasty withdrawal of troops from United States of America (USA) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), has paved the path



for a resurgence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria's (ISIS) Afghan affiliate group – Islamic State of Khorasan (IS-K) province, which has been resilient despite being on the edge of defeat.

The so-called IS-K Province or Wilayat currently poses the potential to transcend from being a mere self-styled province of the Islamic State into a new Caliphate, which would wield central authority over the organization and its many Jihadist networks across the globe. As ISIS continuously loses leaders, combatants, and territory in Iraq and Syria, many of their foreign combatants and affiliate Jihadist groups have looked towards migrating to the Afghan-Pakistan region, which has provided a conducive operational environment for many foreign Jihadists.

Afghanistan is home to three of the most lethal terrorist groups in the world – Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and the ISIS affiliate is known as IS-K, which has continued to dominate the global terrorism landscape by contributing to most of the annual terrorism-related deaths. According to the Global Terrorism Index, Afghanistan has surpassed Iraq as the country which has been most affected by terrorism in the world during the past two years (Global Terrorism Index, 2019; Global Terrorism Index, 2020). By 2018, IS-K had become one of the top four deadliest terrorist organizations in the world, according to the Global Terrorism Index published by the Institute for Economics and Peace.

The instability and conflict that has engulfed Afghanistan has created an ideal opportunity for IS-K to expand its strategic, operational, ideological, and territorial reach in the region. In recent times, IS-K has gained control of pockets of territory in Nangahar and Kunar province, which is located between the Afghan-Pakistan border, while infiltrating many other provinces, as well as local Jihadist militant groups operating in the region.

The resurrection of an Islamic State Caliphate in Afghanistan will signal a shift in the centre of gravity of the terror group's strategic operations, which was previously based in Iraq and Syria. The rapid rise of IS-K will pose grave national security threats to all Central and South Asian countries, which could become frequent targets for future Jihadist terror attacks.

THE ISIS CORE (CENTRAL) AND THE AFFILIATES

Ever since the erstwhile ISIS leader, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi declared the formation of an Islamic State or the so-called 'Caliphate' in 2014, the organisation began to expand its territorial control and regional influence by establishing self-styled provinces known as Wilayats in conflict zones, which display characteristics of political instability, internal conflict, and the lack of governmental control (Masi, 2015). The Islamic State describes its affiliates as 'provinces' (Wilayat) because it views these so-called provinces that are spread across the globe, as part of their aspirations of creating a pan-Islamic state known as the Caliphate. The



formation of Wilayats provides a strategic advantage for ISIS to influence the local and regional dynamics of an internal conflict, through its ideology, propaganda, terror tactics, military successes, and territorial control.

To comprehend the global influence of ISIS and its ability to evolve through its affiliates, despite military losses, it is essential to understand how a Caliphate and a Wilayat are framed by the group. The so-called ISIS Caliphate is a singular pseudo-state administration modelled based on the Ottoman Empire and the Abbasid Dynasty which annexed several nations less than one banner. A Wilayat is an administrative province that comes under the governance structure of a Caliphate, which is controlled by groups that have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and its Caliph (leader) (Dabiq, 2015; Rahmani and Tanco, 2016).

According to ISIS propaganda, Jihadists groups within a designated locality should appoint a Governor (Wali), a religious leadership council (Shura) and provide a military strategy in-line with the group's core principles, while enforcing the ISIS version of Sharia law in the respective regions that are under the affiliate group's control (Dabiq, 2015). In return, ISIS Central will provide military, financial, logistical, and most importantly propaganda support to a Wilayat. Therefore, Wilayats or ISIS provinces, which are in weak and ungoverned areas of a country, can be described as territorial claims made by ISIS to further its ambitions of creating a global caliphate (Gunaratna and Hornell-Scott, 2016).

During the height of the ISIS global reign of terror in 2016, the organisation had 35 Wilayat or self-proclaimed provinces, with 19 provinces located in Syria and Iraq (Al-Hashimi, 2020). According to a 2016 communique issued by ISIS, the group maintained a centralized command and control structure of its 19 internal provinces located within Iraq and Syria, which was the group's primary theatre of operations. These 19 internal provinces had established administrative ministries within Iraq and Syria to execute and coordinate operations at the discretion of its central leadership (Al-Hashimi, 2020). However, most ISIS affiliates that were located outside of the Middle Eastern region were decentralised and maintained operational independence. As ISIS continued to expand in Iraq and Syria, the terror group controlled over 100,000 square kilometers of territory with a population of nearly 12 million under its control (Jones, Dobbins, Byman, Chivvis, Connable, Martini, Robinson and Chandler, 2016).

ISIS has demonstrated its ability to survive through its affiliates that are spread across the globe, despite the fall of their final territorial stronghold in Al-Baghuq Fawqani and the subsequent death of the terror group's leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in 2019. The ability to franchise the ideological brand of ISIS to existing Jihadist terror groups that are spread across the globe has empowered the group to expand its global footprint while maintaining resilience amidst military defeats and operational setbacks. The emergence of ISIS affiliate



groups has added a new dimension to existing protracted internal conflicts, by aligning with the Islamic State's transnational Salafi Jihadist ideology.

Currently, the most active external ISIS Wilayats or affiliates that maintain operational autonomy are: Islamic State - West Africa Province (ISWAP), Islamic State - Central Africa Province, Islamic State - Greater Sahara (at times the affiliate follows commands and directives from ISWAP), Islamic State - Sinai Province (Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis), Islamic State – Algeria Province (Jund al-Khilafah – Algeria and Tunisia), Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (Indonesia), ISIS affiliates in Philippines (Maute group, Abu Sayyaf, Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters and Ansar Khalifa Philippines), Islamic State – Yemen Province, Islamic State - Libya and Islamic State - Khorasan Province (Afghan-Pakistan border region) (Warner, O' Farrell, Nsaibia and Cummings, 2020; Rahmani and Tanco, 2016; The Soufan Center, 2021)

Amongst many of the ISIS Wilayata, the Islamic State's Khorasan province (IS-K) has been the most resilient, as well as the most lethal affiliate amongst the Islamic State franchises. IS-K is currently able to merge the internal conflict in Afghanistan and regional conflicts such as the insurgencies in Jammu and Kashmir and the Uyghur insurgency in the Xinjiang province in China, under one ideological banner. The loss of terrain and the death of ISIS leaders does not signal the defeat of the terror group, as it has proven to be able to maintain its ideological and operational influence through its affiliates and cells which are spread across the globe. The ability to infiltrate and control pockets of territory within the Afghan-Pakistan border region will create a conducive space for the resurrection of a new Islamic State Caliphate.

Despite being weakened significantly since 2018, IS-Khorasan Province has maintained resilience by continuing to recruit new combatants, while conducting several deadly attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan during recent times. A 2018 report by the UN Security Council, sheds light on the global threat posed by IS-K. The report had stated that ISIS core was continuing to facilitate the relocation of many of its foreign terrorist fighters (FTF) who are "nationals of Algeria, France, the Russian Federation, Tunisia and Central Asian States to Afghanistan, as the group had been continuing to lose territory and combatants in Iraq and Syria" (UN Security Council, 2018). Abu Qutaiba, the ISIS leader in Salah al-Din province of Iraq, who had reportedly relocated to Badakhshan province of Afghanistan, was among the prominent ISIS leaders that had migrated because of the group's dwindling territorial control in Iraq, and Syria at the time (UN Security Council, 2018).

The most recent growing threat from IS-K was addressed in a report submitted in July 2021 to the President of the UN Security Council by the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team. The report stated that, "despite territorial, leadership, manpower and financial losses during 2020 in Kunar and Nangarhar Provinces, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (IS-K) has moved into other provinces, including Nuristan, Badghis, Sari Pul, Baghlan, Badakhshan, Kunduz and Kabul, where fighters have formed sleeper cells." The



report went on to further elaborate that IS-K has strengthened its positions in and around Kabul, where it conducts most of its attacks, targeting minorities, activists, government employees and personnel of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (UN Security Council, 2021).

The Jihadist landscape in Afghanistan and the border regions of Pakistan have been fertile grounds for Islamist extremism and terrorism, which has led to the emergence of many Islamist terrorist networks over the years. Due to the multiple terrorist organisations linked to both local and global Salafi Jihadist ideology, many jihadist militants have frequently migrated between terror groups and such a jihadist migration will set the foundation for the formation of key alliances. Alliances, fractionalization, and migration of Jihadists could play a pivotal role in reshaping the transnational agenda of IS-K. The current deterioration of the security conditions in Afghanistan and its effect on the region has created a path for the migration of jihadist combatants from across the globe to join IS-K.

According to Dr. Arian Sharifi (former Director, National Threat Assessment, Office of National Security Council of Afghanistan), there are five key reasons for IS-K to become the next chapter of the war in Afghanistan (Observer Research Foundation, 2020):

1. The history of the growth: Individual aspirations drove fighters from abroad to converge and join the movement in Afghanistan.
2. Ideology as a driving force: The belief of building a political system based on Islamist fundamentalism still exists among the Afghan population.
3. A mechanism for unifying groups: IS-K provides a mechanism for most of the groups to prosper under one umbrella.
4. An alternative to the Taliban: Hardliners among the Taliban find a new resort in the objectives of the IS-K.
5. IS-K as a Pak-phenomena: According to Dr. Sharifi, Pakistan has unleashed a proxy force in Afghanistan parallel to the Taliban (Sharifi, 2020).

Based on Dr. Sharifi's assessment, the recent rise of IS-K will have a transnational implication to South and Central Asian countries, which will be grappling with the aftermath of the U.S. withdrawal and the Taliban takeover of the country. Since Afghanistan provides a conducive environment for IS-K to maintain territorial control and recruits, while having the ability to rapidly regenerate the loss of combatants, the region will become the latest battleground for the expansion of the Islamic State Caliphate.

The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, bears the hallmarks of previous foreign military withdrawals such as the U.S.S.R. withdrawal from Afghanistan (1988-1989) which led to the country emerging as a hub for Jihadist terrorism; the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam which led to a new phase in the conflict following the fall of Saigon (1975); and the U.S. withdrawal in Iraq which eventually created a space for the emergence of ISIS to establish a so-called



Caliphate by controlling vast territory in Iraq and Syria (2011). As seen in the past, U.S. troop withdrawals were often political considerations which were based on the sentiments of the American public and its political elite, and not based on security and strategic considerations. The implications of a hasty U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the U.S. dependence on the Taliban as a partner in peace following the 2020 U.S.-Taliban peace deal negotiated in Doha, will inevitably create new global threats stemming from the Islamic State terrorism brand, which could draw many countries in the region into the conflict, while posing serious threats to U.S. and its allies (Hoffman and Ware, 2021).

RESILIENCE AND RESURRECTION OF IS-KHORASAN (IS-K)

The ISIS threat in the Afghan-Pakistan border region was first reported in a classified intelligence assessment which was disseminated to the top brass of the Pakistani defence establishment in October 2014. The intelligence report warned that ISIS had formed a ten-member Strategic Planning Wing, with the aim of attacking members of the minority communities, military installations, and government buildings, in retaliation for Operation Zarb-e-Azb counter-insurgency campaign, launched by the Pakistani military against Jihadist strongholds in North Waziristan (Akbar, 2016). Many Jihadist militant groups that operate within the Khyber Region and Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, which is located between the Afghan-Pakistan border, eventually pledged allegiance to the ISIS leader. As the new IS-K wilayat began to gain momentum, the Jihadist networks based in Nuristan, Kunar, Kandahar, Khost, Paktia, Paktika, Ghazni, Wardak, Helmand, Kunduz, Logar, and Nangarhar provinces in Afghanistan also pledged their allegiance to the Islamic State (Dabiq, 2015).

The new IS-K wilayat eventually gained territorial control in Kunar, Nangarhar and Jowzan provinces, while simultaneously attracting many disenfranchised mid-level Afghan Taliban commanders and foreign fighters from Iraq and Syria (BBC, 2021; CSIS, 2018; Mines and Jadoon, 2020). During the months to follow in 2015, IS-K placed itself in a ruthlessly formidable position by beheading Taliban leaders and combatants, while simultaneously launching coordinated attacks against minority groups (Shias, Sikhs, and Hazaras) and government targets in major cities across Afghanistan and Pakistan. The ungoverned and contested spaces in the Afghan-Pakistan border region, which includes Nangarhar and Kunar provinces, provided a haven for IS-K jihadists to hold territory while conducting low-level insurgency.

As a result of the emergence of IS-K challenging the Jihadist hegemony maintained by the Taliban in the region and the group poaching Taliban combatants, a rivalry emerged between the two groups. The battle between IS-K and Taliban on territorial power and influenced US to align with the terrorist group and it converted the Taliban to consider IS-K as their new enemy. The emergence of IS-K altered the conflict dynamics in Afghanistan, leading to peace negotiations between the U.S. and the Taliban in Doha, Qatar. According to the Head of the



U.S. Central Command, General Frank McKenzie, on many occasions, the US had provided close air support to assist the Taliban who was engaging IS-K combatants in several parts of Afghanistan (Washington Post, 2020; Williams, 2020). Today, the Taliban which is one of the most brutal terror organisations in the world, has emerged as a political entity, which the U.S. hopes to leverage against transnational Jihadist forces such as Al-Qaida, ISIS and their affiliates, which pose a greater threat to U.S. interests.

IS-K was temporarily weakened because of attacks from the Taliban, Al-Qaida and Haqqani network on one end, and a combined assault by U.S., NATO and Afghan government Special Forces on the other (Mines and Jadoon, 2020). In the wake of the US conducting a historic air-strike at a key IS-K insurgent base located in Achin district, Nangahar Province, by dropping a GBU-43/B Massive Ordnance Air Blast Bomb (MOAB), dubbed as "the mother of all bombs", the group began to face grave setbacks, leading to their operational capabilities in the region significantly decreasing temporarily.

The MOAB was the largest non-nuclear bomb ever dropped in a combat situation, which targeted a network of underground tunnels and caves used by IS-K in the Achin district (BBC, 2017). By 2018, the U.S. and Afghan Special Forces captured a key insurgent stronghold considered as the de facto capital of IS-K Wilayat, located in Deh Bala, Nangarhar province (VOA, 2018; Mines and Jadoon, 2020). Another significant setback for IS-K was when the group lost a large number of combatants, weapons, and territorial control of Jowzjan province, following 2018, Battle for Darzab district between IS-K and the Taliban. In 2019, IS-K was declared defeated by the Afghan government, following the capture of key insurgent strongholds and the surrender of 600 combatants and their families (Reuters, 2019). In 2020, IS-K faced further setbacks following the additional losses of combatants and the capture of the group's leader – Pakistani born – Aslam Farooqi also known as Abdula Orokzai.

Despite being in the throes of defeat, IS-K has been able to forge ahead by conducting low intensity operations, while conducting catastrophic and yet symbolic attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The unparalleled resilience maintained by IS-K surpasses all other Islamic State provinces, as the group has been able to not only survive, but also thrive in the complex jihadist landscape of Afghanistan (Sharifi, 2019).

A testament to the resilience maintained by IS-K can be seen with the group's capability of conducting 77 attacks during the first four months of 2021, which indicates that the threat from the Islamic State's Afghan affiliate can transform into a more potent regional threat (Mir, 2021). The Kabul Airport Attack on August 26, 2021, which killed 183 people including 13 U.S. military personnel that were coordinating a hasty evacuation in the aftermath of the Taliban takeover of Kabul, brought to light IS-K's actual capabilities. The Kabul Airport attack raises alarming questions over the Taliban's ability to counter IS-K, while maintaining 'governmental' control over Afghanistan. Since the Kabul airport attack, IS-K has conducted



a string of suicide bombings on symbolic targets in Afghanistan, in order to bolster the group's image and to maintain its relevance in the regional Jihadist sphere.

Apart from targeting the Taliban by using asymmetric tactics to their advantage in mountainous and urban spaces, IS-K has focused its attention on conducting suicide bombings and attacks on minority communities (Shia and Sufi Muslims), with the aim of exacerbating ethnic and religious divisions. The suicide bombing committed by IS-K on Gozar-e-Sayed Abad, a prominent Shia Mosque in the Afghan city of Kunduz, on October 08, 2021, which killed over 50 and injured 143 Shia Muslims and the Kandahar Shia Mosque suicide bombing, a week later that killed 65 people, clearly demonstrates the terror group, attempting to create a sectarian conflict (The Express Tribune, 2021; Mackenzie, 2021). The pattern followed by IS-K is like the course followed by ISIS Central, that was targeting the Shia community, in order to create a polarizing affect amongst ethnoreligious groups, which eventually made way for a sectarian conflict in Iraq.

The suicide bombers that were used to execute the attacks in the Shia mosques in Kandahar and Kunduz are a part of a much broader narrative of building a perception of symbolism through its attacks. The suicide bombers that targeted the Shia Mosque in Kunduz was identified as an Uyghur Chinese, while one of the Kandahar bombers were identified as an ethnic Baloch from Balochistan, Pakistan (News Week, 2021). The current IS-K strategy is to use suicide bombers who are from regions or ethnic groups that are currently facing insurgency or social injustices, to create a narrative that would appeal to marginalised Muslim communities in South Asia and Central Asia, by portraying an exclusivist image of an Islamic State caliphate being the only solution to their local grievances and local conflicts. As a result, IS-K is currently targeting China by taking advantage of the Balochistan insurgency, which has intensified due to the socioeconomic ramifications resulting from China's belt and road initiative in the region and the country's brutal crackdown on Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang (The Guardian, 2021; The Times of India, 2021).

IS-K is currently leveraging ethnic divisions, which would help the group recruit thousands of Muslims who are faced with persecution, polarisation, economic hardships, and protracted internal conflicts. Previously, a large section of Uyghur insurgents attached to the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) pledged allegiance to ISIS and currently many Uyghur Chinese have joined the ranks of IS-K.

Similarly, Indian nationals were used to conduct a suicide bombing in 2020 at a Sikh temple in Kabul, which killed at least 25 devotees. Both the IS-K militants involved in the attack on the Sikh Temple in Kabul, were identified as Abu Khalid al-Hind and Murshid Mohammed from Kerala (India Today, 2020). The use of an Indian suicide bomber was aimed at appealing to the Indian Muslim audience by projecting the image of persecution of Muslims because of the controversial and discriminatory Indian Citizenship Amendment act, lynch mob violence



against Indian Muslims and the insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir. The use of foreign nationals and persecuted ethnic communities in conducting suicide bombings in the Afghan-Pakistan region will play a significant role in recruiting foreign fighters for IS-K, as it plays a significant role in reinforcing ethnoreligious symbolism to their attacks and portraying local conflict as part of a much larger global cause.

The multiple coordinated suicide bombings that targeted Christian churches and hotels, which took place on Easter Sunday on April 21, 2019 in Sri Lanka, perpetrated by the National Thowheed Jamath (NTJ) – an ISIS inspired homegrown violent extremist group – clearly depicts the convergence between the transnational ISIS ideology and the local ethnoreligious fault lines (Fuard, 2020; Jayaratne, 2019; Solanki, 2019). Such attacks provide an insight into a growing new trend in terrorism, that instils the transnational Islamic State ideology to local conflicts and local grievance, that will plague the South Asian security landscape in the near future.

According to Viraj Solanki (2019), Research Associate for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the 2019 Easter Sunday Bombings in Sri Lanka, “represent a new modus operandi for ISIS in South Asia, consisting of three elements: South Asian citizens returning to the region after joining its ranks in Syria; regional militant groups inspired by the ideology of ISIS, carrying out attacks in its name; and ISIS operating on the ground in South Asia, through provinces such as ISIS-KP (IS-K).” The rise of IS-K will further fuel the rise of inspired networks, lone wolf attackers, autonomous and centralised sleeper cells and new affiliate groups that seek to align themselves with the global Jihadist ideology of building a pan-Islamist caliphate.

An indication of South Asian Muslims who are spread across the world, becoming susceptible to the innovative radicalisation strategies used by ISIS and IS-K to create lone wolf attackers and inspired networks can be seen in the shopping mall knife attack committed in Auckland, New Zealand in September 2021. The ISIS lone wolf was identified as a Sri Lankan national originating from the predominantly Muslim coastal town of Kattankuddy, located in the island’s Eastern Province.

THE TRANSITION TO BECOME A TRANSNATIONAL SALAFI JIHADIST TERRORIST ORGANISATION

The aptitude to project an extreme, transnational, and apocalyptic ideology, along with its capability to govern a de-facto state, which defies national borders, has enabled ISIS to regenerate thousands of foreign fighters who have been killed in combat and inspire a new radical breed of lone wolf terrorists. However, the ideological factor does not solely influence an individual to become an Islamic State terrorist combatant or a lone wolf suicide bomber, who is inspired by the terror groups narratives (Fuard, 2020). There are several factors including security, identity, xenophobia, perceived injustice, persecution, polarization,



perceived threat to ethno-religious or communal identity and even the perception of martyrdom, that plays a pivotal role in influencing an Islamic State combatant's motivation to join the group's "Caliphate" building project (MacLean, 2021; Fuard, 2020; Jayaratne, 2019; Tucker, 2015; Moghadam, 2005).

Currently, South Asia is plagued by both ultranationalist extremism and ethno-religious extremism, leading to polarization and radicalisation, which has empowered IS-K to take advantage of the volatile socio-political environment in the region, while exploiting ethno-religious divisions. The complex Jihadist landscape in Afghanistan, which has become even more volatile with an internal conflict stemming from the Taliban takeover, will create a space for IS-K to further its ambitions of resurrecting the caliphate in the region, by attempting to control territory in ungoverned and weak urban spaces.

The so-called IS-K Province or Wilayat, currently poses the potential to transcend into the central authority of the Islamic State franchise brand, that maintains many affiliates and Jihadist cells under its command structure. According to multiple intelligence sources in Pakistan and India, the operations of the latest IS Wilayat known as Wilayat-e-Hind which focuses on India and Wilayat Pakistan, which focuses on the Pakistan region have been conducting operations directed by IS-K and not ISIS Central as previously believed (Postings, 2019). Intelligence sources indicate that the Wilayat-e-Hind is an extension of IS-K and it focuses on taking advantage of the insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir. Even though, Wilayats or affiliate groups have traditionally maintained operational autonomy, the two Wilayats falling within the South Asian region will inevitably provide greater operational reach and influence for IS-K.

Since 2020, the leadership of IS-Khorasan was taken over by Shahab al-Muhajir who is a former Haqqani Network commander and an experienced strategist in urban warfare. Muhajir, who is originally an Iraqi national, is the first leader of IS-Khorasan to have come from outside of South Asia. Previous IS-K leaders were of Afghan or Pakistani background. Muhajir hailing from Iraq gives him an added advantage, since traditionally Arabs have been respected and considered as mentors and mediators amongst the rural Afghan population, while in the current context he is able to attract large numbers of combatants from ISIS Central who are currently engaged in terror activities in Iraq and Syria to migrate to Afghanistan (Sayed, 2020). It has transpired that Muhajir has been directing his mid-level commanders to conduct welfare and social services activities in areas controlled by IS-K which will further boost the image of its leader. Muhajir has been using many of his ground level commanders to win over tribal leaders in Afghanistan. IS-K will be able to further undermine the Taliban's position of power by engaging in inter-tribal diplomacy and winning over the local population that is disgruntled with a Taliban government. The Kabul Airport Attack, the suicide bombings in Shia mosques and the multiple attacks on Taliban targets, is a clear demonstration of Muhajir using his expertise in urban warfare to conduct coordinated attacks



on symbolic targets, while executing blended tactics in urban battle spaces. His military successes on the battlefield and ability to adapt and execute innovative asymmetric tactics to conduct insurgency will further elevate his stature among the Jihadist leaders in the region.

Colin P. Clarke (2018), a senior political scientist for RAND corporation states that with ISIS Central suffering near annihilation in Iraq and Syria, one of its affiliates could grow to become even more deadly and operationally capable than the core organisation was during its peak in 2015. "With ISIS franchise groups and affiliates across the globe, there is no shortage of contenders to supplant ISIS as the world's most dangerous terrorist group. Many factors could fuel the rise of a new Islamic State (ISIS) offshoot, including the relative weakness of the security forces in the area where the terrorists are operating, so it is difficult to discern which affiliate could become the next major threat," Clarke explains. The current developments in Afghanistan and the regional conflicts in South and Central Asia, currently points to IS-K becoming a strong contender that could evolve into the next transnational Salafi Jihadist terrorist organisation.

The resurrection of the Caliphate in Afghanistan depends on six key factors which policy makers and counterterrorism strategies should consider. The six factors which will play a key role in driving IS-K to establish its caliphate in Afghanistan are:

1. IDEOLOGICAL AND HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE KHORASAN REGION

There are certain Hadiths or Islamic texts which mentions the importance of the historic region known as Khorasan province which includes parts of modern-day Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. IS-K has been distorting the Hadith texts and portraying a misrepresented version of a prophecy which mention about Black Flags emerging from a region known as Khorasan, which signals the end of times and the coming of the Messiah (Prophecies concerning the Mahdi and the second coming of Jesus). Much of these Hadiths have been distorted and exploited to suite the ISIS narrative and their extremist apocalyptic ideology, which has been used time-and-again to justify their cause.

One of many hadith's states, "There will emerge from Khorasan black banners which nothing will repel until they are set up in Jerusalem" (Ahmad in al-Musnad, 855 AD). Many of the Hadiths were written centuries after the death of Prophet Muhammed and the founding of Islam.

Therefore, the historic and ideological significance of this region known as Khorasan is being propagated to rally Jihadist fighters from across the globe to join IS-K's caliphate building project. The historic and religious significance of the Khorasan region also provides ideological legitimacy for the group to conduct its Jihad and justify its reasons to commence a Caliphate building drive in Afghanistan.



2. THE COMPLEX AND DYNAMIC MILITANT LANDSCAPE

IS-K combatants have previously served under groups such as the Afghan Taliban, TTP, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, TNSM, Al-Badr, Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent, LeJ, Tanzeem-e-Eslami, Haqqani Network, Jundullah, LeT, Junddul Khaliffa, Jaish-e-Mohammed and ETIM (Uyghur Chinese). Some of these groups have openly pledged their loyalty to the Islamic State and have also been cooperating with IS-K, even though few other Jihadist terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda, Taliban and a large section of the Haqqani network have been hostile towards the Islamic State affiliate, due to their rivalry over ideology, political differences, resources and territorial control.

Even though there are bitter rivalries amongst certain Jihadist groups, a symbiotic relationship exists, which has helped IS-K to remain resilient over the years. IS-K's strategic alliances with local groups played a significant role in building its capacity and resilience. Many reports have also suggested that a large number of dissatisfied Taliban commanders and combatants have joined IS-K, while a significant section of the present Taliban fighters have viewed IS-K with either sympathy or have covertly supported the group. The complex Jihadist landscape has enabled IS-K to operate freely, with the ability to occupy and control ungoverned spaces in the Kunar and Nangahar provinces.

3. THE INTERNAL CONFLICT LEADING TO A SECURITY VACUUM

As experienced in the past, the current trends of violence will create a vacuum for terrorist groups in the region, including Taliban and IS-K competing to fill the void, by attempting to gain territory and influence over the local population. A large number of foreign fighters that would migrate to Afghanistan will play a crucial role in filling the ranks of IS-K to capitalize on the security vacuum that has been created as a result of the withdrawal of U.S. forces and the lack of a standing Afghan military. Many Pakistani terror groups as well as several regional Jihadist networks have focused their attention on Afghanistan, as the U.S. and NATO withdrawal along with the ensuing internal conflict provides an opportunity for many Jihadist networks to train and operate freely while aligning themselves with either Taliban, Al-Qaida or IS-K which are the most dominant terror organisations operating in the country.

Other than the fact that Taliban, Al-Qaeda and IS-K follow somewhat of a similar Wahhabi ideology, which plays a paramount role in driving Salafi Jihadist terrorism, the three terrorist groups pursue different political goals. The political aspirations of the Afghan Taliban are driven based on their localised objectives that are both Islamist and ultranationalist. The Taliban is driven by the objective of establishing a homegrown Afghan-ultranationalist Islamist state governed under Sharia law, which adhere to the Deobandi Hanafi Islamic school of thought that has stark similarities to Wahhabism. On the other hand, Al-Qaeda's aspirations are based on conducting transnational terror attacks against the U.S. and their



Western allies, for maintaining a military presence and conducting military campaigns in many predominant Islamic countries. Unlike Al-Qaida and the Taliban, ISIS is inspired by an apocalyptic philosophy of governing territory which goes beyond national borders by establishing a so-called “Caliphate” or a Pan-Islamist state governed by strict extremist Wahhabi interpretations of Islam. Currently, the Islamic State or IS-K ideology resonates amongst many marginalised communities that are caught in the middle of internal conflicts.

The Taliban’s battle with the moderate National Resistance Front in the Panjshir Valley region, will further hamper its capabilities in countering IS-K. The National Resistance Front is led by Ahmad Massoud, the son of the legendary Afghan military commander, Ahmad Shah Massoud, who was assassinated by Al-Qaeda suicide bombers on the behest of the Taliban, two days before the 9/11 attacks on the U.S. World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

The Taliban is not a monolithic organisation, and its core consists of many alliances between Jihadist groups such as the Haqqani network and many Jihadist commanders that represent various ethnic and tribal factions. The internal power struggle within the Taliban and disenchantment of mid-level and regional Taliban commanders will create an opportunity for IS-K to emerge into a more dominant position in the region.

4. REGIONAL CONFLICTS AND ETHNORELIGIOUS FAULT LINES

Currently the South Asian region is plagued with militancy and radical ethnoreligious ultranationalism, which has intensified the threats posed by Jihadist and Islamic State inspired groups. Ethnocentric policies and the rise of extremist ethnoreligious ultranationalism in India and Sri Lanka, has created a favorable condition for IS-K to radicalise and recruit individuals from these countries. Similarly, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Maldives have had several of their nationals join ISIS. The current wave of Islamist extremism in the region will further strengthen IS-K’s capabilities of recruiting combatants and potential suicide bombers from the Muslim majority countries in such as Pakistan, Maldives, and Bangladesh, that has experienced a rising tide of ethnoreligious extremism which is intolerant towards minority communities.

The Rohingya refugee crisis in Myanmar and Bangladesh, stemming from the genocide of the Rohingya Muslims, perpetrated by Buddhist extremists in Myanmar will further increase the potential for IS-K recruitment and will open a new conflict theater. The conflict in Jammu and Kashmir, the Uyghur insurgency, Islamist terrorism in Uzbekistan and the insurgency in Pakistan’s tribal regions, will create a larger pool of recruits for IS-K. The terror group will also be able to have a strong presence in Pakistan due to the considerable number of internally displaced Afghans migrating to the border regions of Pakistan as a result of the internal conflict. IS-K is able to regenerate the loss of combatants and leaders by strategically leveraging the current regional conflicts and ethnoreligious fault lines.



5. GEOPOLITICAL INFLUENCES

The internal conflict raging in Afghanistan will become even more complex, with the covert and overt involvement of many foreign state actors. The U.S. and NATO withdrawal has presented an opportunity for China and Russia to enter into the fray in order to take forward their geopolitical ambitions in the region. China and Russia have built key alliances with the Taliban and have engaged in several diplomatic meetings. The Uyghur insurgency spilling over to Afghanistan will create a situation for China to protect its assets and investments in Afghanistan and Pakistan while engaging in counterinsurgency operations in the Afghan-Xinjiang border.

Similarly, Pakistan which has played a leading role in promoting the Taliban, maintains significant influence over its leadership and the conflict dynamics in Afghanistan. The Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI), the premier intelligence agency of Pakistan has maintained close links with a large section of Jihadist leaders in the region and has also been allegedly financing operations of the Haqqani network. Pakistan has also aided the Taliban during its siege in Panjshir Valley in 2021, following a visit to Kabul by senior ISI officials who had discussions with the Taliban.

IS-K will seek to use Afghanistan to launch attacks on India and to intensify the insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir. This will inevitably draw India to the conflict to counter Jihadist militants that threaten India's national security and national interest. As seen in the past, both Pakistan and India, will be engaging in deep covert operations to undermine each other in the region. If the two countries use militant groups and proxy forces to undermine each other's regional influence, IS-K will have the ability to take advantage of the ensuing proxy war.

On the other hand, Iran and Uzbekistan has been maintaining its support to Shia and Uzbek ethnic communities living in Afghanistan. A continuation of attacks on the Shia community living in Afghanistan will draw Iran into the conflict. Uzbekistan is currently fighting IMU, which is intricately linked to IS-K, which has used Afghanistan as a launchpad to conduct terror operations in the country.

Many Middle Eastern states have also been indirectly involved in the conflict by supporting Jihadist groups covertly, which could alter the course of the conflict. The current geopolitical undercurrents that are at play in defining the conflict in Afghanistan could create a situation in which the region could become a battleground for the latest proxy war. A proxy war would further increase IS-K's potential to evolve into the foremost terror group in the region. The geopolitical involvement and military interventions in the Syria conflict, can be considered as a case study that provides a clear indication as to how ISIS used the proxy war between state actors to expand its caliphate and to spread its influence in the region. The transnational nature of IS-K and its regional appeal, combined with geopolitical interests and local



grievances, will create the ideal condition for new conflict theatres to appear, which would inevitably lead to many state actors engaging in the conflict.

6. LEVERAGING HYBRID WARFARE STRATEGIES

Like ISIS central in its operations in Iraq and Syria, IS-K has proved its ability to evolve in rapidly changing operational environments, which is part of its success in remaining resilient in the face of defeat. IS-K has consistently demonstrated its ability to adapt to the changes in battle spaces and battlefield conditions, while also opening new battlefronts to wage hybrid Jihad.

Hybrid warfare entails a blend of conventional and asymmetric strategies, which deploys both military and non-military tactics including the use of propaganda and disinformation campaigns, political influences, blended tactics, economic incentives, activation of terrorist cells and specialised paramilitary units. IS-K has been able to continuously open new battle spaces due to the hybrid tactics the organisation has adopted.

Propaganda has been one of the key driving forces of ISIS central and IS-K, which has radically redefined the global Jihadist landscape. Despite the battlefield losses, IS-K has been able to regenerate its lost combatants through its online and offline propaganda campaigns that have played a vital role in radicalisation and recruitment. The use of integrated propaganda campaigns will empower IS-K to maintain a strong position in the ideological and virtual battlespace.

The control over the opium trade in Afghanistan can make way for IS-K to emerge as one of the wealthiest terrorist groups in the globe as it will be able to dominate the global heroin production while changing the political economy of the country. Control over the opium fields will also strengthen IS-K further, by propelling the organisation to a more superior position than the Taliban.

The ability to create fractionalizations within the Taliban is a key strategy used by IS-K. Currently, the High Council of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan led by Mullah Rasul and the Fidayi Mahaz led by Mullah Najibullah are two breakaway factions of the Taliban that have joined hands with IS-K, which further establishes the fact that the Islamic State affiliate is in a strong position to weaken the Taliban from within, at least temporarily. Tribal relations are an important aspect in the conflict in Afghanistan and engaging in inter-tribal diplomacy and building key political alliances in ungoverned spaces will further reinforce the group.

The use of a combination of military, diplomatic, economic and propaganda tactics simultaneously is a part of the IS-K arsenal of using hybrid warfare strategies, which will help the organisation get closer to its goal of resurrecting the caliphate in Afghanistan.



CONCLUSION

Despite the U.S. spending \$5.9 trillion dollars since it launched the global 'war on terror', the transnational threat posed by Salafi Jihadist groups are evermore present today. States grappling with the scourge of transnational Salafi Jihadist terrorism should learn from the multiple mistakes made during the war on terror, which has created an unstoppable enemy, that continuously keeps evolving and morphing despite substantial losses. Both, the proportional use of force and the ability to counter the appeal to the transnational jihadist ideology of Islamic State is a serious matter policy makers and counterterrorism strategist should consider.

The never-ending phenomenon of Jihadist terrorism can be defeated only through a global, regional, and local response, which focuses on dismantling the conditions that lead to radicalisation and recruitment. Therefore, counterterrorism strategists and policymakers should pay close attention to the developments in Afghanistan and the threat posed by IS-K to the region and adopt a multidimensional and integrated approach to countering IS-K and similar transnational Jihadist terrorist groups.

Currently, IS-K is an affiliate group that is in the process of transitioning to become a transnational terror group. IS-K, which also maintenance operational autonomy, is following a similar trajectory as ISIS Central, which took advantage of the internal conflict, the regional security vacuum, and the dynamic jihadist environment in the region, which led to its evolution from an affiliate to a transnational terrorist organisation. The organisation under Muhajir is currently on the path to evolving into the next major transnational terrorist organisation that would dominate the global Jihadist space by surpassing both ISIS Central and Al-Qaeda in terms of lethality and popularity. The resurrection of the so-called Islamic State Caliphate in Afghanistan will signal the dawn a deadly new era that would reshape the global security landscape.

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INTRODUCING IRON MAN: EXOSKELETONS IN WARFARE

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ABSTRACT

The article looks at the latest developments in the use of exoskeletons in warfare. It attempts to address two major research gaps in the literature – (i) While there are essays on where individual countries are in terms of military exoskeleton research, there is currently no primer or overview where all the available data from various countries is collated into one coherent analysis. It will thus offer the first truly global look at the latest developments in this field as of 2021, comparing the progress made by major military powers such as the USA, Russia, China, NATO, India etc and (ii) There is very little discussion on the implications this technology might hold for the battlefields of the future. Since it would be radically new and an untested entity if used in modern warfare, it is vital that security scholars ponder the consequences of deploying such innovations in contemporary theatres of operation. The article attempts to rectify that gap as well, with a brief look at the potential changes in warfare exoskeletons could bring about. The article also attempts to frame the relevant issues in a structure that could facilitate further research. It highlights the areas of uncertainty in this new technology that could potentially disrupt the global system.

Keywords: exoskeleton, battlefield, modern warfare, technology

INTRODUCTION:

“I knew that was where we were heading, but I didn't realize we were this close...that's Iron Man.” these were not the words of a layman, they were from Adi Granov, one of the main illustrators of the Iron Man comic released by Marvel Comics (Mone, 2018). This was his reaction to being shown the Raytheon Sarcos XOS, one of the first models in a series of powered exoskeletons currently being developed by the pentagon. The suit lends its user increased strength, speed, and endurance (Keller, 2021), much like a battle armour would in science fiction and fantasy literature. Such technology is no longer in the realm of imagination, armies around the world are actively working on them, with some even coming close to fruition.

The purpose of this article is to address two major research gaps in the literature – (i) While there are essays on where individual countries are in terms of military exoskeleton research, there is currently no primer or overview where all the available data from various countries is collated into one coherent analysis. It will thus offer the first truly global look at the latest



developments in this field as of 2021, comparing the progress made by major military powers such as the USA, Russia, China, NATO, India etc and (ii) There is very little discussion on the implications this technology might hold for the battlefields of the future. Since it would be radically new and an untested entity if used in modern warfare, it is vital that security scholars ponder the consequences of deploying such innovations in contemporary theatres of operation. The article attempts to rectify that gap as well, with a brief look at the potential changes in warfare exoskeletons could bring about.

What is an exoskeleton? Simply put, it is a skeletal structure that forms around the body on the outside, rather than on the inside. Crustaceans like crabs and lobsters have exoskeletons, as do insects like grasshoppers and ants. These creatures have their skeletons serving as an outer armour of sorts to protect their bodies. In contrast, human beings have endoskeletons – our bones are on the inside of our bodies, covered by tissue and muscle membrane. Having endoskeletons allows organisms to grow to large sizes and allows organisms to have a great degree of flexibility (all vertebrates for instance have endoskeletons) but it also makes us more vulnerable to damage from external factors.

The purpose of an exoskeleton in the battlefield is to negate this disadvantage and to augment the physical qualities of the soldier (Weinberger, 2013). With weapons getting increasingly destructive, the plight of the common soldier is one that should be easy to relate to. While conventional warfare breaks out at a far less frequent basis than ever before, the wars that do happen tend to be highly destructive and result in large death tolls because of the increased capacity for damage. Populations are also far less tolerant of casualties in modern wars, especially in democratic nations, which makes it imperative for the State to develop ways in which fewer soldiers are sent back home in caskets.

While exoskeleton technology is nothing new, either in the realm of fiction or military research, it has only been in the 21st century that it has started to take new shapes and forms which capture the public imagination. The 'iron man' analogy is not the only recognizable comparison from pop culture. James Cameron's classic movie "Aliens" features an infamous scene where the protagonist wears a powered exoskeleton to fight against the alien creature at the end. Robert Heinlein's classic work *Starship Troopers* depicted soldiers wearing advanced battle suits with integrated systems. These moments in fiction are important because modern researchers and scientists grew up being exposed to such thought, allowing it to shape their own work in the real world. We often neglect what a big part works of imagination play in shaping modern science because the correlation is not made on a frequent basis.

USA

One of the most active nation in this regard is, unsurprisingly, the United States (Stewart, 2018). There are a number of companies currently working on powered exoskeletons, many of them with their own features and characteristics that would have differing impacts on the modern battlefield. Unlike Russia and China, which are also heavily investing in development, the USA has a large pool of private sector research it can draw on to compliment any public sector developments. A number of leading defence companies, from Raytheon to Lockheed Martin, have already made huge strides in this regard.

The first and major development is the aforementioned Raytheon Sarcos XOS, the same one which made Adi Granov make the Iron Man comparison. The suit was one of the earliest innovations in this field, having reached completion more than a decade ago in 2008 (Karlin, 2011). Coincidentally, it was the same year that Hollywood released the Iron Man movie as well. The suit was impressive but it was the second generation of the armour, the XOS 2, which made huge waves and became a major news item all over the world, even being included in Time Magazine's list of Best Inventions (Raytheon's XOS 2 robotic exoskeleton nabs top innovation nod, 2010). The suit was a major improvement over the first generation, allowing its user to easily lift nearly 100 kilos with little difficulty, even being able to sustain the load for long periods of time without experiencing any physical stress. The company initially received funding from the US Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, known colloquially as DARPA, but reports suggest that most funding since then has been private and independent.

Raytheon has recently released its third generation of the exoskeleton, known as the Guardian, which has been equally impressive. The new prototype was also featured by Time Magazine in 2020, being named as one of the 100 Best Inventions of 2020. The new suit is to be used in a number of industries beyond just defence, including oil, manufacturing, logistics, aviation and warehousing. Like its predecessor, it allows the wearer to carry heavy loads over long periods of time and over long distances without any muscle fatigue. It is expected to be ready for sale by 2022, with Delta Airlines already stating that it wants to use it for their freight and cargo maintenance teams (Edwards, 2021).

Another innovation that could have had a big impact was the TALOS battle suit, although it ultimately ended in failure. The abbreviation for it is Tactical Assault Light Operator Suit, and its story gives us some interesting insight into how exoskeleton technology might be deployed in the battlefield, along with its shortcomings as well. The idea of the suit is famously said to have originated from a 2012 raid conducted by SEAL Team 6, one of the Navy SEAL contingents of the Naval Special Warfare Development Group (Keller, 2020). The team was deployed on a night-time raid to rescue a civilian doctor who had been captured by the Taliban. Although the hostage was rescued, the leader of the team, 28-year-old Chief Petty Officer Nicolas Cheque



was killed by an assault of close-range gunfire. This ignited a conversation in American circles about the need to have a protective suit for special operations that would enhance the speed, stealth and durability of the soldiers, instead of merely boosting their brute strength with a generic exoskeleton.

Out of this was born the TALOS. A tribute to Talos, the famed giant bronze android from Greek mythology who is said to have patrolled the Crete island's shoreline, research into the suit was announced in 2013 and touted as being potentially revolutionary in the field of special operations. Stretching the Iron Man-Talos analogy even further was no less than then US President Barack Obama himself, who said "Basically, I'm here to announce that we're building Iron Man." (Poole, 2021) which was greeted with both laughter and enthusiasm.

The results however, have turned out to be a failure. After half a decade of research, it was finally announced by the US Special Operations Command in 2019 that the idea was not feasible. The reason for the failure however is not a lack of funding or even that the idea was bad in principle, it was simply that current networking capabilities are not sufficient to sustain a battle suit with a complex interplay of sensors and systems. Integrating all these individual systems into one seamless structure – from the exoskeleton to the helmet to the various communication devices – turned into a task the designers ultimately decided was too difficult to undertake. However, even though it was stopped in 2019, this is not to say that the entire endeavour was a failure, since the TALOS did make great strides forward in the battle-suit domain (Douglas, 2021).

RUSSIA

Not far behind the USA is its former rival Russia, which has also invested a lot of time and resources into developing exoskeleton technology. There have been reports of an exoskeleton race between the Russians and the Americans as far back as 2018 (Tucker, 2018), with both rivals gearing up to produce the next great innovation. The program to develop battle-suits, known as the Ratnik program in Russia, first came into the limelight in 2013, with Russia's Deputy Prime Minister at the time, Dmitry Rogozin, announcing its features to the media. The first prototype was reportedly made to be showcased at the Russia Arms Expo in 2013, where a range of other such innovations were showcased as well. To the chagrin of some international commentators, the New York Times reported that some pieces of the suit were seen being worn by Russian soldiers in Crimea (Herszenhorn, 2014), which meant they had already taken the lead in operationalizing it on the battlefield.

It is the third generation of this prototype though, the Ratnik-3, which is the most famous and has sparked a lot of discussion. Since it is not dependent on power, it has been able to circumnavigate many of the issues which led the TALOS project to failure. Built by Moscow's Central Research Institute, the suit is said to be capable of similar feats as its American



counterparts in terms of adding strength and durability to the wearer. Discussions of the suit often seem so deep into the realm of propaganda or science fiction that there were even reports of fitting the suit with a watch that would be nuclear resistant (Brown, 2017).

It is worth noting that an earlier prototype of the Ratnik was also deployed in Syria for bomb disposal purposes (Rostec Releases Video of Soldier Exoskeleton That Was Tested in Syria, 2021). Known as the Exoskeleton 1 or EO-1, it underwent diligent testing in 2017 with combat engineers on the field. Russia has been actively involved in the Syrian conflict since 2015, which predominantly seems to be influenced by a 'spheres of influence' model (Yacoubian, 2021). Since Russian de-mining robots like the Uran-6 require large and heavy consoles that need to be carried, the exoskeleton helped the Russians carry the large load over long distances in Syria, something they would have been unable to do without the EO-1. This is a classic example of a military application without the use of force being involved.

Since the Russians seem more intent on small steps rather than making radical pronouncements like the Americans, it has been noted that Russia is actually taking the lead in terms of practical value. Unlike the TALOS for instance, the developer of the EO-1 was always quite realistic about what this would be capable of and what it would not. This essentially mean that in a hare-and-tortoise way, the Russians have been slowly but steadily gaining primacy here, with small innovations that make just enough headway for the next phase of research (Hambling, 2020). To add to the scope of Russia's progress in this field, there have recently been reports that the Research Institute has already delivered about 300,000 of the suits (Asthana, 2020), a number so staggering that no other country even comes close if the reports are true.

Probably the most pertinent Russian developments alongside the Ratnik, are the battle-suits known as "Schturmovik" or "Stormer", which have been developed in parallel with the exoskeleton, but seemingly with more of a focus on flexibility and speed, similar to the difference between the XOS and the TALOS. Although the weight it allows the user to carry only seems to be around 60 kg, lower than a traditional exoskeleton, the mobility it provides has made some tout it as a major breakthrough in the field (Keller 2020) which demonstrates just how smoothly Russia has managed to use its operations in Syria to learn lessons and focus on gradual, practical innovations.

CHINA

Not to be left behind by the other major powers, China has also been focusing a lot of energy into the use of exoskeletons and battle-suits, in some way perhaps even more overtly than its rivals. China has largely depended on Norinco, the country's state-owned manufacturer for heavy equipment like ground munitions and armoured vehicles. The first generation of the Norinco exoskeleton was unveiled in 2015, with features that were more or less identical to



the early versions produced by the USA. The second generation of it was unveiled in 2018, once again with upgraded features that put it on par with the American and Russian versions (Lin and Singer, 2018). The Chinese versions are built for mountainous terrains, since those are the conditions under which they are most likely to be deployed. The first version of the Norinco had a top speed of nearly 3 miles an hour, a speed it would allow the user to sustain for about 12 miles, and while it is claimed that the second generation improves on it, the metrics are still unclear.

In addition to the terrain, China has also been exploring the possibility of optimizing its suits for high-altitude areas (Osborn, 2020), where it is likely to see the most military action. In addition to the possibility of a direct confrontation, logistical military activities in these regions are constantly hampered by the climate, which necessitates some kind of human intervention for maintenance purposes. Standard equipment such as robots and drones are commonly deployed in such areas and break down quite frequently in the rocky terrain, which often means human soldiers have to be sent in there to conduct manual repairs. Carrying large loads into such areas for the human operator is usually a daunting task, often having to deal with elevation levels upward of 3000 meters. Donning an exoskeleton however, would make the task much easier for the manual repairman being sent in.

In 2019, the PLA conducted what it called the 'Super Warrior Military Individual Exoskeleton System Challenge', a contest between nearly a hundred teams from various think-tanks, companies and universities in the country to see who would build the best exoskeleton. The suits were tested for their mobility, ability to operate in rough terrain and physical enhancements. While the systems showcased were still basic (Xuanzun, 2019), what it did demonstrate was the Chinese government's continued commitment to tap into its public resources and population to make advances in this field.

It was in late 2020 though, that China unveiled what is arguably its first overtly militaristic use of exoskeletons. China Central Television ran a program in December 2020 on the latest developments, showing video footage of a suit that was now intended to be worn by soldiers deployed in Southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region (Peterson, 2021). Since the suit is non-powered, it once again bypasses many of the challenges that made the American TALOS unfeasible. The video showed troops hauling a supply delivery to one of the outposts in Ngari prefecture known for its mountainous terrain (Xuanzun, 2021), carrying the load with little effort. There has also been heavy speculation that the Chinese might be planning to use this to counter India (Ellmer, 2021) in the Gulwan River Valley.

THE REST

These developments of the three major powers do not mean the rest have done nothing about it. Although other regional and global powers have not been able to pump as many



resources into the technology as the aforementioned ones, ample progress has been made in places like Australia, Japan and India.

Australia has developed its own exoskeleton known as the Operational Exoskeleton or OX. While it is not a full-bodied and heavy suit, the emphasis is a lot more on decreasing the strain for infantry troops by using cables to help them carry larger weights. The mechanism works on a simple principle using Bowden cables (Husseini, 2019) to redirect the load on a soldier's back right into the ground. Since the mechanism only weighs about 3 kilograms, it is significantly lighter and less cumbersome than the XOS or HULC. Australian soldiers are required to carry loads of around 85 kg into combat regularly (Williams, 2015) and this is expected to ease the effort required.

India has also expressed an overt interest in the development of exoskeleton technology for military applications. Reliable information about their forays into the field first surfaced in 2019, revealing that the Defence Research and Development Organization, the Indian army's official research organization had already begun to explore such possibilities (Siddiqui, 2019). The private sector is also being utilized for research, with the DRDO laying out parameters for what it considers to be the optimal features for an exoskeleton. The DRDO's guidelines are essentially to ensure that any private sector contributions are in line with their requirements, to avoid sub-par contributions.

Some of the features listed out by them shows that they do have a keen understanding of how the technology can be used in Indian terrain, rather than simply trying to mimic their Western counterparts. The DRDO's requirements include things like the weight not exceeding 5 to 6 kgs, an uplift load of over 100 kgs, the ability to operate under temperatures from -20 C to +45 C (since India has regions like Kashmir with freezing climates and Rajasthan with arid deserts), and a service life of at least ten years (Sagar, 2019).

Japan has been active in this regard as well. Back in 2015, the defence ministry announced that it was allocating USD 7.5 million into researching "highly powered mobile suits" (Simpson, 2015). Even going back nearly a decade, Japan unveiled a pair of robotic legs in 2012 that could be worn by a soldier to leap over a meter in less than a second. While the amount of less than eight million was criticized in some circles as being insufficient to produce anything, it still demonstrated a commitment towards public funding for these developments. In 2019 was when Japan really entered the sphere in a big way, unveiling for the first time the exoskeleton mechanism it had been working on. It has been noted that the technology itself is more or less comparable to the American versions (Marinov, 2020) despite some criticism.

Lastly, NATO has also become cognizant of the need to develop exoskeletons, although it is surprisingly behind many of the other names listed here. Other than launching the Integration of the Exoskeleton in the Battlefield Workshop series, which is a series of workshops



conducted to facilitate research on using exoskeletons for military applications (Marinov, 2018), there is little evidence that it has taken any proactive action in this direction as an institution.

With that overview of where various nations are right now, the article will now explore the possible implications of this technology for modern security.

IMPACT ON THE BATTLEFIELD

One of the primary worries about advancements in military technology in general is that they might exacerbate differences that already exist between the great powers of the world and smaller nations. Just as how nuclear weapons created a significant divide between those who have it and those who do not, it is not only possible but highly probably that new, disruptive technologies will create a similar hierarchy. It isn't likely to be much different in the case of exoskeletons either. The overview above clearly shows that countries that can afford to delve into this technology are already doing so in a large scale. And when those developments reach fruition, it is likely to widen the already existing gulf between the powerful and the powerless.

Will this make it easier for countries to intervene in other parts of the world. It would be difficult to argue to the contrary. The rise of drone technology has already demonstrated how easy it is for countries to operate in other territories while facing little to no domestic pressure. Contrasting the American interventions in Iraq and Pakistan demonstrate this point. In Iraq, local American protests broke out almost immediately and dissent has almost become a part of daily life. Almost every day, there was some anti-war protest in some part of the USA criticizing the intervention in Iraq. The interventions in Pakistan and Yemen by contrast, done primarily through drones, faced almost no resistance at all. The reason for this is not that Iraq's sovereignty was somehow more important to the average American protester than Pakistan's or Yemen's. Rather, it was because there were no dead American soldiers coming back.

Human casualties can often play a big role in the psyche of the public. Similarly, the lack of human casualties can often make the public apathetic to a problem, even if the problem itself is just as destructive as the one that was causing human casualties on their side. This is the reason some have argued against the use of drones and robots in the modern battlefield, because it would make war much cheaper for the larger powers in terms of lives lost, which in turn would make them wage war with even more impunity than before.

Consider the case of Russia for instance. As mentioned earlier, there are reports that battle-suits were being used in Crimea, a portent of things to come. In future conflicts in that region, Russia is only going to ramp things up even more. What this means is that the inherent power-gap between Russia and its adversaries is going to grow even further, despite the gap already seeming quite insurmountable. The same could be said of China. As stated above, China has



already deployed exoskeletons for troops in the Tibetan region, which means their ability to enforce any type of military action grows even stronger there, with the writ of that State being exercised to an even larger degree than before. There would be very little anybody could do against this even if the State behaved in a tyrannical way, barring intervention from some other nation which did have the technology to counter new and disruptive technologies.

The other, perhaps even more dangerous implication is the possibility of such technology landing in the hands of non-state actors, either via innovation or because of proxy warfare. It is not impossible to think of scenarios where countries that do have access to such technology, arm insurgent groups in countries that do not. Proxy warfare is one of the norms today since the great nuclear powers can no longer wage war against each other. What would happen if a rich country armed local terror groups with exoskeleton technology, particularly in countries where the governments in charge had no real answer to the destruction these battle-suits could be capable of? The result would be a flipping of the basic principles of asymmetric warfare, where the non-state actor suddenly has the technological advantage instead of the State.

This could lead to a tectonic shift in the nature of warfare itself, where some conflicts are waged with the State being on the defensive while the non-state actors were the ones who were capable of attacking head-on.

The deciding factor of how influential battle-suits would be, is how well they synergize with other technological developments in the field. The large powers are working on many other types of weaponry that could compliment the use of exoskeletons, leading to doctrinal changes that one cannot anticipate at the moment. For example, innovations in areas such as genetic engineering and enhancement drugs will play a major role in the wars of tomorrow, and could be used to devastating effect in conjunction with exoskeleton technology. Invisibility technology is already becoming possible, with prototypes being tried out. 3D Printing is already transforming the way in which military power – especially on the logistical front – is being imagined. Even terror groups have already started using 3D printing and drones (Hambling, 2016), incorporating it into their arsenal, so this logic would apply to non-state actors as well.

CONCLUSION

Not all of this might be doom and gloom, there is much to look forward to in terms of the benefits this could bring. As mentioned earlier, it could drastically lower the fatality rates of the soldiers, bringing fewer of them back home dead. While this might seem like a bad thing to some, it would be difficult to objectively argue that protecting human life, combatant or non-combatant, should not be welcomed. This could also have a positive impact for civilians, given the elderly and the paralyzed a new lease on life.



Besides, there is an equally large contingent which claims exoskeleton technology itself is never going to be a major factor in the battlefield, given all the challenges. The failure of the TALOS might prove them right. Some of the features required for exoskeletons to be viable might turn out to be impractical in the battlefield. For instance, exoskeletons would have to be worn by a number of soldiers for them to revolutionize warfare, a handful of suits worn by a handful of soldiers would not have a big impact. This presents a major problem since each suit would have to be custom made for different soldiers. If the joints and actuators in the suit any misalignment, that could be both dangerous for the user and make the suit itself immobile (Mittal, 2020). The cost of making thousands of custom suits might far outweigh any benefit.

Ultimately, the impact of this technology may not even be monumentally different from what we've seen with other disruptive invention. While there is no doubt that it is revolutionary in nature, the same could be said about developments in drone strokes, space warfare, 3-D printing, invisibility technology, hypersonic missiles etc. There are dozens of new areas in which military researchers are currently making breakthrough after breakthrough. There is no one single tech that will reinvent the wheel by itself. Rather, it will be a combination of different inventions that will actually lead to a metamorphosis in combat.

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CHINA, INDIA AND THE US POLICY TOWARDS THE INDIAN OCEAN AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR SRI LANKA'S INDIAN OCEAN POLICY

K.K. Pradeep Ranaweera

ABSTRACT

Power struggles are a common occurrence in world politics and their impact depends on the nature of the parties to the struggle. As the 21st century being dubbed the century of Asia, the growing competition between China and India as two aspiring Asian nations to become global superpowers has shifted the gravity of world politics to the Indian Ocean region. The United States of America, as an existing superpower, seeks to maintain its position to retain its status despite the evolving world order. Accordingly, the direct and indirect actions of these three countries make the Indian Ocean region a contested domain for dominance. Sri Lanka, as a small country in the region, located centrally in the Indian Ocean, is strategically facing challenges due to the rivalry of the US, India, and China. With inherent dependency over these three countries, Sri Lanka's policy towards the Indian Ocean is important for its security and development. Although Sri Lanka has fundamental principles towards the Indian Ocean, current power relations relating to the Indian Ocean has created much uncertainty towards the peaceful existence of the IO. Therefore, Sri Lanka was compelled to re-strategize its policy in the Indian Ocean while broadening the scope of security. This paper provides a detailed study of the nature of current power rivalry in the Indian Ocean with specific policy expectations of major triangle of power of the Indian Ocean. Accordingly, it analyses the factors that influence Sri Lanka to formulate its policy towards the Indian Ocean region. It concludes that instead of acting on a stand-alone policy, Sri Lanka should strongly follow a policy of multilateralism to minimize the tension in the region and achieve its national interest through cooperation without taking a side of any power block which are trying to compete in the Indian Ocean to assure its hegemony.

Keywords: Indian Ocean Region, power block, Security Dilemma, SLOC, Triangle

INTRODUCTION

Recent decades have seen the concept of national security been redefined and broadening in its scope. The conventional interpretation of the concept of national security denotes the safeguarding of territorial sovereignty and securing the identity of a state from invasion, occupation, and acquisition by a foreign power. However, currently the definition of the term is not limited to protecting the sovereign location of the country (Mendis, 1992, p.43). With



technological advancements and the rise of the internet, the above-mentioned elements of national security have been challenged and the paradigm of national security is being subjected to transformation in many different ways.

The centre of gravity of global power politics is moving towards Indian Ocean. Sri Lanka, as one of the strategically located country in the Indian Ocean, the growing power relations in the Indian Ocean have created two scenarios for Sri Lanka. These scenarios posed either to ignore the strategic changes taking place in the Indian Ocean or actively engage those changes while serving its national interest. From the perspective of realism in international relations, it is more viable to consider the second aspect. This article focusses on the emerging strategic trends in the Indian Ocean and their implications for Sri Lanka's national interest as a small island state located in the contested space of Indian Ocean.

INDIAN OCEAN REGION

The main complexity of the Indian Ocean region starts with the absence of a clear definition of the countries considered as the member states in the Indian Ocean region. Various organizations, initiatives and definitions, carry different countries as members of the Indian Ocean region. Due to physical connectivity, Indian Ocean Region constitutes 1/3 of the world population and comprises almost 51 coastal and landlocked countries in the world. Among them, 26 countries come under IOR, 5 Red Sea states, 4 Persian Gulf states, Saudi Arabia, France – Crozet Islands, Kerguelen Islands, Saint Paul and Amsterdam Islands, and the Scattered Islands, Britain – the Chagos Archipelago and 13 landlocked states (Javaid, 2020).

The geographical boundaries of the IO region are demarcated by Asia, Africa, Antarctica, and Australia. The Indian Ocean receives international attention due to global trades, maritime security issues, resources, sea lines of communication (SLOC), and especially the power rivalry over the domination of the oceanic sphere etc. The IOR started gaining more attention of the world in the wake of the power competition of powerful states for strategic dominance in the region. The US, China and India are the main countries that shape the Indian ocean strategic setting. This competition has somewhat undermined the other critical issues in the Indian ocean. Sri Lanka, as one of the countries in this region, is struggling to charter its foreign policy which includes engaging the emerging strategic issues in the Indian ocean due to strategic competition among the above mentioned three big actors. This prevailing reality in the region has posed many strategic issues for Sri Lanka to re-think a fresh approach towards the Indian Ocean region. In this respect, this paper tries to identify policies of the India, China and USA strategic triangle occurring in the Indian ocean and to discuss possible policy options for Sri Lanka to achieve its national interests. The paper will employ the Omni-Balancing theory to examine Sri Lanka's approach towards the Indian Ocean region. The theory mainly describes how the small states behave when dealing with more prominent powers.



OMNI-BALANCING THEORY FOR SRI LANKA IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

“Omni-Balancing Theory” from Steven David is considered a popular theory in International Relations to explain the behaviour of the third world countries and their policies due to internal and external challenges they face. The theory mainly encompasses promoting alliances to minimize the threats and challenges encountered by small states. According to this theory, the small states are compelled to mobilize all their abilities and resources against their opponents or enemies to reduce internal and external risk. If a state is facing the issue of survival, it encourages to go for alliances to face both internal and external threats instead of taking a side of the rivalry (David, 1991). It is one of the essential pillars to preserve the security of the state. The growing tendencies in the Indian Ocean region have posed challenges to the internal affairs of countries. Applying this basic theoretical perspective to the Indian Ocean in the present, three actors of China, India and the US seem to play a critical role.

First, the US’s strategic interest in the Indian Ocean and Asia in the era of Asia’s century has maximized its presence in the region is evident. China, on the other hand, is compelled to preserve its interest in the region. Without grand justifications, India as the next global superpower, its geographical proximity and interest in the Indian Ocean, as well as China’s presence in the Indian Ocean have determined India’s attempt to dominate the Indian Ocean region. In this circumstance, Sri Lanka has several options to choose from. Among them, all working together, two against one, all against all, or one is mediating the conflict between other the options that are available with different impacts (Fernando, 2015, p.87). In terms of the Omni-balancing theory, the most appropriate option would be collaborating with all actors based on its national security priorities.

The current government of Sri Lanka appears to be converting to that slowly. However, Sri Lanka is still trying to use and see the Indian Ocean from an Indian perspective due to its geostrategic reality and the experiences that come across over the past decades dealing with India. It is also a paramount need to identify the major triangle’s interest or the policy towards the Indian ocean, to realise and assess the capability of Sri Lanka to cooperate and adopt multilateralism as an approach to balance the region. On the other hand, in a regional perspective, Sri Lanka can employ the fourth option to minimize the tension in the region, especially under the US, India and China. Sri Lanka has already evaluated this when it proposed that the Indian Ocean be a Zone of Peace whereby building supra-ordinary value to compel all actors in the Indian Ocean to accept the declaration. However, neutrality or isolation would not help for Sri Lanka to achieve its national interest under the existing situation. It cannot also be ignored that the growing development of the region has enabled the emergence of a new layer mainly dominated by Australia, Japan, South Korea, the UK, France, Russia, Germany, and the EU while catering to the top triangle’s interests.



As a small country with these strategic dynamics, Sri Lanka poses several challenges to following a policy related to the Indian Ocean. Following the Omni-balancing theory, Sri Lanka is connected to the world as a hub in the Indian Ocean region. In terms of geostrategic locations, all harbours in the country generate strategic objectives. Hambantota, as it is in the major navigation routes, Colombo harbour as one of the major options for unloading and refuelling, Trincomalee as the best natural harbour in Asia are created more challenges than the opportunities for Sri Lanka. As a result of that, US and India are approaching to make their presence in the country where China already made after buying Hambantota port under the 99 years lease and perpetuity method.

Climate change, non-traditional threats, maritime issues are the other significant challenges posed by the Indian Ocean. Because of the contemporary changes and the dynamics, the Indian Ocean formed new alliances for shaping the competition among US, India, and China to dominate the region.

MAJOR TRIANGLES' POLICY TOWARDS THE INDIAN OCEAN

INDIA'S POLICY TOWARDS THE INDIAN OCEAN

India's policy on the Indian Ocean is shaped by emerging dynamics in the Indian Ocean. From the Indian perspective, India believes the Indian ocean is the terrain and other countries follow it. These perceptions further emphasized the presence of China in the Indian ocean. India is also trying to see and measure the role of China in the South China sea, and to adopt the same policy to the Indian ocean. Therefore, the competition between China and India is mainly designing the hegemonic domination in the Indian ocean.

India also focusses on the more non-traditional issues-oriented approach to the Indian ocean except in the case of China's presence in the Indian ocean. Till contemporary alliances were created, India's approach was mainly to address non-traditional issues and bilateral conventional security issues. However, with recent development and new axis formation, India is trying to transform military and security backed approaches to the Indian ocean covering global development. As a result of that, India already declared the fully modernization of the blue-water navy by 2030 (*Indian Naval Indigenisation Plan (INIP), 2015-2030*). With this development, India plans to cater for self-reliance, self-sufficiency in military technology, power projection and sea control.

Another major development of India's policy towards the Indian ocean came up with the Modi's neighbourhood first policy (TRT World, 2021), As entire south Asian countries are one way, the other shares boundaries with India. However, India has failed to maintain good relations with its neighbouring countries since its independence. This aspect is mostly discussed and much debated by both neighbours and India due to its compelling issues. The



neighbourhood first policy was proposed as the ultimate strategy of India to revamp its relations with other Indian ocean countries, especially in South Asian countries. While following the act east policy, look east policy, India is now trying to adapt and change its neighbourhood policy as giving the neighbour's priority. However, India has yet to show progress on the confident building among its neighbours, keeping a side of its hegemonic approach to dominate the region.

Protection from sea-based threats to India's territorial integrity is another policy of India's Indian ocean policy. Moving from the traditional terrorist influence or threat, India is also projecting to reduce China's presence in the region. India accused China of spying on India nearby Andaman and Nicobar Islands. It also found that Chinese nuclear submarine visits to Indian ocean at many times (Gupta, 2021).

The preservation, promotion, pursuit and protection of offshore infrastructure and maritime resources within and beyond the Maritime Zones of India (MZI) is another objective that is trying to archive through its Indian ocean policy. As per the trade and commerce battle with China, India sees more protentional space to exploit marine resources for its development purposes.

The promotion, protection, and safety of India's overseas and coastal seaborne trade and her Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) also another concern of India through the Indian Ocean. As this paper highlighted, the modern capabilities of the states or the security directly reflect its capacity to protect Sea lines of communication. In the wake of the growing technological dependence of India, the importance of preserving and securing the Sea Lines of Communication without any interruptions remains as the major concern of the modern-day. With all, India has defied its maritime policy as a holistic maritime security policy that combined both freedoms from threats from 'in' and 'from' the sea. These are the major objectives that India is trying to deploy as its policy towards the Indian Ocean. (Indian Naval Indigenisation Plan (INIP), 2015-2030).

India also concerned about the growing tendencies in the Indian Ocean region specially after the sign of AUKUS deal among US, UK and Australia to provide nuclear-powered submarines after the withdrawal of the original agreement with France to get submarines. Even though, India works with other extra-regional powers to preserve its national interest in the Indian Ocean, the recent nuclear deal seems to challenge India's pre-eminence in the region. Under the agreement, there is high tendency for Australia to deploy nuclear submarines in the East-Indian Ocean before India. Admiral Arun Prakash, former naval chief, already raised the point, saying that the exclusive nature of the AUKUS as an issue of other Quad members of India and Japan (Prakash, 2021).



CHINA'S POLICY TOWARDS THE INDIAN OCEAN

China's policy towards the Indian Ocean is determined by three major factors.

1. Belt and Road Initiative
2. Assuring the accessibility to Indian Ocean Harbours for both economic and military purposes
3. Malacca Dilemma

As discussed in earlier, China is trying to use its maximum capacities to bring Belt and Road Initiative with Indian Ocean region countries. On one hand, it tries to influence Indian Ocean region countries with infrastructure projects under the BRI. To pursue the said interest, they want to assure free and unrestricted access to all Indian ocean countries harbours. With this mind, it has already started developing and investing in most of the ports in the Indian Ocean region, sometimes referred by others as a string of pearls in the Indian Ocean. Hambantota Harbour is one of the focal points of this project. The third factor of the Malacca dilemma is yet another major concern of China to establish its presence in the Indian Ocean region. The Malacca dilemma is mainly triggered by China's heavy dependency of its economy and energy supply over other countries. In the year of 2003, it was Hu Jintao, President of China, described the situation where potential threat that hinder the china's economic development through choking the oil imports (Paszak, 2021). In terms of its energy consumption, 80% of china's energy comes from the outside, specially through the sea lines. The strategic location of Malacca lies between Sumatra Islands and Malay Peninsula narrow stretch of water can be blocked by any rival nations against China. Furthermore, 80% of Its exports go through the Malacca strait. Due to China's approach towards the South China Sea related issues, it has already in the dilemma of this threat might hinder its development activities. Based on these three factors, China's policy towards the Indian Ocean region needs to be explored (Mudunuri, 2020).

Based on the above three factors, China tries to formulate its policy towards the Indian Ocean region. Among them; The main policy is to assure its trades and energy resources transit in this route without any interruptions from any powers in the region, specially India or the US.

Another policy of China is to protect SLOC undersea cables as a national security priority. There is no argument that data and the protection of data without allowing falling under unwanted people or group is remain as a major important strategy in the 21st century. This has led many countries to include data protection as major security means for their existence in the international system.

It took almost 18 hours to send a message across the Atlantic Ocean in 1858 after the installation of the first submarine cables. But today, these cables are positioned to transfer more than 25 terabytes per second across the oceans. Most of the trades and commerce and



transactions are heavily dependent of these cables keeping countries’ economies at stake. According to data, \$10 trillion financial transactions are taking daily. As an emerging power in the world power, China sees the protection of these communication lines as a major policy in the Indian Ocean as well (Chadlow and Helwig, 2020). Chinese officials view control of undersea infrastructure as part of a broader strategic competition for data. Chinese Communist political party officials explained that “although undersea cable laying is a business, it is also a battlefield where information can be obtained” (Starks, 2020). In this regard, the protection of SLOC especially undersea cables, are another policy of China in the Indian Ocean region (Chadlow and Helwig, 2020). Based on the available economic and development reports, it shows that China is emerging as the major power in the world. As AT Mahan defined: whoever holds the Indian Ocean may have the power to run the world. Asserting to the above, China is trying to become a maritime power in both the Pacific and the Indian Ocean (Northrop, 1955, p.261). For that it’s trying to further use of soft power influence over the members in the Indian Ocean. The below-mentioned table shows China upper hand in the naval capabilities with India. However, the competition to enhance the blue navy capacities of both countries are at stake.

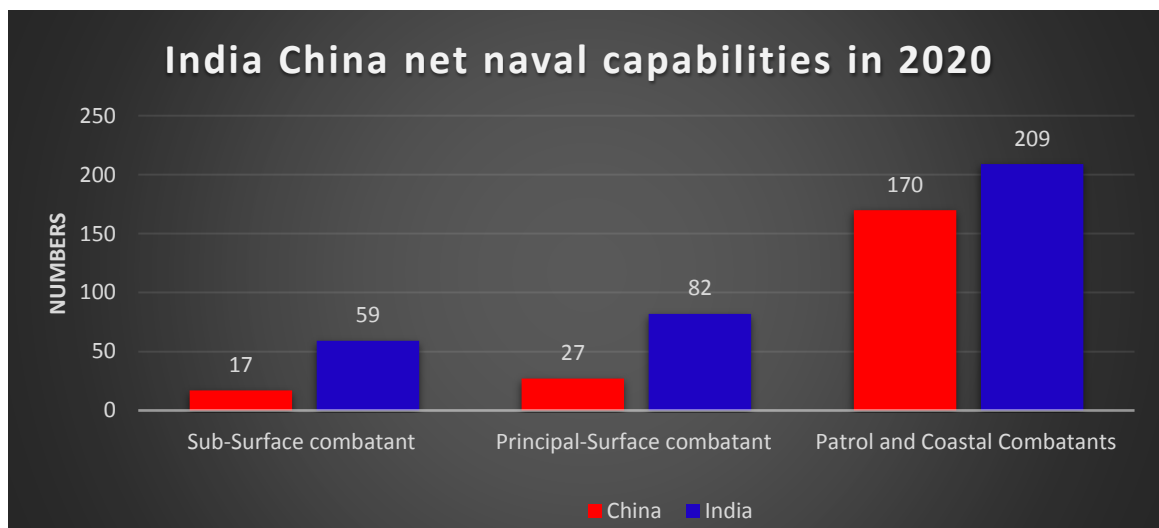


Figure 01: comparison of India vs China net naval capabilities in 2020

Source: (GFP, 2021)

Counter-terrorism activities are yet another policy concern of China’s to justify its presence in the Indian Ocean. With the considerable increase of vessels navigation in the region, acceleration of non-state actors’ activities in the member countries in the Indian Ocean region posed the vulnerability of terrorism in the ocean. Since all countries depend on their development and security aspirations in the Indian Ocean, China wants to secure that their connectivity, trades, and commerce are assured in the region. Based on the above policies, China is trying to deploy its policy towards the Indian Ocean. Unlikely China’s policy to the South China Sea, Indian Ocean policy seems to be the composition of both economic and security-oriented but peaceful navigation. However, the competition of the USA to maintain



its greater status in the Indian Ocean, India's apprehension on China's presence in the Indian Ocean have created a challenge for China to justify its actions in the region. As Harvard political scientist Graham Allison, posits that "when a rising power threatens to displace a ruling one, the most likely outcome is war" (Peng, 2021). According to Allison, this has been true in 12 out of 16 such instances in the last 500 years. This has been the case against China's presence in the Indian Ocean.

THE US POLICY TOWARDS THE INDIAN OCEAN

The United States of America's policy towards the Indian Ocean goes beyond the physical borders of the Indian Ocean. Since it had been in the Pacific region, contemporary US policy towards the Indian Ocean is becoming the extension of its pacific policy to cover the region. However, the US policy on the Indian Ocean is mainly influenced by a few factors which are changing under the geo-strategic dynamics. The main policy of the US is to protect chokepoints in the Indian Ocean. Such as the strait of Hormuz and the strait of Malacca.

These are the two crucial places where the US energy supply and trades are navigated. With the growing populations and the further market expansion in Asia's region, the US is keen to protect and assure its market exploitation in the Indian Ocean region. Combining both protection of Chokepoints and the trades in the Indian Ocean linked to assure the Sea Line of Communication. Among the key straits, several times, Iran has warned the US about the blocking of the Strait of Hormuz. Piracy of the western Indian Ocean region is another concern of the U.S. determination to mark its presence in the region. Apart from the issues that are being highlighted, the emerging trends of China and India in the Indian Ocean region has created the necessity of its active participation in the Indian Ocean region. (Cordesman and Toukan, 2014, p311). It is much clear that the US never had a strong strategy priority to the Indian Ocean until China's approach to the Indian Ocean. This was justified by the previous Presidents of Obama, Trump, and the event with the existing incumbency to re-balance the Indian Ocean. (Basu and Parpiani, 2021). The emergence of China and India as regional and global powers, competition of both countries to win its regional members are the major reasons that the US justify its role as a balancer in the Indian Ocean. Historical records of both China and India has put the future of the Indian ocean at stake. Since both did not accept the things are in the Indian Ocean, as a major superpower in the World US tries to maintain the tension with the intention to preserve its national security interest in the region.

Paying attention to the existing geopolitical realities, the United States of America's policy towards the Indian ocean can be recognized as;

- Prevent the Indian Ocean region from being subjected to any hegemonic domination either China or India or anyone and to actively present while pursuing the policy of pre-eminence



- Strategically working with every country in the region, irrespective of large or small, to protect the interests of the United States.
- Strongly promoted the rule-based order to pursue the regional stability
- Ensuring the energy and communications safety of the United States are not threatened or disrupted in any circumstance
- Protecting choke points that are strategically important for the US global status
- Prevent the region from being used by terrorists as the basis of operations
- Prevent the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction from the region to state and non-state actors
- Continue to work with like-minded partners to support open societies and promote shared values, including the rule of law, human rights, democracy and religious freedom in order to preserve its interest across the region.
- Follow the lead role in all types of operations related to non-traditional security activities.

SRI LANKA'S POLICY TOWARDS THE INDIAN OCEAN

Under the existing competitive rivalry among the triangle of power blocks such as China, India and the US, Sri Lanka's policy towards the Indian ocean is paramount for regional stability and balancing. Sri Lanka's policy on the Indian Ocean can be traced to two different quotes. One is from His Excellency the President speech at the United National General Assembly. The other event is from the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The President, in his speech, clearly articulated that Sri Lanka is against any country domination in the Indian Ocean (IANS, 2020). Furthermore, Sri Lanka will stand and work to stay neutral without catering for any power block campaign over the Indian Ocean dominations. In his word, Sri Lanka, "As a strategically placed country in the Indian Ocean, it is our priority to ensure that the Indian Ocean is maintained as a zone of peace where no country could gain advantage over any other" (Statement by H.E. Gotabaya Rajapaksa, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka at the General Debate of the 75th Session of the UNGA, 22 September 2020). This clearly showcases Sri Lanka's interest in the Indian Ocean to see as a shared resource which needs to use as a shared resource. Also, GoSL wants to follow and adhere to a long-standing policy of Non-aligned foreign policy referring to the Indian Ocean region. In this regard, Sri Lanka will not entertain any of the alliances which are trying to further escalation of tensions in the Indian Ocean region. However, taking strategic and geological proximity, Jayanath Colombage¹ has reiterated Sri Lanka's policy on the Indian Ocean mainly determined by India's First approach. (Interview of the Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs). In his interview, he has summarised Sri Lanka's Indian Ocean policy as:

1. Sri Lanka wants to remain Indian ocean neutral.

¹ Admiral (Prof) Jayanath Colombage is the Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sri Lanka.



2. Sri Lanka does not want to create its actions as a strategic concern to India.
3. Sri Lanka expects and prefers rule-based maritime relations for the Indian Ocean.
4. Development and,
5. Maintain friendly relations with all countries in the world.

Considering the Omni-balancing theory, Sri Lanka's stance clearly articulates as a small state, it tries to develop and promote more cooperation and cordial relations with other countries rather than taking a side of the competitions existing in the Indian Ocean. Despite the existing scenarios in the Indian Ocean, which are beyond the expectations of Sri Lanka, we still believe that the Indian ocean should not be a playground or theatre for the great and the emerging powers in the world. Despite the enormous western propagated conclusion on Sri Lanka's pro-China policy, Sri Lanka tries to preserve and protect its national interest as a small island which located in the middle of the region. From the national interest, China's economic assistance and cooperation and India's support are necessary for Sri Lanka's future development. Therefore, Sri Lanka may not take a side of Sino-Indian or US-China power rivalry in the Indian Ocean. Instead of taking a side, Sri Lanka expects to promote and pursue a more multilateral approach to managing Indian Ocean region issues. The intention to follow such policy has been witnessed with the appointment of a separate state minister for regional cooperation focusing on the economic and other non-traditional issues neglecting the existing power rivalry of China, US and India triangle in the Indian Ocean (Kawakita, 2021).

Analysing the above, Sri Lanka's policy towards the Indian Ocean must be carefully assessed from both domestic and external factors. In these respective, the following factors are the compelling factors for Sri Lanka to take a stand on the region.

1. Economic recession and debt crisis
2. India as the closest neighbour
3. China from the friend in need
4. The US as the biggest export market for Sri Lanka
5. Utilizing its geopolitical location for securing its national interest
6. Concerning the security and the power politics in the region
7. Managing three harbours without antagonizing any of the rivals

The exciting economic situation in the country is not moving in any favourable way for Sri Lanka at any scale. Foreign reserve issues, monetary policy gaps, import restrictions, unemployment, Scarcity of Foreign Direct Investment, Loan repayment obligations, declining of GDP, the downfall of declared economic policies, national and international debt and covid19 posed economic rescissions are the bitter experiences that Sri Lanka suffers today. In any approach to the Indian Ocean will have an impact on mentioned issues directly or indirectly. As mentioned above, living with a regional giant as the closest neighbour, Sri Lanka cannot work isolated manner or independently without concerning India's security concerns

in the region. It is also linked with China’s presence in the Indian Ocean, where India believes that China’s presence in the Indian Ocean as a threat to their dominance or their existence in the region (Rajagoplan, 2021).

Analysing the data, Sri Lanka has two alternative directions in its economy. The first five imports countries of Sri Lanka are India, China, UAE, Singapore, and Japan. Whereby Exports are depended on US, UK, India, Germany and Italy. This also influenced Sri Lanka to keep India a priority in its decision-making process related to the Indian Ocean region.

Imports	Trade (US\$ Mil)	Partner share(%)	Exporter	Trade (US\$ Mil)	Partner share(%)
United States	2,920	24.87	India	4,494	21.08
United Kingdom	1,043	8.88	China	4,189	19.65
India	790	6.72	United Arab Emirates	1,564	7.34
Germany	547	4.66	Singapore	1,292	6.06
Italy	532	4.53	Japan	1,038	4.87

Table 01: Top Five Exports and Imports partners of Sri Lanka

Source: <https://wits.worldbank.org/countrysnapshot/en/LKA>

Sri Lanka’s international debt is also another critical issue that influences its policy towards the Indian Ocean region. Below chart shows the composition of the foreign debt of Sri Lanka in 2019.

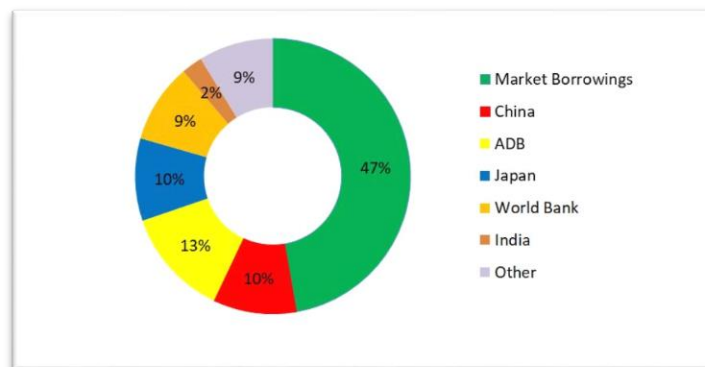


Figure 02: Foreign Debt of Sri Lanka in 2019

Source: http://www.erd.gov.lk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=102&Itemid=308&lang=en

Even though China stands as 10% holder of Sri Lanka’s debt, with recent borrowing of US\$ 500 million syndicated loan from China has increased portion up to more than 25% of total Chinese debt in Sri Lanka. In this circumstance, any aggressive or action against or unfavourable for China would create a negative impact for Sri Lanka. A very recent example

is China’s response towards the rejection of organic fertilizer by Sri Lanka, quoting its bacterial infections (Colombo Gazette, 2021). This dependence is also playing a vital role in policymaking in the Indian Ocean for Sri Lanka.

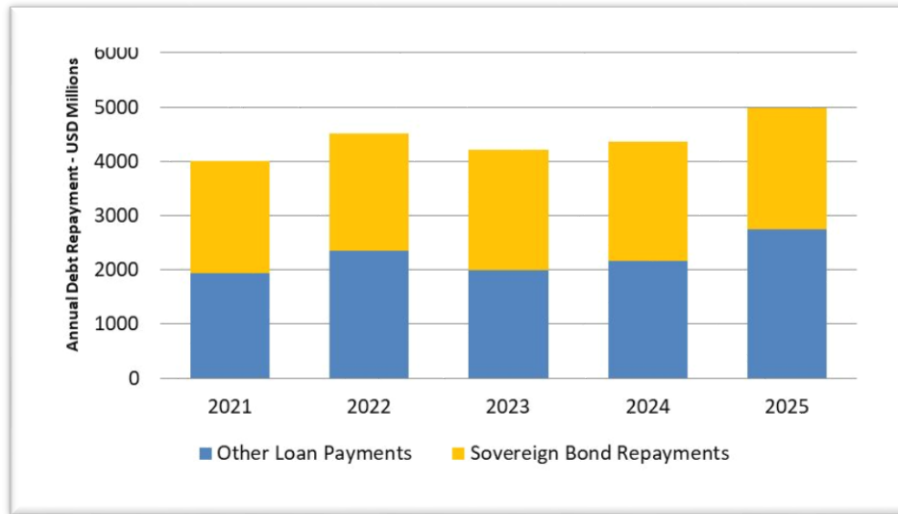


Figure 04: Foreign Debt repayments of Sri Lanka

Source: http://www.erd.gov.lk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=102&Itemid=308&lang=en

Despite the covid19 impacted wounded economy, Sri Lanka also must work hard for its foreign debt repayment annually. Based on the available data, Sri Lanka is accountable to repay more than US\$ 4000 in 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025, almost US\$ 5000 million respectively. If Sri Lanka loses any of the competitors such as India, US or China will trouble the debt repayment since Sri Lanka’s exports, and imports relate to these three countries.

With all changing scenarios in the Indian Ocean, realise the impossibility of the Indian Ocean to remain as a zone of peace due to conflicts of Interest between India, the US and China. Analysing the rival’s strategies and adopted policies to the Indian Ocean region, existing issues in the Indian Ocean and emerging trends have identified nine major factors to justify their cause of action.

Number	Factor
F1	Interrelations of – and Possible Rivalry between – the Region’s Three Major Powers are inevitable (India, china, US)
F2	Trade route that connects the international markets with Africa will be one of the competitions among powerful countries and drag them into the Indian Ocean
F3	Competition for Influence and Resources for the purpose of exploitation and exploration (fishing, minerals, oil & gas)
F4	Failed and Failing States may pose regional instability



F5	Population Growth and People's Movements (Push and Pull Factors of Migrations)
F6	Increasing Militarization in the region
F7	Proliferation of Militant Islamist Movements
F8	SLOC: Potential threats for Flashpoints which identified as (Choke points in Indian Ocean)
F9	Non-conventional security threats (subversive)(piracy), (illegal migration, money laundering, financial crimes)

Table 02: Concerning Factors of Sri Lanka

Source: Author's analysis

The mentioned factors could determine all countries to adopt and implement its policies in the Indian Ocean. Taking all issues highlighted will impact Sri Lanka to the broad range of security and the survival in the Indian Ocean region. The chart below will analyse the impact range of those factors for Sri Lanka.

	Factor	Impact	Possible outcomes
F1.	Interrelations of – and Possible Rivalry between – the Region's Three Major Powers (India, China, US)	Sovereignty issue	Possibility of becoming a proxy state
F2.	Trade route that connects the international markets with Africa will be one of the competitions factors among the powerful countries to drag them into the Indian Ocean	SL Harbours & ports issue	Increased influence of big three over strategically harbours
F3.	Competition for Influence and Resources for the purpose of exploitation and exploration (fishing, minerals, oil & gas)	Rights of Exclusive Economic zone and continental shelf	Increased competition by resource hungry nations
F4.	Failed and Failing States may pose regional instability	Internal security threat	Regional anarchy and war lords
F5.	Population Growth and People's Movements	demographic challenges	Highly concentrated alien communities
F6.	Increasing Militarization in the region	Neutrality in international relations	Compromise of navigation protocols
F7.	Proliferation of Militant Islamist Movements	Security-safe havens	Propagation of extremism and fundamentalism



F8.	SLOC: Potential threats for Flashpoints which identified as (Choke points in Indian Ocean)	Security & safety of the sea routes	Disturbance of SLOC
F9.	Non-conventional security threats (subversive)(piracy),(illegal migration, money laundering, financial crimes)	Non-conventional security threats	Risk of becoming regional hub for non-conventional security threats

Figure 03: Impact analysis of Factors

Source: Author's analysis

Analysing the factors highlighted in the above, it is evident that these impacts posed direct and indirect implications for Sri Lanka's national interests and regional existence as a sovereign country in the Indian Ocean region. One way the other these outcomes challenge the security aspects of Sri Lanka. With a range of implications, Sri Lanka must work for avoiding becoming a proxy state of any of mentioned competitors in the region and to assure its safety and security through engagement as denoted from the Omni balancing theory.

CONCLUSION

Any sovereign state is obliged to preserve its security without the influence of other states. It is not unusual that the security measures that states adopt are not always publicly declared or exposed to any states. However, states design their security policy with the careful consideration of both domestic and external factors regionally and internationally. It is a common feature in the Indian Ocean region that insecurity of one state is created by another in its defence. As a result, states in the Indian Ocean region have created insecurity in their neighbours due to the actions taken by states based on temporary or short-term security arrangements. Although the size of states and their ability to exert influence in the international system facilitate the elimination or management of such risks or problems, small states can be seen to have a significant impact there. Sri Lanka is a small country with a high geographical location and geopolitical importance in the Indian Ocean region, that has attracted the interest of regional and extra-regional powers. Therefore, Sri Lanka's security and threats related reactions obviously impact vis-à-vis other regional countries. For this reason, it will be strategically important for Sri Lanka not to take the side of any party in the growing power struggle but to actively intervene in matters that are important and influential in general on a multilateral basis.

The careful assessment of both fundamental security issues and contemporary security dynamics in the Indian Ocean is especially important for Sri Lanka's future. According to the Omni Balance Theory, it is essential to look at the changes taking place in the outside world, especially in the region, in finding answers to the security issues facing Sri Lanka internally. To



deal with this situation, Sri Lanka needs to adopt an issue-based pragmatic approach with other countries in the region to address its national security concerns.

The contemporary rivalry of India with China to be a major power in the world sharpened India's presence in the Indian Ocean. With Sri Lanka's tie with China has given negative interpretations for Sri Lanka as challenging India's security concerns by many experts. However, it was noticed that Sri Lanka is trying to navigate its policy on the Indian Ocean as a small country and preserve national interest rather than taking either side of the rivals.

According to the military rank index in 2021, The United States, China and India ranked number one, third and fourth, respectively, Where Sri Lanka remained in 79th with increasing status (GFP, 2021). Sri Lanka has no interest to join any ongoing rivalry among the key players in this triangle of power, that are trying to hegemonize the region. However, India's entry into the Indian Ocean region was initially based on non-traditional security concerns. Contemporary developments limited China's presence in the region as a prioritized concern. China's different approach to the Indian Ocean region compared to its South China Sea approach shows the importance of energy, market, and communications as major concerns of China's presence in the region. With the growing trends in the Indian Ocean, China seems to tighten its presence to ensure its expectations in the Indian Ocean region. Acceleration and the expansion of the scope of the QUAD initiative, the AUKUS deal has further increased the tension in the region. China seems to be aware of the importance of Africa in the journey to be a global superpower and navigation route for the continuity of its development.

The United States operates in the Indian Ocean region with two different objectives. First to play the role of existing global superpower and, secondly, to preserve its future power in the Asian region. Based on the above interest, the US operates its activities in the Indian Ocean region. However, the emergence of China and activities of the Indian Ocean created more security concerns for the US to initiate a new strategy to the Indo-Pacific region beyond non-traditional security concerns.

Sri Lanka's policy towards the Indian Ocean follows a multifaceted approach. Mainly, it tries to discourage militarization in the Indian Ocean region while promoting the rule-based ocean governance as a solution for any rivals to use IO for their security and development. As a policy, Sri Lanka is more concerned about the interest of India in the IO. However, a multilateral and cooperative approach to developing ties among India, China, and the US is paramount important for the future development of Sri Lanka. As it declared, Sri Lanka would remain the policy of de-nuclearization in the Indian Ocean and promote a multilateralism approach to address non-conventional security threats of piracy & armed robbery, illicit trafficking, energy resources, and the physical security of ports & ships. Appealing for non-use of force and peaceful settlement of disputes are the major interest of Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean, where many countries are struggling with maritime boundaries



and disputes in the IO. Because of any conflict among a triangle of US, India, and China may create an unstable environment in the region.

Against this backdrop, the peace and stability of the region will be determined by the way the US, India deals with China as they seek to establish their dominance in the Indian Ocean region. The existing reality shows that all rivals blame others for their heavy presence in the region. Whereby China says they enhanced their presence because of the India and US presence over the region and India, US follow the same argument against China. Given the rapid changes taking place in world politics, it is already clear that the power struggle of these countries will have a profound impact on the Indian Ocean region. Under these circumstances, dealing with these powers with equal weight is an essential factor for the future of Sri Lanka while promoting multilateralism in the Indian Ocean. The existing reality shows the further polarisation of the Indian Ocean region. Instead of becoming a confronter, major countries in Asia need to adopt a cooperative and pragmatic approach to make free and open Indo-Pacific to create Asia as a central region in global affairs. It will be the responsibility of emerging powers to think broadly by keeping the region first policy and facilitating small countries to overcome challenges without falling apart with power rivalries which may lead to having an impact on free, open Indo-Pacific. If the confrontation continues, the Geographic identity of Asia may exist without the geopolitical identity of Asia in future. The Asia's century is a promising slogan and a rallying point for states in the region. However, no single country in the region is likely to emerge solely as a superpower, unless they adopt a more collaborative approach, to complement each other's capabilities and capacities. The freedom in the Indian ocean depends not merely in the capacity of a few countries trying to outmanoeuvre others to dominate the Indian Ocean, but on the rule-based, distributed collaboration to ensure peace and safety in the Indian Ocean. Sri Lanka's policy direction underlies this need to collaboration on regional and international powers to use the Indian Ocean as the path to prosperity, as most countries in the region aspire.

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AN INDONESIAN PERSPECTIVE ON TERROR FINANCING INVESTIGATION

I Made Wisnu Wardhana

ABSTRACT

The article consists of three key elements: (1) the terror finance trend in Indonesia prior and after 2013, (2) the connection of Indonesian jihadist in global terror finance, and (3) the Indonesian government response upon countering the terror finance. The first part highlights the shifting trends of terror financing sources from "dependent" terror groups -that are receiving donations from overseas - to "independent" groups that have established charity organisations as the source of funds. The second part discusses "Indonesia and Beyond". This part identifies the important role of the Indonesian jihadist play in terms of terror financing. These activities include courriering funds and playing an intermediary role between the Middle East and Southeast Asia. The third part discusses the Indonesian government's effort in countering terror financing which consists of the strategies and achievements used up to now. These efforts include enforcing laws in arresting "the key financiers" and listing individuals and entities and provide them to update the United Nation consolidated list. These lists reveal their affiliation to Al-Qaeda or domestic terror groups. This articles uses primary data collected from the local law enforcement agencies and highlights the Indonesia terror finance trends, transfer patterns, and the significant improvement of of terror financing countermeasures implem,ented in Indonesia.

Keywords: Terror Financing, Terror Finance Countermeasures, Non-profit organisations

GENERAL OVERVIEW: TERROR FINANCE TREND¹

Prior to 2013, most of the terror finance *modus operandi* have shown a transformation from non-violent to violent.. The non-violent *modus operandi* serves in the form of international illegal transfer of money by the terrorist groups. Abuza (2003) mentioned a local terror group of Indonesia affiliated and received funds from overseas terror groups., The terror attacks by *Jemaah Islamiyah* from 2002 to 2005, such as Bali Bombings, were funded by Al-Qaeda (Abuza,2003). The violent *modus operandi* serves in the form of illegal activity, such as bank robbery(Ariant, 2013), auto-theft, and one "unique" case of fundraising through online

¹ The researcher used 2013 as a year in dividing two different periods consisting of before and after 2013. The year 2013 was when the Indonesian Anti-Terrorism Financing Act was enacted. This timeline is useful to gauge the effectiveness of the Anti-terror Financing Law after it was enacted.

hacking to support terror activity in Central Sulawesi (Ariant, 2019). These activities were identified prior to 2013 in the phase of early establishment of Non-Profit Organization (NPO) in Indonesia in which the NPO then used as the new fundraising *modus operandi* of the terror group. There were three NPO's (Al-Haramain Foundation Indonesia, KOMPAK, and Hilal Ahmar Society Indonesia) identified as being used by terror groups to support the terror activities in Indonesia.

After 2013, there was a significant rise in the numbers of NPOs used for terror activities. There are numerous NPOs established by the terror group serving as the cover of their fundraising to support the terror activities. During 2020 to 2021, the Indonesian authority has successfully dismantled source of funds of the *Jemaah Islamiyah* which used charity organisations named *Baitul Mal Abdurrahman Bin Auf* (BM ABA) and *Syam Organizer* (Antara News 16th August 2021). The charity organisations were used to follow various *modus operandi* in collecting funds, such as charity boxes, online promotions, and direct funds collection during religious events. There were around 2000 charity boxes spread and placed in highly polpulated spots, such as convenience stores and restaurants. This shows the shift of trends from depending on the terror groups to raising funds through non-profit organisations which are more independant in nature.

INDONESIA AND BEYOND: THE INDONESIAN "JIHADIST" MOVEMENT IN GLOBAL TERROR FINANCING.

a. The financial flow of the Islamic State: Centrally supporting terrorism activities taking place in Indonesia from 2015 to 2016.

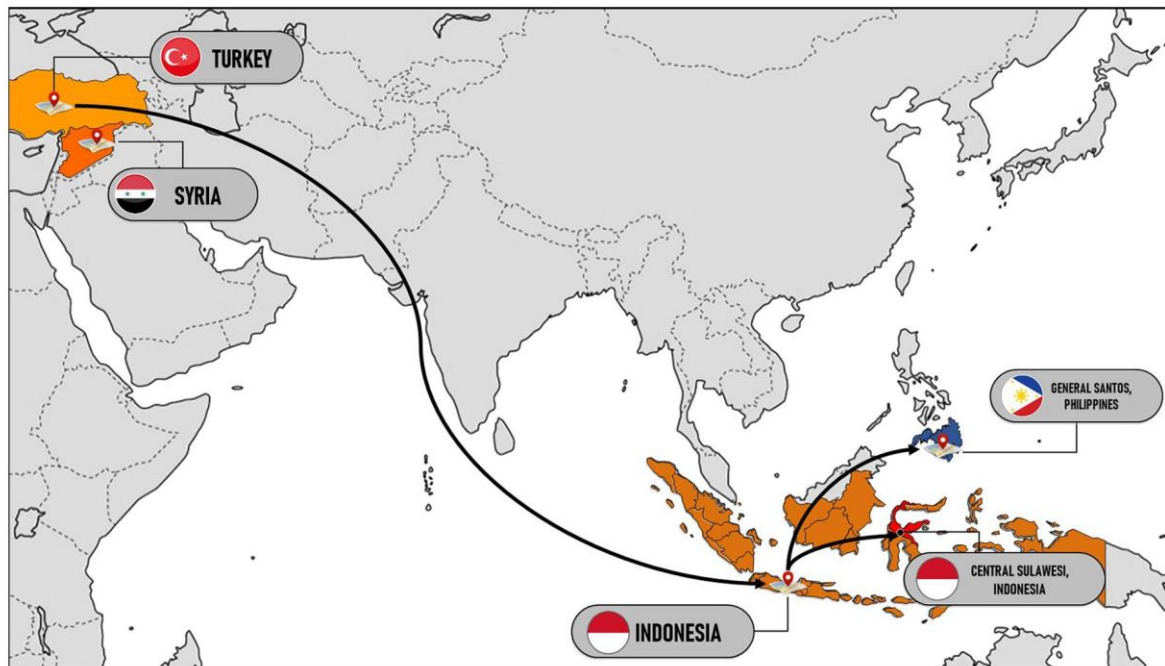


Figure 01. The financial flow of the Islamic State: Centrally supporting terrorism activities taking place in Indonesia from 2015 to 2016

Source: Author

Back in 2014, a group of Indonesian FTF's led by "BahrumSyah" fled to Syria to join the Islamic state (Ref needed). The group then famously known as "Katibah Nusantara" (Straits Times, Jan 17th 2016) and served as the representatives of the South East Asia's jihadist. BahrumSyah and his group were tasked to facilitate the Indonesian and/or South East Asian who wanted to travel to Syria to join the struggle to establish the Islamic State. *Katibah Nusantara* also had other special task to funnel funds to support terror acts in Indonesia or South East Asia (Singh, 2016). In the middle of 2015, *BachrumSyah* sent USD \$100,000 to Indonesia for terror purposes². The funds were used to; (a) establish a new terror group called 'Jemaah Anshoruh Daulah' in Indonesia, (b) support military training in East Java as preparation for terror operation by the 'Jemaah Anshoruh Daulah' in the central capital city of Indonesia which then famously known as the 'Thamrin Terror Bomb' in January 2016, (c) the funds were also transferred to General Santos Southern Philippines³ to purchase firearms to support the terror acts in Indonesia, (d) some of the funds were distributed to the Eastern Indonesia *Mujahideen* in Central Sulawesi as direct funding to purchase logistics, firearms, and indirect funding to finance the family of the terror group.

b. The Indonesian terror group acting as "hub" to finance the Marawi Siege in the mid 2017

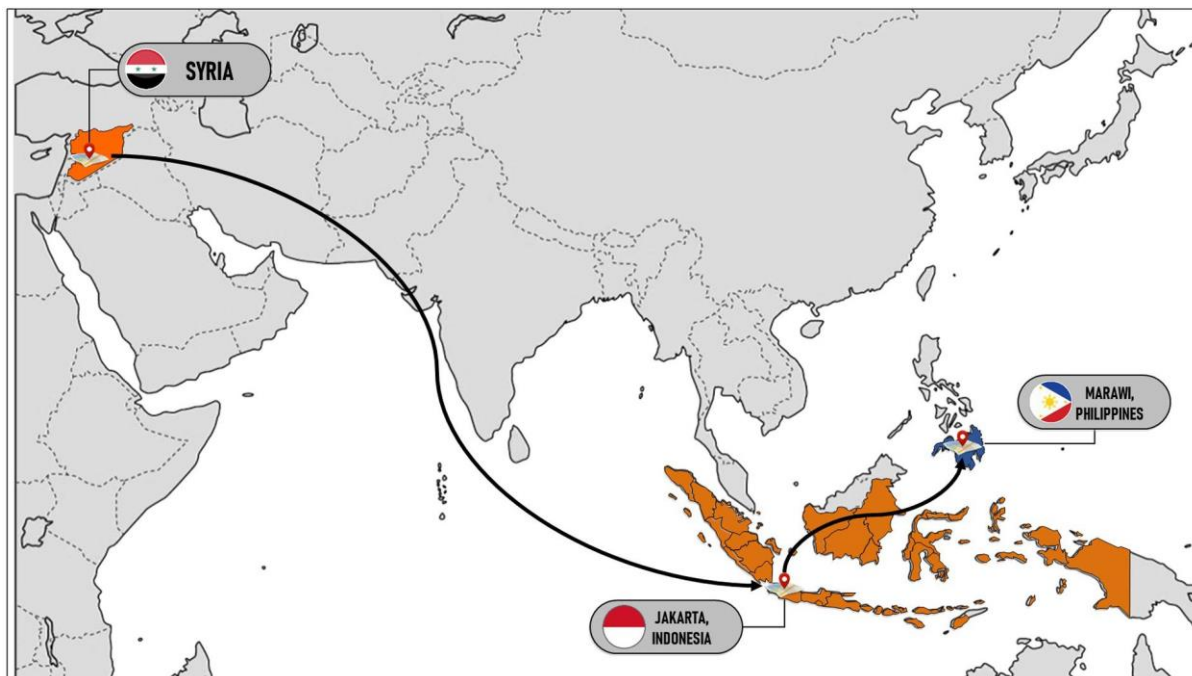


Figure 02: The financial flow of the Islamic State Central and Indonesia as intermediary in supporting terrorism activities in Marawi in 2017

Source: Author

² <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-3142099/kapolri-teroris-dapat-dana-rp-13-m-dari-suriyah-yordania-dan-turki>

³ City of General Santos, is a city in the region of Soccsksargen, Philippines

The incidents in Marawi was led by the local Maute group and *Abu Sayyaf* group faction led by Isnilon Hapilon (Geoffry,2017). At that time, there Munawar (Syria) contacted Achmad Supriyanto (Indonesia) and Dr. Mahmud (Southern Philippines) to send funds for designated areas in Marawi Southern Philippines. The Indonesian supporters named Achmad Supriyanto, Rochmat Septriyanto, Gilang Nabaris and Akhmad Ghoni⁴ sent an amount of Rp 300,000,000 in January 2017 and Rp 100,000,000 in February 2017. The total amount sent from Indonesia were Rp 400,000,000 or USD 28,000⁵. The funds transfers occurred from January to February 2017, while the Marawi Incidents happened a couple months later in May 2017.

c. The Funds for Islamic States-Khorasan

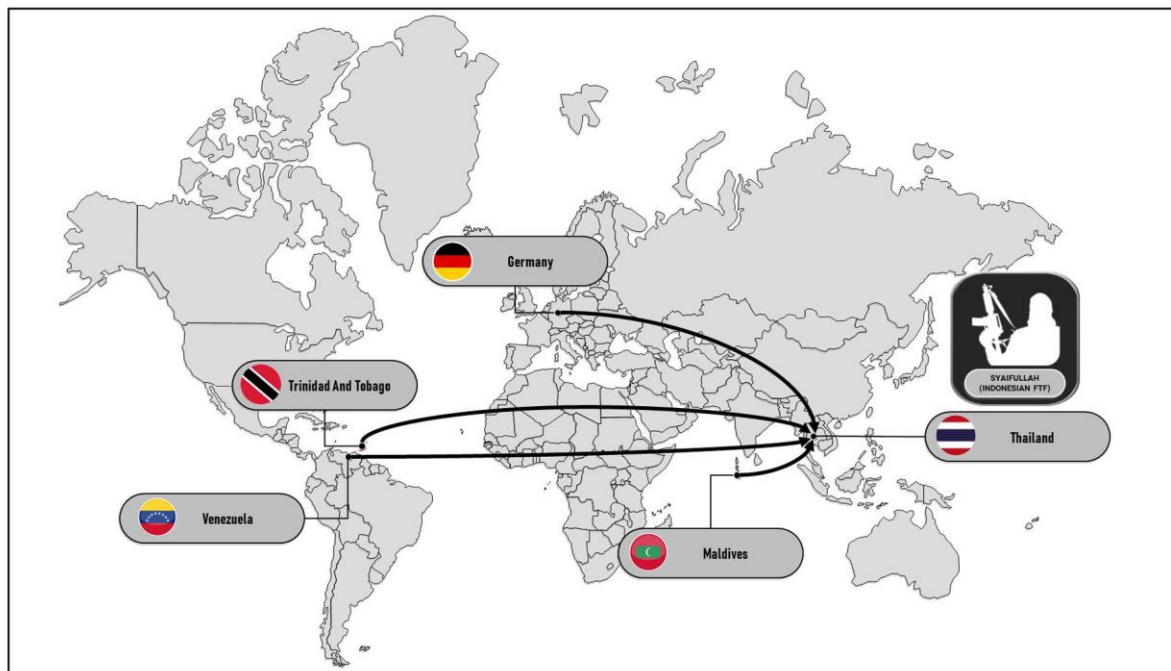


Figure 03: The flow of funds received by Indonesian FTF's for IS-Khorasan in 2017

Source: Primary Data of the Researcher

An Indonesian FTF named Syaifullah a.k.a Daniel fled from Indonesia to Thailand in 2017. He was aiming to join IS-Khorasan and acting as a funds courier. He received funds of \$29,000 USD through Western Union in Thailand then distributed the funds to Myanmar and carried some of the funds to Afghanistan. Syaifullah a.k.a Daniel received the funds from various locations, such as Germany, Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela and Maldives (Singh, 2021). Based on the travel records, he then flew to Iran, and then to Afghanistan after receiving the funds. The Indonesian authority believed that Syaifullah a.k.a Daniel was killed in 2019 in the Afghanistan territory.

⁴ Arrested in March and June 2017.

⁵ Primary data collected from counter terror financing operations in Indonesia.

d. The Financial Flow of NPO's in Funds Collection and Distribution

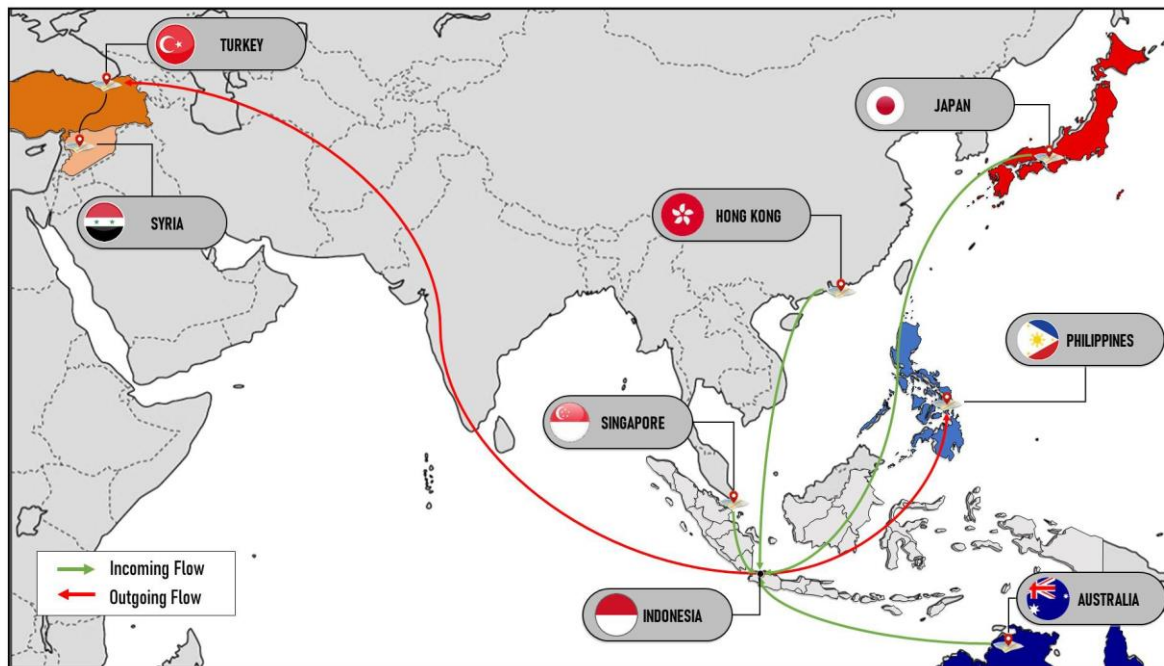


Figure 04: The flow of funds collection and distribution of the non-profit organisation in supporting terrorism activities in Indonesia and overseas after 2013

Source: Primary Data of the Researcher

The fundraising and funds transmissions were conducted in domestic and overseas. The map shows how the funds collected from overseas, mostly from Asia (Singapore, Hongkong, Japan). These funds were transmitted by the Indonesian workers who also served as terror sympathisers (Ariyanti,2020)⁶. The Indonesian authorities also found some funds transfer from Australia. They also found that the donors support the terror groups through charity organisations that were suspected of terror groups or groups that carried out certain movements based on their campaign or promotions. The funds were distributed domestically to support terror groups and their activities in Indonesia. Some were also internationally distributed to the conflict zones, such as Southern Philippines and Syria. Not only funds, the charity organisation also distributed logistics and humanitarian workers which served as cover for transferring "Jihadist" to the conflict zone.

⁶ V. Arianti, RSIS and Muh Taufiqurrohman, "Extremist Charities Spread in Indonesia", EastAsiaForum, (March 17th 2020).

THE INDONESIAN GOVERNMENT EFFORT IN COMBATING TERRORISM FINANCING: WHAT ARE THE STRATEGY AND ACHIEVEMENT

A. LAW ENFORCEMENT STRATEGY

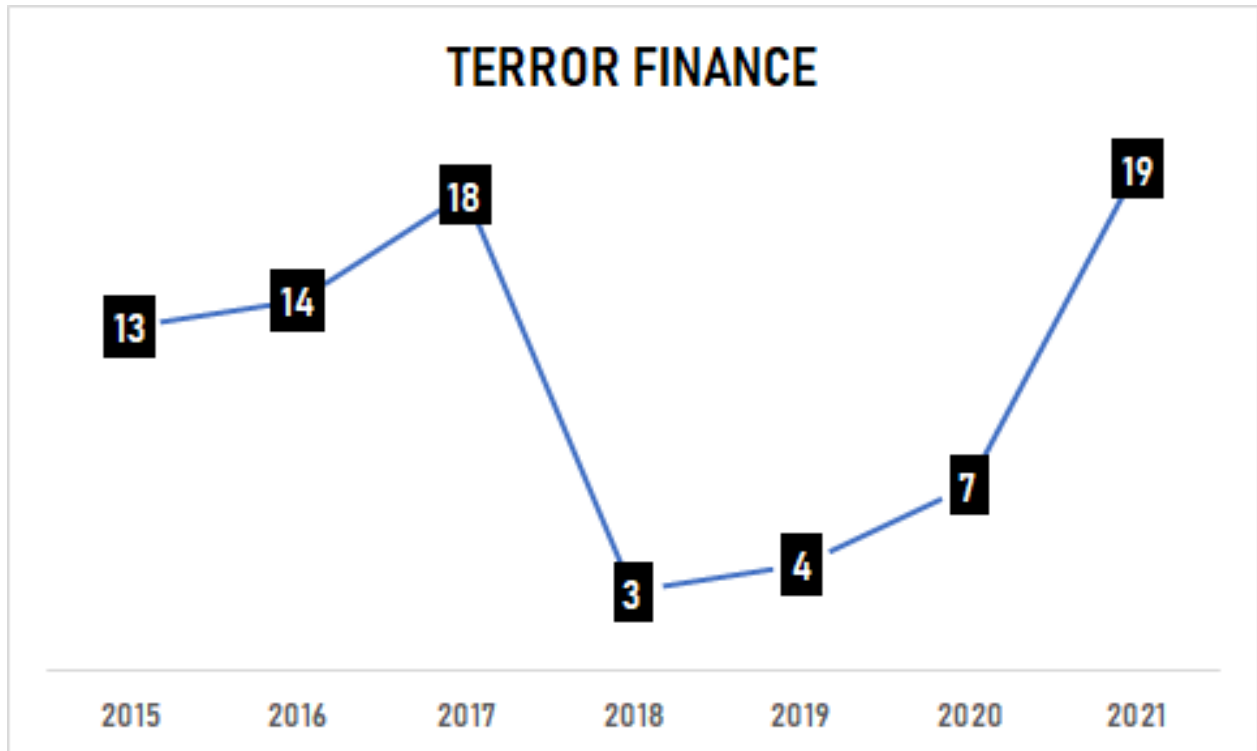


Figure 05: The arrests of terror financiers in Indonesia from 2016 to 2021

Source: Author

Responding to the terror group cases, the Indonesian government has been actively arresting the terror financiers. Referring to Image 5 of Terror Financiers, the blue line shows the number of arrested terror financiers. In 2015 to 2017, some of the terror financiers were Wahyudin a.k.a Iron (arrested in 2015), Hendro Fernando who was arrested in 2016 (Arnaz 2016), Suryadi Masud, Adi Jihadi, and Mulyadi (arrested in 2017) whose cases refer to the financial support from Islamic States Central in supporting terror activities in Indonesia, also cases of financing and purchasing weapons to the Southern Philippines in 2015 to 2016 (Direktori Putusan, 2018) (section II.a). In 2017, some of the terror financiers were Achmad Supriyanto, Rochmat Septriyanto, Gilang Nabaris and Akhmad Ghoni in which they were responsible of funds transmission to Marawi (Direktori Putusan, 2018) (refers to section II.b). Another specific case of the non-profit organisation in terror finance was by Aznop Priyandi, an administrator and treasurer of Baitul Mal Ummah, a charity organization in Riau Sumatra supporting terror groups in North Sumatra (Direktori Putusan, 2018). After 2017, there was a significant drop of arrests from eighteen to three in 2018. However, from 2018 onwards, there has been a significant raise, especially during 2020 to 2021 with a total of seven to nineteen arrested terror financiers.

B. DOMESTIC SANCTIONS LIST STRATEGY

Another strategy used by the Indonesian government is the domestic sanctions list strategy. Image 6 below shows the listing amount by the Indonesian authority upon the terrorists or entities affiliated with terror groups in domestic sanctions list after 2013.

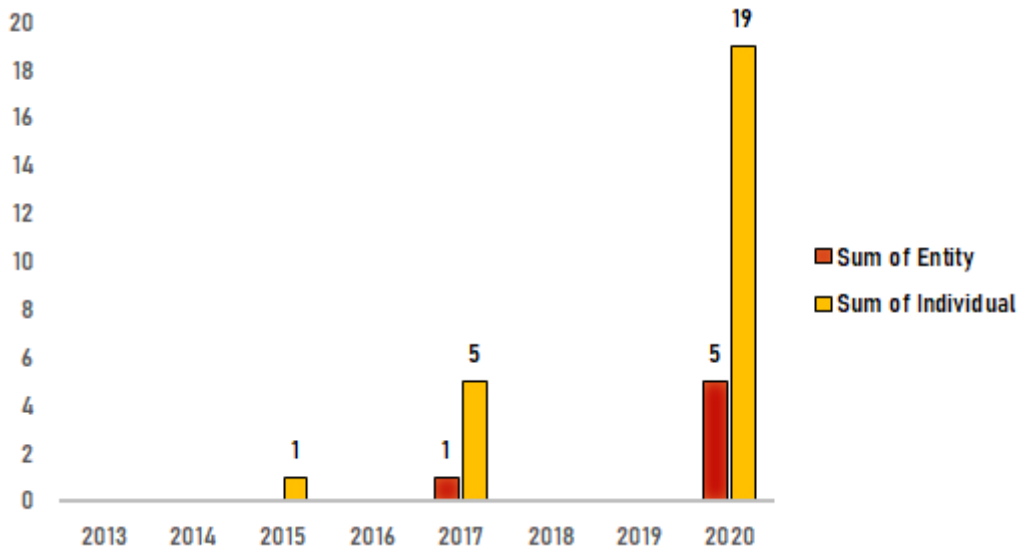


Figure 06: The list of individuals and entities listed in the domestic sanctions list after 2013

Source: Primary Data of the Researcher

In 2015, the domestic sanctions list was represented by only a single amount of individuals listed and none of the entities listed in 2015. However, the listing increased in 2017 with five individuals and one entity listed. There were no individuals or entities listed during 2018 to 2019. However, the listing of individuals and entities then had a drastic increase in 2020 with a total of nineteen individuals acting as the non-profit organization staff and five unregistered non-profit organizations. In 2020, some of the non-profit organizations listed were (1) Abu Ahmed Foundation and (2) Muslimah Bima Peduli which were an affiliate and supporter of the Jabhat Al-Nusrah in Syria(Nomor,2020), (3) RQ Sama Taat which raised the funds through social media in order to support the terror attack at the Brimob police detention center in 2018(The Guardian, 2018), (4) Gashibu, a charity organisation located in Central Java which supported the Eastern Indonesia Mujahideen movement in Central Sulawesi, and (4) Aseer Crue Center which supported people listed in the terrorist wanted list and affiliated with the error suspect (Nomor,2020).

CONCLUSION

Examining the terror finance of Indonesian terror groups supports the states in combating the terrorism. The Indonesian terror groups are playing a significant role in supporting global terror, serving as direct support as an FTF in the conflict zones and as an intermediary in



funnelling funds through cash courier. These terrorist groups act as hub and propagate supportive activities to and from South East Asia. This article spots the shift of terror finance trend in Indonesia terror groups, from receiving funds from overseas and conducting illegal activity to become more independent by using charity organisations as a cover to attract numerous potential donors or even public donations to support their violent activities. Responding to this findings, Indonesia is now on the right path in combating terrorism financing. The data shows significant rise in the quality and quantity of arrest and the listing of individuals or entities in the domestic sanction list. The Indonesian authorities are now using all possible instruments in combating the terror finance in Indonesia. This effort includes promoting cooperation between government agencies and private sector as the efforts could not solely done only by government authorities.

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**LONE WOLF TERRORISM: IDENTIFYING FUTURE POSSIBLE THREATS IN SRI LANKA**

KERL Fernando and Roshan Fernando

ABSTRACT

Lone wolf terrorism is arguably becoming one of the most attractive means of trends in terrorism. Identifying a growing pattern of a 'domino effect' after a terrorist attack, post- Easter Sunday attack tenure in the present Sri Lanka seems a high possibility of inspiring radicalization for a future 'lone wolf terrorist attack'. Moreover, the current COVID-19 pandemic seems to facilitate the grooming of lone wolves due to isolation policies, increased usage of social media and further even to launch an attack since the attention of the 'National Security' has shifted away from terrorism to health and safety. In this backdrop, this paper focuses on whether Sri Lanka's next terrorist attack would be a lone wolf attack. To find feasible solutions, the methodology adopted in this paper is qualitative based on both primary and secondary sources. The main objective of this study was to prevent the next terrorist attack in Sri Lanka. To achieve this objective the research proposed an actionplan to prevent any possible attack and emphasize the importance of civil-military nexus in State intelligence.

Keywords: Lone Wolf Terrorism, Threats, Sri Lanka

INTRODUCTION

There is no universally agreed definition for 'terrorism' though its origins traced back to the French Revolution. In 2006, it has been estimated over 109 different definitions of terrorism. The UN panel, on March 17, 2005, described terrorism as any act "*intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act.*" However, with the evolution of transnational terrorism, traditional terrorism has revolutionalized into a spectrum in which terror tactics have become more unexpected and untraceable.

Against this backdrop, as per the researcher's evaluation, the sources of terrorists can be divided into three: International Terrorist Organizations, Local/ Homegrown terrorist groups and Lone Wolf terrorists. In simple terminology, a 'lone wolf' implies a very independent or solitary or introverted person. Thus, in the present crime-terror jargon, it also refers to 'a terrorist or other criminal who acts alone rather than as part of an organization'.



According to Metzger (2012), Lone wolves are warriors acting alone or in small groups who attacked the government or other targets in 'daily, anonymous acts'. Further, as per Fuard (2021), they can be described as individuals or a collective of organized individuals who are motivated by a terrorist ideology and operate outside of any command structure of a terrorist organization.

However, Perlman (2017) revealing the origins of the term 'lone wolf' pointed out that there is something wrong in its use since Las Vegas attack, due to the fact that wolves are very social animals that usually run in packs. As Ben Zimmer wrote in The Wall Street Journal, native Americans had some legendary chiefs or warriors named 'lone wolf', though, as members of tribal communities, were not really 'lone wolves'.

As per Gartenstein-Ross and Barr (2016), it is sometimes difficult to explain whether an actor has received outside help and what appears to be a lone wolf may actually have been carefully orchestrated from outside. In this backdrop, Lone wolf attackers plan and commit violent acts alone, outside of any command structure and without material assistance from any group. They may be influenced or motivated by the ideology and beliefs of an external group.

Weimann (2012) in his "Lone Wolves in Cyberspace" points out that though these individuals seem to be acting alone, there are often ties between lone wolves and terrorist organisations for example, terrorist backed online content.

According to Worth (2016), Lone wolf attacks are rare — there have been perhaps 100 successful politically motivated attacks pulled off by a solo actor in the United States since the 1940s. But they began attracting special attention from the national security community more than a decade ago when Al Qaeda started encouraging them. By 2010, then-CIA Director Leon Panetta declared that lone wolf attacks could pose the main threat to this country.

As reported by Dickson (2015), during September of 2014, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, the official spokesman for the terrorist group Islamic State (IS), urged followers, sympathizers and Muslims living in western countries to "kill in any manner" , *"a disbelieving American or European – especially the spiteful and filthy French – or an Australian, or a Canadian or any other disbeliever"*

With regard to 'Inspired Networks' or 'Lone Wolf Packs', Salafi Jihadists Lone Wolf or inspired networks will pledge allegiance to groups such as ISIS or Al Qaeda and its leaders. Thus, Spaaji (2010), attempts to isolate the phenomenon of lone wolf terrorism and specifies, a lone wolf terrorists may identify or sympathize with extremist movements or



terrorist organizations, however, if they join an established organization, they cease to be deemed as a lone wolf.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The problem statement, methodology and objectives of this research are as follows; Research Problem of this paper is mainly focus on answering ***whether Sri Lanka's next terrorist attack would be a lone wolf attack?*** The methodology of this paper relied on a qualitative methodology based on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include in-depth discussions with intelligence officers and Secondary sources include media and the internet.

This study requires an extensive study of Lone Wolf Terrorism and therefore the objectives of this research aim to:

- Evaluate the historical background of Lone Wolf Terrorism via reported incidents worldwide
- Examine the nature and sources for evolving Lone Wolves
- Understand the opportunities and threats of possible Lone Wolf Attacks in Sri Lanka
- Ultimately, to find out appropriate measures to overcome this challenge.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In David C. Rapoport's (2012) "The four waves of modern terror", the first wave refers to the anarchist wave, which has similarities to present day lone wolf attacks. As per his words, the high point of international terrorist activity occurred in the 1890s in the "Golden Age of Assassination", when monarchs, prime ministers and presidents were struck down one after another, often by foreign assassins moving easily across international borders.

Historically, Italians were particularly active as international assassins, crossing borders to kill four heads of state or holders of principal political offices in different countries, i.e. the French President Carnot (1894), Spanish Premier Casnovas (1896), and the Austrian Empress Elizabeth 1898. In 1900 an Italian Anarchist Gaetano Bresci a member of the Anarchist community in Patterson New Jersey, the capital of Italian Anarchism in North America returned to Italy to assassinate King Umberto I. Thus, in the present day lone wolf attacks more than the foreign assassins, locals seem to have been radicalized to the extent of launching a terrorist attack.

In this background, the first reported lone wolf attack occurred on 15 November 1988 in Pretoria, South Africa in the modern era, which killed 07 people and wounded 5 more. The attacker was a Christian and he declared that he was the leader of the 'White Wolves Organization', which proved to be a figment of his imagination (Rob, 1991).



Aftermath, the following are the recorded lone wolf terrorist attacks which received the publicity:

Timoth McVeigh who carried out the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing (United States) on 19 April, killed 168 people and it is often given as a classic example of the “lone wolf”.

On 15 April 2013, Boston Marathon Bombing (Massachusetts, United States) took place a short distance from the finish line. A pair of homemade bombs detonated in the crowd watching the race, killing 3 people and injuring more than 260. The first bomb exploded about 5 hours into the race and roughly 12 seconds later a second bomb exploded 180 meters from the first. The attackers were two brothers Dzhokhar Tsarnaev and Tamerlan Tsarnaev (26 years old). Although there appeared to be no concrete links between the Tsarnaev brothers and any larger plots or terrorist groups, Dzhokhar revealed to investigators that he and his brother had obtained the plans for the bombs from Inspire by an online newsletter published by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). According to Ray (2013), that led analysts who were following the investigation to conclude that the Tsarnaevs were “self-radicalized,” having developed a personal militant ideology that drew from disparate sources without being directly connected to any of them. Therefore, it is apparent that they have been self-radicalized through online and unconnected to any outside terrorist groups.

On 12 June 2016, in the Orlando, Florida nightclub shooting, Omar Mateen, a 29 year old Muslim American of Afghan descent, opened fire at the Pulse gay nightclub, killing 49 people and wounding 53 others. He pledged allegiance to ISIL during the attack (Worth, 2016).

On 14 July 2016, Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel, a Tunisian national residing in France, killed over 80 and wounded hundreds when he ploughed a 19-ton cargo truck through crowds celebrating Bastille Day in the southern French city of Nice. Mere days after the Nice massacre, a 17-year-old Afghan migrant seeking asylum in Germany attacked passengers on a train in Würzburg with an axe and a knife, wounding four before police killed him. Two other attacks claimed in ISIS’ name have been carried out since then: *“A suicide bombing on July 24 injured 15 in the German city of Ansbach and on July 26, two attackers claiming allegiance to ISIS stormed a church in a suburb of the French city of Rouen, slit an 84-year-old priest’s throat, and took hostages”*. (Gartenstein-Ross and Barr, 2016)

On 15 March 2019, Brenton Harrison Tarrant, a self-described “Ethno-nationalist”, committed two consecutive terrorist attacks at Al Noor Mosque and Linwood Islamic Centre in Christchurch, New Zealand, killing 51 people and injuring 49 others. The attacker also livestream the attack via Facebook. In 2020, at Nice (France) beheading attack occurred inside the Notre-Dame Basilica in the city centre which killed 3 people. The suspect was 21-



year-old Tunisian national who had arrived in France via Lampedusa in Italy at the beginning of October. (Willsher, 2020)

On 2 November 2020, Vienna (Austria) attack was an incident where a heavily armed man opened fire at Vienna's popular night time place known as 'Birmuda Triangle'. 2 women and 2 men were fatally shot during the minutes of terror. 23 others wounded. The gunman was later identified as 20-yearold "Islamist terrorist". (BBC, 4 Nov 2020)

On 27 January 2021, 16 years old boy has been detained in Singapore for planning to attack Muslims at 02 mosques on the anniversary of New Zealand's Christchurch attack. He has got influenced by the Christchurch killer and this teenager has also planned to livestream the attack as similar to Christchurch attacker. (Mahmud, 2021)

The aforementioned are the most famous cases that occurred worldwide whereas there are several incidents of lone wolf terrorist attacks occurred in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and other parts of the world.

SOURCES FOR EVOLVING

In evaluating the reported incidents worldwide, it is evident that the main source for becoming a lone wolf terrorist is "Radicalization".

According to Hamm and Spaaj (2015), the radicalization model indicates that lone wolf terrorism begins with a combination of personal and political grievances which form the basis for an affinity with online sympathizers. This is followed by the identification of an enabler, followed by the broadcasting of terrorist intent. The final commonality is a triggering event, or the catalyst for terrorism.

Law enforcement and intelligence communities ability to detect and prevent lone wolf terrorism demands a clear understanding of these radicalization processes. Further, the radicalization process seems unique to each other where the tenure to become radicalized varies from person to person. Upon examining the afore cited incidents, it is possible to identify the following sources of evolving lone wolf terrorists:

- Self-radicalization : mostly via online sources.
- Inspired Networks :Terrorist organizations campaigns, family nexus
- Inspired Attacks or any other events

LONE WOLF TERRORISM IN SRI LANKA

In the Sri Lankan context, yet a clear lone wolf attack has not been identified. Even though some try to interpret April 2019 Easter Sunday attack as a lone wolf attack, "According to



government officials, all nine suicide bombers were Sri Lankan citizens associated with National Thowheeth Jama'ath (NTJ), a local militant Islamist group with suspected ties to foreign terrorist organizations" (Lumiae Group, 2019) With the elements of being members of a terrorist/extremist group, they cannot be called as 'Lone wolves'.

After Easter Attack on 21st April 2019, passing two years, again during the Lent season, on 28 March 2021, Palm Sunday and the first day of Easter Holy week, two suspected suicide bombers detonated an explosive device outside the Sacred Heart of Jesus Cathedral in the port city of Makassar, South Sulawesi Province in Indonesia (Solace Global, 2021).

Moreover, the arrest of a Singaporean boy for planning an attack on Christchurch anniversary on 27 January 2021 shows the *domino effect* of lone wolf terrorism and the inspiring impact of other terrorist attacks. Therefore, it is apparent that lone wolf terrorists have successfully embraced the tactic of even being inspired by 'copycats'.

In the evaluation of these events, the researcher finds that there is a high probability of a future lone wolf attack in Sri Lanka, maybe as a response to the Easter Sunday attack or maybe as a result of being inspired by copycats.

A. *The possibility of being unidentified as a 'lone wolf terrorist attack' in Sri Lanka*

On 6 June 2021, in London Ontario (Canada), a pickup driver had moved and killed three generations (4 members) of a Canadian Muslim family, targeted them because of their faith. (Faheid, 2021) The alleged attacker has had terrorism charges filed against him. It is significant because it's the first use of Canada's antiterrorism laws to prosecute an alleged Islamophobic act. "*It can now be accurately described as 'murder-terrorist activity' per Section 231 (601) of the Criminal Code*" (The Conversation, 2021) In this event, it was said by Police that the victims were targeted because they were Muslim.

It is imperative to point out that if a similar incident occurs in Sri Lanka, such would not consider as an act of lone wolf attack, whereas it would be shrouded in the guise of a criminal act, maybe it would even fall into the category of a 'personal revenge'.

B. *Why is possibility in Sri Lanka*

The near periphery of Sri Lanka has experienced lone wolf terrorist attacks. Especially, the arrest of 16-year-old Singaporean boy On 27 January 2021, for planning to attack Muslims at 02 mosques on the anniversary of New Zealand's Christchurch attack. Moreover, On 28 March 2021, Palm Sunday and the first day of Easter Holy week, suicide bombing attack in Indonesia. These two incidents have similarities along with the Easter Sunday bombing,



where the first event symbolizes the possibility of an anniversary attack and the second about a re-target during the Christian Lent season.

In these circumstances, in Sri Lanka, especially aftermath of the Easter Sunday attack on 21 April 2019 by Islamist extremists, the possibility of occurrences of lone wolf attacks by any radicalized person against any community or at any location is highly probable.

This probability has become realistic to a certain extent with an incident reported in Northern Province, Sri Lanka with traces to lone wolf terrorism;

- On 3 July 2020 the explosion in Iyakkachchi, Kilinochchi.

A rehabilitated ex-LTTE cadre Thangarasa alias Gangai Aathman, was injured and later died after hospitalized, while manufacturing an explosives device in his house suspected to be used on Black Tiger Day (5 July 2020). During a search of his house, the Police found two homemade bombs and detonators. During the investigations, it was found that a person named 'Manirasan' had been calling the deceased from France constantly and pushing him to keep the LTTE sentiment alive. Investigations conducted so far revealed that Thangarasa Thevathasan had acted on the instructions of one Manirasan, an ex-LTTE intelligence wing cadre operating from France. Technical analysis of his phone by the intelligence units found a few numbers connected to France...Manirasan has sent money to Thevathasan from France to conduct these activities and a large sum of money has been sent during June 2020 to purchase a motorcycle in aid of his activities.(Nathaniel, 2020) This incident has been purely categorized as an attempt of LTTE revival. Thus, during the interviews led with intelligence officers, it was revealed that though an ex-LTTE cadre was engaged, this attempted attack even had characteristics of lone wolf terrorism, because, the deceased had been inspired by a person called *Manirasan* from France and a large sum of money has been transacted in aid of this attempt. It seems that the deceased has been inspired by *Manirasan* outside the direct command structure of the LTTE.

Furthermore, there have been many cases of manufacturing explosive devices at the domestic level in Sri Lanka, mainly by ex-LTTE cadres. Even the extremists have manufactured the Easter Sunday attack explosives locally. . As Ray (2013) reported about the Boston lone wolf attack by two brothers, where the devices used in the attacks were household pressure cookers that had been packed with an explosive substance, nails, and ball bearings and the latter two elements acting as shrapnel when the bombs detonated.

In Sri Lanka's famous 'parcel bomb case' of The King Vs Jayawardene, which was held on 15 July 1949 at the Court of Appeal, the deceased was a youth of age of about 16 years at the time of his death which occurred on January 21, 1948. On that day when he returned from school he found a parcel which has been sent to him by post awaiting him. He took it to his room and when he opened it a bomb which was inside it exploded and caused him very



serious injuries which resulted in his death. “Mr. Chanmugan, the Government Analyst, who dismantled one of the bombs said that the main component of it was a stick of dynamite about 2 ½ inches in length...”. [Emphasis added] (LAWNET) This proves that even in 1948, the traces of usage of explosives upon personal revenge were in practice.

Even in the present context, the technology of manufacturing bombs are freely available online. Moreover, the basic ingredients to manufacture homemade explosive devices are also available in the open market in Sri Lanka. For example, TATP includes hydrogen peroxide, which is found in hair bleach and some disinfectants. Ammonium Nitrate & Urea Nitrate are also chemical compounds mostly found in fertilisers. Further, fuel oil, black power, icing sugar etc are some easily available ingredients (National Academies Press, 2018, p 23,). This even aid the breeding of terrorism as well as the opportunities available for terrorists for future attacks. Therefore, reducing the threat of improvised explosive device attacks by restricting access to explosive precursor chemicals.

C. *How to identify*

Identification of lone wolf terrorists are the biggest challenge for the counter-terrorism mechanisms. As per the views of Hamm and Spaaj (2015) on radicalization process, the lone wolves physically isolate from society, at the same time they seek recognition for their causes through spoken statements and threats, manifestos, e-mail messages, texting and videotaped proclamations.

Isolation and the expression of radicalized ideology or expression of hate or revenge against any community, religion or ideology and further, showing allegiance to any terrorist group are the only available sources which would depict from the individual himself/herself. Further, tracing the online usage links, social media networks and history of Google search can be possible ways to identify the radicalized individuals. Further, at the domestic level or search on each other in small circles, by checking on the usage of social media, sudden or periodic changes in expressions, ingredients he/she buys are the basic identification methods of lone wolf terrorists. Thus, domestic methods will also not be successful due to the evolving trend of family nexus in terrorism.

Although lone-wolf attacks are hard to prevent due to many practical issues, mainly challenges of identifications , this research proposes the following action-plan in order to prevent lone wolf attacks in Sri Lanka:

1) Measures should be taken to isolate lone wolves.

Isolation is the best way to identify lone wolves. As Sri Lankan Government successfully isolated LTTE suicide bombers, even to overcome this obstacle, it is imperative to provide guidelines to the police and security forces on how to identify a lone wolf attacker/terrorist.



- 2) The Government should build and maintain a strong relationship with the most affected communities.

In the Sri Lankan context, especially with the Tamil, Muslim and Catholic/ Christian communities. The researcher finds these communities more vulnerable and depressed due to past occurrences and this research predicts these communities will be vulnerable for lone wolf breeding. Intelligence officers shall be deployed to gather information and also by methods such as 'community policing', the grievances of these communities as well as suspicious people/ behaviours shall be identified.

- 3) The Government security agencies and law enforcement authorities should interrupt the communication between inspired networks via social media and shall take maximum precautions to cut the bridges of sources for becoming radicalized.

For example, fundraising campaigns, diasporas, hate speeches and other violent propaganda etc used to attract lone wolves shall be identified and proceed legal action against them or cut the bridges of communications. With these, Government should try to discredit the ideology embraced by lone wolves.

D. Possible future attacks

There is a perceived threat of lone wolves terrorism in Sri Lanka. Most importantly, the current COVID-19 pandemic is a highly possible stage to breed lone wolves by inspired networks as well as to become self-radicalized without getting noticed due to existing health guidelines which advocate the isolation behaviours.

On the other hand, police and armed forces' attention have shifted more towards the pandemic than to terrorism owing to the prevailing situation in the country though the country only passes two years of a fateful Easter Sunday attack. For example, even private security officers of supermarkets are more vigilant on customer's body temperature, masks and sanitizing rather than checking the customers belongings in search of any dangerous weapon.

In the discussion of future possible lone wolf threats, this research forecast the danger, if any police or security forces personnel become radicalized, the threat he/she will be able to pose against the national security of Sri Lanka. Suppose an airforce pilot has become radicalized and has ended up being a lone wolf without being identified? Suppose a police officer has become a lone wolf attacker? The threat will be calculated if an official aircraft holder or a licensed weapon holder execute an attack in such circumstances.



CONCLUSION

In concluding remarks, as no universally agreed definition for 'terrorism' due to the unpredictable nature and similarly yet academia has never agreed on a finite meaning for 'lone wolf terrorism'. However, Rappoport's first wave refers to the anarchist wave which has a similarity to present day lone wolf attacks. In evaluating the reported incidents worldwide, it is evident that the main source for becoming a lone wolf terrorist is "Radicalization". In the Sri Lankan context, yet a clear lone wolf attack has not been identified though some interpret April 2019 Easter Sunday attack as a lone wolf attack, with the elements of attackers being members of a terrorist/extremist group, they cannot be called as 'Lone wolves'. After Easter Attack on 21st April 2019, passing two years, again during the Lent season, on 28 March 2021, Palm Sunday and the first day of Easter Holy week, two suspected suicide bombers detonated an explosive device outside a church in Indonesia, also, with the arrest of a Singaporean boy for planning an attack on Christchurch anniversary on 27 January 2021 shows a *domino effect* of the lone wolf terrorism and the inspiring impact by other terrorist attacks. Therefore, it is apparent that lone wolf terrorists have successfully embraced the tactic of even being inspired by 'copycats'. In evaluation of these events, it is evident that there is a high probability of a future lone wolf attack in Sri Lanka, maybe as a response to the Easter Sunday attack or maybe as a result of being inspired copycats. Hence, the identification will become problematic with labelling any cause of 'lone wolf terrorist activity' as a mere criminal act or as an LTTE revival attempt during the investigations due to lack of the knowledge of 'lone wolf terrorism' concept. Therefore, in order to identify, the 'knowledge' on lone wolf terrorism is imperative and this research propose a three steps actionplan to prevent lone wolf attacks in Sri Lanka : *Firstly*, measures should be taken to isolate lone wolf attackers by providing guidelines to the police and security forces by identification. *Secondly*, the government should build and maintain a strong relationship with the most affected communities such as by means of 'community policing' and *thirdly*, the Government security agencies along with law enforcement authorities to interrupt the communication between inspired networks via social media and shall take maximum precautions to cut the bridges of sources for becoming radicalized. In the circumstances, this research recommends a forum where Sri Lankan police and armed forces field officers, intelligence officers, academics and policymakers are made to work together in the dissemination of information and intelligence in order to prevent any attempt of any lone wolf attack in Sri Lanka.

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CLASH OF STRATEGIES: CHALLENGE OF PRESERVING THE INDO-PACIFIC EQUILIBRIUM

Captain Rohan Joseph¹

ABSTRACT

The Indo-Pacific is witnessing fierce strategic competition as an outcome of employing Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategies by several leading players to gain pre-eminence. These strategies tilt the geostrategic balance in one's favour, dividing the critical ocean space led by the U.S. and China. As no other maritime space has a diverse geostrategic and geopolitical environment like the Indo-Pacific, these strategic clashes have the potential to impact global peace and stability. This paper focuses on analysing how the clash of Indo-Pacific strategies and initiatives introduced by several players could impact the Indo-Pacific equilibrium leading to global instability? The impact of major players led by the U.S., China, regional organizations, and other players was analysed to comprehend the resultant impact on the Indo-Pacific peace and stability. The paper also examined the policy and strategy implications encountered by island nations like Sri Lanka, in attempting to strike a balance while responding to the Indo-Pacific strategies and initiatives introduced by the two major blocks led by the U.S. and China. The above understanding would assist policymakers in characterizing the Sri Lankan Indo-Pacific strategy and strategizing future foreign policy options.

Keywords: Indo-Pacific, Indo-Pacific Strategies, Regional Stability

INTRODUCTION

In 1920 Karl Haushofer, a German geopolitician accurately forecasted the renaissance of Asia through the reflection of Indian and Chinese interactions in the greater Indo-Pacific Ocean, which he named the *Indopazifischer Raum* or the Indo-Pacific Space (Haushofer, Tambs and Brehm, 2021). However, the Indo-Pacific concept drew wider attention in recent geopolitical discussions following a speech made by the former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Indian Parliament in 2007 (MOFA-Japan, 2007). Since then, the Indo-Pacific concept has gathered momentum and is currently seen as one of the most vibrant ocean spaces in which major powers continue to engage in fierce competition. Current dynamics in the Indo-Pacific span from the West African shores to the Eastern shorelines of the U.S. Robert D. Kaplan (2010) argues the criticality of the Indian Ocean as well as the broader Indo-Pacific to the U.S. One could expect the discussions pertaining to the Indo-Pacific to continue especially considering the dynamic nature of the geopolitical competition as well as the global economic significance the Indo-Pacific holds.

¹ Views expressed here are that of the authors and do not reflect that of Sri Lanka Navy.



The Indo-Pacific will remain as the core where the future direction of the world will be largely dependent on. This attracted major players to the Indo-Pacific led by the U.S. and China. These two players are attempting to gain the strategic edge in the Indo-Pacific by competing and attracting others to join them. While some players have opted to be part of the above dynamics, others have opted out, because of the influencing power of the two major players. Employment of dedicated Indo-Pacific strategies and initiatives by major players has been identified in influencing the remaining players in the region and achieving the former's strategic objectives.

The reiterations of Prime Minister Abe's 2007 speech (MOFA, 2007) elaborated on the 'broader Asia' and 'dynamic coupling' between the Indian and the Pacific Oceans as 'seas of freedom and of prosperity' (Abdollahpour, 2021). Abe (2021) ensured that his leadership will stand by for the preservation of the common good in the Indian and Pacific Oceans and that Japan will play significant role in it. Since then, players in the Indo-Pacific as well as have introduced dedicative Indo-Pacific strategies and initiatives. While these strategies broadly focus on ensuring free and unrestricted access to all, they however focus on fulfilling strategic objectives that are unique to a nation or a block.

Even though the stated policy and strategic objectives of the Indo-Pacific strategies and initiatives aim at making the region free and open to all, ground realities resemble a different picture due to the fierce competition that has been unveiled. The U.S., China, Japan, India, Australia, some European Union (EU) countries, organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) either have dedicated Indo-Pacific strategies or initiatives. There are obvious concerns among the Indo-Pacific players of each other's motives as the region is divided into two leading power blocks led by the U.S. and China.

Existing Indo-Pacific strategies and initiatives are used to gain regional supremacy. Accordingly, the two leading players require the acceptance of the other players as they remain a vital pillar in executing the former's intentions in the region. While the United States and China continue to use their strategies and initiatives in this game of chess to gain a lead, the remaining players are influenced to accept the former's strategy over the other and make strategic moves against the opponent. Certain regional states are aware of the evolving dynamics and have the potential to rebalance due to their superior position. However, countries with less influencing powers have either been influenced or forced to align with one of the blocks.

It is in the above context that the strategies and initiatives of major players continue to clash in a quest to gain dominance. The interest shown by distant Indo-Pacific countries in its affairs have added a new dimension making the already complicated and geopolitically sensitive Indo-Pacific playing more complex. The Indo-Pacific, therefore, has become a highly volatile region, because of the continuous pressure being exerted on the regional states as well on the leading players that seek to gain a strong foothold by tilting the balance of power in one's favour. As the competition continues, the strategy clash has an exceedingly high potential to impact regional equilibrium as leading players focus on preventing the opponent from gaining a strategic edge. As no other maritime sphere has

such a diverse geostrategic and geopolitical environment like the Indo-Pacific, the above strategy clash has the potential to influence global peace and stability.

This article illustrates the key facets of Indo-Pacific strategies and initiatives introduced by some of the major players, organizations and their impacts on regional equilibrium leading to global instability. Further, at a time where Sri Lanka has been identified by many regional and global players as a strategically vital partner in fulfilling certain objectives of respective Indo-Pacific strategies and initiatives, the outline of Sri Lanka's Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy is also briefly presented.

THE U.S. AND THE INDO-PACIFIC

Despite the introduction of three key documents, the U.S. is yet to fully employ a broader actionable framework to yield the expected strategic ends highlighted in the documents. While there is strong attention towards the dynamics that evolve in the Indo-Pacific, the environment has offered a unique opportunity for the U.S. to strengthen economic and strategic engagement in the region.

A shift from the previous Asia-Pacific stance to the present Indo-Pacific shows that the U.S.' focus on the region is strongly cemented in their policies (Heiduk and Wacker, 2020). The U.S. has also understood the strategic significance of the Indian factor when engaging in the Indo-Pacific and to use the maritime space to challenge the Chinese behaviour (CNAS, 2020). Since former U.S. President Trump's speech in Vietnam in November 2017, in which he elaborated on the broader U.S. vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific, the U.S. has made it clear that their wider strategic aim is to gain pre-eminence in the region.

The U.S. National Security Strategy published in December 2017 notes that "a geopolitical competition between *free* and *repressive* visions of world order is taking place in the Indo-Pacific region [emphasis original]" (U.S. Government, 2017). This statement essentially divides the Indo-Pacific region into two competitive blocks hinting that the 'free' vision is held by the U.S. and the 'repressive' vision by China. The document further highlights that Beijing's intention is to displace the U.S. in the Indo-Pacific and reorder the region in favour of Beijing (U.S. Government, 2017).

The *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships and Promoting a Networked Region* published in June 2019 (Department of Defence, 2019), draws attention to forming partnerships and allegiances. The opening remarks denote that "increased investments...will sustain American influence in the region to ensure favourable balances of power and safeguard the free and open international order" (Department of Defence, 2019). Identifying the region as the priority theatre also reflects that the U.S. is focused on countering China's attempts to "reorder the region to its advantage by leveraging military modernization, influence operations, and predatory economics to coerce other nations" (Department of Defence, 2019, p 4).

The third document launched in November 2019 titled *Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision*, describes how the U.S. is planning to collaborate with its allies and partners (U.S. State Department, 2019). This document states that the "Indo-Pacific



nations face unprecedented challenges to their sovereignty, prosperity, and peace” and reaffirm that the U.S. “will compete vigorously against attempts to limit the autonomy and freedom of choice of Indo-Pacific nations” (U.S. State Department, 2019, p 5). In addition to renaming the U.S. Pacific Command as the USINDOPACOM, the U.S.-India partnership is considered vital to implementing the U.S. Indo-Pacific vision. To compete with China’s range of infrastructure initiatives, the document fills a vacuum by introducing a series of infrastructure projects that were not discussed previously.

The arguments of the above strategy documents revolve around gaining pre-eminence in the Indo-Pacific over China. While the current administration has also given greater weight to Indo-Pacific affairs and the active U.S. involvement in the region, the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategies and initiatives are largely focused on competing with China. While the U.S. strategy documents spell out promising plans and initiatives that attempt to ensure freedom of navigation, rules-based order, focus on allies and partners, the prime objective of the U.S. is to contain China. While this general notion gathers momentum, whether the U.S. is truly capable of rallying partners and allies in the region is yet to be proved. While analysts predict greater U.S. presence in the Indo-Pacific especially after the withdrawal from Afghanistan, it is imperative to note here that what makes U.S. presence in the region is not additional boots on the region, but its potential in harnessing a stronger framework. The strategies have so far divided the region into two blocks and have also resulted in motivating passive players in the region to align with the U.S. initiatives in the face of China’s ever-growing influence and presence in the region.

CHINA AND THE INDO-PACIFIC

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has been widely regarded as Beijing’s global and grand strategy (Akimoto, 2021). China believes that the BRI can improve the global governance system and the initiative is even capable of assisting disadvantageous countries (Minghao, 2018). Further, the BRI has implied that its focus is centered on economic cooperation, and that it does not entail security objectives (Minghao, 2018). It has been able to establish vital nodes at strategically important locations in the Indian Ocean. Moreover, Beijing’s critics accuse that it is monopolizing some of the strategically vital chokepoints.

Apart from the growing tensions between the U.S. and China in the South China Sea, Beijing is of the view that Washington is attempting to prevent the implementation of the BRI (Huang, 2018; Liu, 2019). It is observed that the U.S. is attempting to gain control of the Eurasian continent in the post-Cold War era by preventing the rise of a country or group that has the potential to challenge the U.S. (Yang, 2019). On the contrary, Beijing sees the BRI as a novel concept that promotes an updated version of international relations as the initiative can bring tangible benefits to Indo-Pacific countries (Meng, 2018).

Beijing’s reluctance to use the Indo-Pacific term in their policy documents and the notion that China does not belong to the region reflects the contradictory nature even on using the Indo-Pacific term by China (He and Li, 2020). Furthermore, Beijing criticizes the U.S. of attempting to create competition in the region by creating different blocks, resulting in a major division. Foreign Minister Wang Yi noted that “stoking a new Cold War is out of sync with the times and inciting block confrontation will find no market” (Ministry of Foreign



Affairs, 2018). However, the BRI, like its competitive initiatives in the region requires the assistance and the acceptance of the other players. When compared with other Indo-Pacific strategies and initiatives, the BRI has covered a considerable area in the region through a range of projects that challenge the U.S.-led block. This tension is expected to escalate to a level that could make the region geopolitically unstable.

JAPAN AND THE INDO-PACIFIC

While Japan's intentions immediately after the World War II was to expand its shipping industry and fisheries, attention to maritime security sparked following Beijing's gradual expansion in the maritime space that has a direct impact on Tokyo's security objectives. The intention to play a vibrant role in shaping the regional dynamics is a result of a range of manoeuvres that China has conducted in the strategic realm making Japan uncomfortable. While attempting to employ a wide range of mechanisms to ensure security, Japan together with the U.S. has charted a course in the Indo-Pacific with the intention of reshaping global perceptions.

Former Prime Minister Abe is credited with introducing the Indo-Pacific concept in 2007 and the subsequent introduction of Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy, which combines two continents-Asia and Africa, with two oceans-the Indian and the Pacific (Ministry of Foreign Affairs-Japan, 2017). The FOIP aims at promoting stability in the region by strengthening partnerships with India, East Africa, Australia, and the U.S. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs-Japan, 2017). Beijing's engagement in the Indo-Pacific influenced Japan to shift from its 'check book diplomacy' to take more initiative (Green, 2018). However, Beijing continues to view the FOIP as a containment strategy (Kistanov, 2018).

One of the key pillars of Japan's FOIP strategy is economy, and it seeks all possible avenues that could displace China from the equation in the Indo-Pacific affairs by way of expanding two critical sectors namely, energy, and infrastructure (Paskal, 2021). Keeping an uninterrupted energy supply is not only essential for Japan but equally important for all the players in the region. While the slightest disturbance in the sea lanes of communication could impact Japan in a major way, attention is also focused on becoming a leading liquefied natural gas provider in the region. The Japan-U.S. Strategic Energy Partnership from 2017 (White House, 2017) adds a strong pillar to Tokyo's FOIP strategy and position in the region as an alternative energy supplier as well.

As a countermeasure to Beijing's BRI-led infrastructure projects, Tokyo also focuses on capitalizing their potential in building high-quality regional infrastructure that shows the ambition to compete with China. The attempt to become the flag bearer in regional infrastructure development and the focus to play a leadership role in the growing strategic and economic relations in the Indo-Pacific reflects that through the FOIP Japan is ready to challenge Beijing and partner with the U.S. in displacing China from the Indo-Pacific.

INDIA AND THE INDO-PACIFIC

The strategic significance of the Indian factor in terms of preserving the strategic balance in the region has been accepted by all the players. This critical position India holds in Indo-



Pacific affairs makes New Delhi a vital partner that need to be taken on board by the major players continue to compete in the region, and to those who focus on gaining supremacy over the others by employing varying Indo-Pacific strategies and initiatives. The current political leadership leads New Delhi in a direction that can frame a robust, initiative-taking, and sustainable mechanism that helps India to take the middle path without aligning with the U.S. or confronting the China factor.

Prime Minister Modi's Indo-Pacific strategy not only aims at reaping the full potential of the Indo-Pacific but attempts to strike a balance between the U.S. and China, as the slightest intention of aligning with either one of them would not only have irreversible impacts on the economic and security aspects of India but would result in tilting the strategic balance in favour of either the U.S. or China. As the pragmatic balancing act may seem challenging, New Delhi favours working with Washington and Beijing to build a resilient maritime security framework and focus deeply on the geo-economics front. To achieve the above, New Delhi has introduced initiatives such as the Act East Policy, and the Free, Open, and Inclusive Indo-Pacific strategy that help to connect strategically vital nodes in the Indian Ocean.

India's 'Act East' policy aims to engage with the Asia-Pacific to promote economic cooperation through bilateral and multilateral dialogue (Ministry of External Affairs-Government of India, 2015). India's 'Free, Open, and Inclusive' Indo-Pacific strategy highlighted the importance of inclusiveness when addressing Indo-Pacific affairs (Chaudhry, 2018). The 'Act East' policy has not been viewed as a strategy to counter China. Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (Panda, 2017), the 'Neighbourhood First Policy (Tourangbam, 2019), and 'Security and Growth for All in the Region', (Kapur, 2019) are the prominent Indian strategies that aim at maintaining the crucial balance in the Indo-Pacific.

Yet, tensions in the long-disputed border in the Himalayan region, increased Chinese activities and presence in the Indian neighbourhood have made New Delhi uncomfortable. Analysts highlight that the increasing Chinese presence in countries including Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Pakistan not only fuels New Delhi's suspicions over the true ambitions of China but makes it important to understand how the behaviour of states could have wider strategy impacts on New Delhi's Indo-Pacific vision.

AUSTRALIA AND THE INDO-PACIFIC

Despite a whole of government approach towards Pacific islands, Southern Ocean, and Antarctica (Brewster, 2021), Australia has so far failed to frame a comprehensive Indian Ocean strategy (Bateman and Bergin, 2010). Australian policy documents such as the Foreign Policy White Paper (FPWP) and the Defence White Paper (DWP) attempt connect nodes to the Indo-Pacific. The Australian FPWP highlights the importance of peaceful evolution respecting the fundamental principles of Indo-Pacific players (Australian Government Foreign Policy White Paper, 2017). The Australian DWP highlights the value of strengthening the Australia-U.S. alliance and the necessity of U.S. leadership in protecting regional interests (Australian Government-Department of Defence, 2016). However, neither the FPWP nor the DWP have taken into consideration the impacts on the Indo-Pacific or on the regional stability due to aligning with the U.S. to contain China.



The Indo-Pacific strategic space is of vital importance to Australia's long-term ambitions in the region. Eventually, Australia will benefit due to the opportunities available to deal with regional players, opening of a path to counter China, and to address maritime security concerns (Panda, 2019). With Australia's future military ambitions and its willingness to play a vital role in the Indo-Pacific, Canberra is seen as an attractive security partner for regional players. The recent interactions and direct security cooperation with countries such as Japan and broader engagement with Southeast Asia, South Pacific, and the Indian Ocean exhibit Australia's interest in engaging and contributing to each other. However, the recent developments which sparked following the announcement of the 'AUKUS', an alliance among Australia, the United Kingdom, and the U.S., is seen as a major challenge for Australia in its own neighbourhood and the Indo-Pacific. The new alliance has been criticized by different entities for making the region further divided and seen as a mechanism to counter Beijing through different fronts.

THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE INDO-PACIFIC

The strategic value of the Indo-Pacific region to the European Union (EU) has been increasing in the recent past. The economic potential, geopolitical dynamics, and importantly the maritime trade and energy network that connects through the Indo-Pacific remain critical for the EU's future progression. In addition to being one of the leading trade partners in the Indo-Pacific, 'over 70% of the global trade in goods and services, and over 60% of foreign direct investment is being held by the Indo-Pacific and Europe (European Commission, 2021).

Like all other major global players, the EU countries also have identified the intense geopolitical rivalry and the increased pressure that is mounted on global trade and security. The above reasons have largely led the EU to deeply engage with the Indo-Pacific considering the importance of strategically engaging to achieve long-term EU objectives. The EU has elaborated on the importance of having a common position in the region and of playing a significant role in the security domain as well.

President Macron in a speech delivered in Sydney in May 2018 presented France as an Indo-Pacific power while outlining its strategy towards the region (Morcos, 2021). Interestingly, France's Indo-Pacific concept is much wider as it stretches from Djibouti to Polynesia. Paris is also deeply concerned about the China factor and its impact on the global commons. Therefore, France is focusing on preserving the equilibrium in the region as there is a possibility of the current tensions leading even to a military conflict. While attempting to strike a balance between the leading players, Paris sees itself as a 'mediating, inclusive, and stabilizing power' focusing on promoting a 'stable, law-based, and multipolar order' in the Indo-Pacific (Morcos, 2021). In doing so, Paris is keen on improving the military balance while supporting Europe's active interaction with the Indo-Pacific.

Germany introduced policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific in September 2020 titled 'Germany-Europe-Asia: Shaping 21st Century Together' (Bordoloi, 2021). It is interesting to note that the document does not present a Germany Indo-Pacific Strategy; instead, it provides a set of guidelines that urge the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to engage with Southeast Asia. Berlin understands that the shifting geopolitical power



structures in the Indo-Pacific have the potential to impact Germany in the future. At a time when Europe is seriously considering the issues that are likely to surface due to the China factor, Germany makes it a point not to take sides and to give due prominence to strengthening multilateral mechanisms in the Indo-Pacific.

The Netherlands launched their policy note on the Indo-Pacific in November 2020 titled 'Indo-Pacific: Guidelines for strengthening Dutch and EU Cooperation with Partners in Asia' (Government of Netherlands, 2020). The Netherlands also understands the strategic significance of the Indo-Pacific for the future progression of the EU. While speaking strongly on the tensions that take place in the South China Sea, and violations of the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea, the policy note seek cooperation to ensure maritime security in the region while highlighting the value of deepening ties with regional powers. Like any other European nation, the Netherlands is increasingly worried about the Indo-Pacific region becoming destabilized because of intense competition and intends to assist the partners to manoeuvre in an extraordinarily complex environment by becoming a valuable partner that could help ease the tensions (Hejimans, 2021).

ASEAN, QUAD, AND THE INDO-PACIFIC

Of the organizations that are active in the Indo-Pacific affairs either directly or indirectly, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) remain important. The two leading power players along with their respective blocks continue to interact with the remaining players in the Indo-Pacific especially taking these two structures as key nodes for engagement.

The *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific* (2019) an outlook for cooperation, promotes peace and stability, assists the regional rules-based order, economic cooperation, enhances ASEAN-led initiatives, and explores other areas such as maritime cooperation. The ASEAN centrality in the region has been seen as a key factor that has the potential to play a vital role. While some argue that ASEAN is also facing a challenging situation in preserving its centrality in the current context, critics have also cited the inadequacy of the ASEAN-led multilateral mechanisms in addressing the increasing division in the region. However, the potential of ASEAN is seen as a major factor in resolving many issues as experts cite that ASEAN remains a critical link for external players to progress in the Indo-Pacific.

The QUAD even though not a formal alliance in the recent past has focused on economic and security issues, especially in the backdrop where tensions with Beijing continue to rise. While the four players, Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S. have agreed to work on a strategy that promotes free and open ocean and respect for a rules-based order, the grouping has been cited to challenge the China factor. Beijing's relations with the members of the QUAD were seen becoming relatively tense during the pandemic period and the China officials have criticized Tokyo for bringing the 'Cold War mentality' to the region through the QUAD (Smith, 2021). Despite QUAD leaders agreeing to ensure wider cooperation in the region, this alliance is viewed as a mechanism to contain China through military means (Smith, 2021).



While it is too early to predict the dynamics and impact on the region due to the recently introduced AUKUS and how QUAD will be affected, it can be deduced quite easily that the two forums are designed to counter Beijing's influence in the Indo-Pacific, impacting the regional stability to a greater extent.

THE IMPACT ON THE INDO-PACIFIC EQUILIBRIUM

The world order has today polarized heavily on the Indo-Pacific like never in history. While having a firm grip on the affairs of the region over the other players has been identified as a critical factor towards gaining unprecedented control of global affairs, major players led by the U.S. and China have introduced several strategies and initiatives to monopolize the ownership of the Indo-Pacific. The salient features discussed above relevant to such strategies and initiatives reflect that even though they speak broadly of ensuring security and prosperity in the region, the underline factor undeniably remains as to pivot the regional balance of power in favour of a particular block.

The analysis of the above-discussed strategies, initiatives, and even the recently introduced new alliances such as the AUKUS too reflects that the world is revisiting a new Cold War era, and the Indo-Pacific remains as its epicentre. While the AUKUS reflects the latest development in terms of the strategy clash in the region, the already introduced Indo-Pacific strategies and initiatives have resulted in dividing the region into two clear groups, and one could only expect this division to further expand. Further, the formation of similar alliances such as the AUKUS in the Indo-Pacific and in other parts of the globe is also expected, and such initiatives are only expected to tilt the already imbalanced Indo-Pacific region.

One block is criticized by the other for attempting to contain and block their activities. Like the rest, the U.S. too requires the acceptance as well as the support of regional players and small island states in effectively implementing respective strategies. Analysts cite that the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific initiatives are yet to make a notable impact in the region when compared with Beijing's initiatives. Further, the nationalist approach adopted by the U.S. during the previous administration has indicated that even though the significance of allies and partners are strongly worded in their strategy documents, the right opposite is reflective when it comes to implementation.

China on the other hand continues to expand its grand strategy Belt and Road Initiative taking strategic advantage of all the viable options in addition to the Indo-Pacific theatre. Beijing's BRI strategy has been a success when compared with the U.S. as the former has been successful in establishing some of the strategic nodes in the Indo-Pacific, which are considered critical if any player requires making considerable influence, militarily or otherwise. It is also worth noting that China has been careful not to form different alliances like the U.S. in achieving long-term strategic objectives but, continues to focus on vigorously expanding the BRI globally.

Apart from ASEAN and the QUAD, organizations such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS), Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM),



ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), etc. play a significant role in the Indo-Pacific dynamics. The implementation of a range of frameworks and action plans by these organizations focusing on areas such as maritime security, maritime trade, defence cooperation, climate change, and marine pollution, among many other facets are either directly or indirectly resonate with the Indo-Pacific strategies and initiatives of the two leading blocks. While the possibility of the above players employing regional organizations to achieve a particular group's objectives cannot be ruled out, looking at some of the organization's behaviour in the regional affairs, it is evident that even these regional organizations are aligned to a different block in one way or the other.

The 'small states' are also an integral element of the strategic game of chess that is being played in the Indo-Pacific. The strategies that have been already launched by the major players are implemented mainly through the small states. Therefore, gaining access and acceptance from the small states for the success of respective strategies is seen as a critical factor. It is in this context that the two major players compete to gain acceptance of the small states in one's favour through a range of initiatives. This situation has put the small states in a dilemma as accepting a particular major player's strategy or initiative results in disturbing the other major player, and certain regional players. This is the 'small state's dilemma' encountered by countries in the region which adds yet another dimension to the Indo-Pacific dynamics.

Apart from aspects that have been impacted due to Indo-Pacific strategies launched by different players, focus on the freedom of navigation is seen as an area that has attracted the attention of many. While the leading players continue to criticize each other for issues that centre around the South China Sea, it is important to note that the sea lines of communication that span across the Indo-Pacific are considered as vital lifelines that ensure uninterrupted trade and energy flow. The situation becomes tense among the rest when Beijing is cited as having a certain degree of involvement in 17 ports and the direct involvement in constructing 13 ports out of them (Faridi, 2021). It is paramount that the key players in the Indo-Pacific understand the regional and global implications that should result to take control of any strategically vital maritime chokepoints in the region.

The above discussion shows that the 'Stability Matrix' (Figure 1) in the Indo-Pacific includes components such as; major players (U.S. and China-led), respective Indo-Pacific strategies and initiatives, other players (Australia, India, Japan, etc.), and organizations. The complex interactions among each of the above elements and the intensity of the reactions create a force by each block. The resultant force created, therefore, dictates which block has the potential to make the most impact over the other to gain dominance. The past and present regional dynamics have shown that even though the stated intentions of major players are to retain stability, security, and cooperation in the region, their actions over the years have contradicted when it comes to ground realities. As an outcome of the two leading group's intense dynamics, a force is generated by each block which seeks to gain even a slight edge over the other in regional affairs. This continued contest results in instability as destabilizing the regional balance is the only way a particular block could gain supremacy over the other.

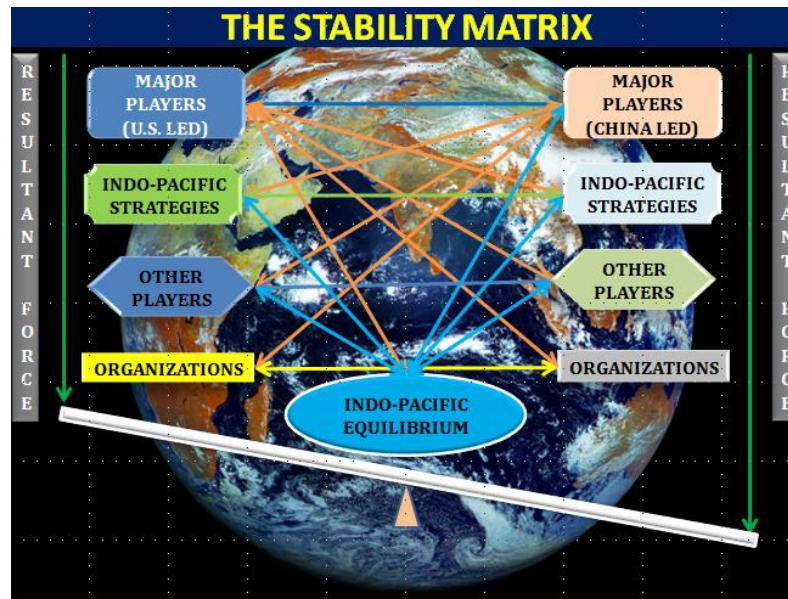


Figure 1: Stability Matrix

Source: Author

SRI LANKA'S FREE AND OPEN INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY

Even though Sri Lanka has not officially announced a dedicated Indo-Pacific strategy or initiative, Colombo has committed to ensuring freedom of navigation and adherence to international rules and regulations in the Indian Ocean and broader Indo-Pacific. Despite the above, Sri Lanka has become a key partner in the strategies and initiatives launched by the two players. Sri Lanka being a small island state in the Indian Ocean, the strategic location is one of the leading factors that attract key players to take Sri Lanka on board as an important player in their strategic manoeuvres in the Indo-Pacific. Admiral Harris, the former U.S. Indo-Pacific Commander at the 2016 Galle Dialogue International Maritime Conference underlined the importance of Sri Lanka's 'location' in deciding the strategic significance (U.S. Embassy-Colombo, 2016). When the former Indian National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon called Sri Lanka 'an aircraft carrier parked fourteen miles of the Indian Coast' (Menon, 2016), he highlighted the strategic importance of Sri Lanka's location to India.

The above situation drives Sri Lanka to a challenge when it comes to making key strategic decisions. As a nation that embraces a nonaligned foreign policy, it is vital to keep all players equally engaged. Further, it is also equally important not to make any indication to hint that Colombo is aligned to either country A, B, or C, which is a mammoth diplomatic exercise that requires precision handling of affairs. In this quest, it is vitally important to understand the sensitivities that surround India as well. Sri Lankan policymakers such as the President and the Foreign Ministry Secretary on several occasions have reassured that Sri Lanka will not allow any action to take place on her soil that impacts India.

At a time when many players prefer to engage with Sri Lanka through maritime-centric cooperation initiatives, policymakers are required to map out plans that enable Colombo to carry out strategic manoeuvres with all players. While Sri Lanka has the freedom to engage with any partner, the Indian factor remains critical. The assurance given to India that 'Sri Lanka would not be used for any activity that could pose a threat to India's security' (NDTV,



2021) recently by the Sri Lankan President himself speaks the sensitivity of the Indian factor. Therefore, the author highlights that it is important for Sri Lanka to focus on a 'Right Alignment' policy, which gives freedom to align with any partner willing to collaborate in achieving the country's strategic maritime vision especially in the Indian Ocean and broadly in the Indo-Pacific.

In the above context, it will be important for Colombo to unveil Sri Lanka's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (SLFOIP) strategy. While agreeing upon freedom of navigation and international accepted rules-based order, the SLFOIP should focus on *strategically* engaging with all players in the Indo-Pacific. This strategy should essentially centre on the Indian Ocean with a broader view of the Indo-Pacific. Further, the strategy requires embracing '*inclusiveness*' to avoid Sri Lanka being aligned with any block to exclude any player or compete with another block which could impact Sri Lanka negatively. This is where the criticality of making the most appropriate strategic manoeuvre becomes challenging to a small island state like that of Sri Lanka.

Due to the location and the past experiences in dealing with maritime security-related issues, the strategy should focus on presenting Sri Lanka as a vital partner that has experience in addressing maritime security issues. Further, it is imperative to highlight the role Sri Lanka can play in protecting the global trade and energy arteries that span across the surrounding ocean space. Such a strategy would not only position Sri Lanka as a vibrant maritime partner in the wider Indo-Pacific but would also help to achieve strategic maritime ends that Sri Lanka wishes to achieve as the maritime space remains the last frontier due to the enormous potential it holds.

CONCLUSION

Indo-Pacific strategies and initiatives that have been introduced by leading players have resulted in the division of the region into two leading blocks. While the two blocks continue to compete to gain an edge over the other, the much-needed stability in the Indo-Pacific is disturbed to a greater extent. As a result, maritime trade and energy transportation, maritime security, and regional cooperation have encountered rough seas and fierce winds.

The continuous attempt to tilt the Indo-Pacific balance in favour of one block or a couple of countries through above-discussed strategies and initiatives is expected to continue dramatically in the coming few years. The recently introduced defence alliances and any other similar future initiatives will only make the already complicated environment a complex one. Some observations have been made regarding some of the regional organizations as they too tend to incline towards certain blocks in achieving their objectives. This makes the situation further tense.

Based on the above discussion and the current developments that take place in this strategically vibrant maritime space, it can be argued that even though the already introduced Indo-Pacific strategies and initiatives state that they focus on ensuring freedom of navigation and respecting rules-based international order, ground realities reflect that the two blocks led by the U.S. and China are engaged in a fierce competition that attempts



to seek regional primacy. The rapid pace of the changing geopolitical landscape in the Indo-Pacific indicates that the two leading blocks will continue to fiercely arm the region through similar strategies and initiatives making the Indo-Pacific the most volatile region that holds the potential of becoming a theatre that exhibits true military manoeuvres, both on land and out at sea, making the beginning of a fierce conflict.

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Uttama Seva Padakkama (USP-medal) for valuable service and devotion to duty marked by exceptional ability, merit, exemplary and unblemished record of moral and military conduct. Captain Joseph is a recipient of seven (07) 'Letters of Commendation' from the Commanders of the Sri Lanka Navy for his exemplary performances.



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